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Fragmented Memory in an invented land: The Absence of History In the Abacha
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Fragmented Memory in an invented land: The Absence of History In the Abacha Military Dictatorship of Nigeria

Thesis by
Gromyko Benedict Dumuje

A thesis presented to SOAS, University of London
in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Africa Department
SOAS, University of London
London, UK



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Abstract

This thesis aims to advance within the Cultural History paradigm, the notion that military governance in Nigeria – with a focal study on the Abacha regime (1993-1998) – operated and thrived within contrived *anti-historical* spaces. Abacha's regime, the final military government in Nigeria as well as being an overt composite of prior regimes, affords this thesis a comprehensive barometer to determine the breadth of governmental anti-historical intent.

Studies of Nigerian military governance neglect to address the issue of suppressed national histories as a distinct state-sanctioned policy. These studies fail to label, and superficially view anti-historical gestures as mere adjuncts to dictatorial ambition and power. Existing research overlooks the relationship between a negation of historical discourse and perpetuation of non-democratic powers rooted in artificiality. This thesis addresses that shortcoming: asking to what extent the perceived historical negation as a government tool was in effect between 1993-1998. We ask to understand, in the context of a postcolonial multi-tribal nation, how state actors may subvert history through strategic annulment and proscription.

Using history scholarship data from educational institutions amongst other markers, we show how government influenced and implemented anti-historical policy. To note: 'anti-historical' positions also comprise advancing certain interpretations of history reflecting governments' political objectives, as opposed to wholesale suppression of historical memory. Equally, whilst anti-historical spaces are explored through a military-leadership milieu, this thesis recognizes multi-causal reasons for anti-historical tendencies, such as: under-resourcing of Nigerian universities, archives and research centers particularly in the 1980s -1990s.

Historian Michael Stanford posited historiographical pursuit involved not just unearthing new historical facts but attaining 'fresh historical insights' that 'alter existing histories.'¹ Stanford concludes: 'That is why history is rewritten every generation.'²

This study deepens understanding of Nigeria's postcolonial condition by highlighting how military disruptors post-independence, themselves upended nationhood by disrupting the notions and discipline of history.

¹ Michael Stanford, *A Companion to the study of History*, (Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994) p.6.

² Ibid.

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List of Abbreviations

FMG	Federal Military Government
HSN	Historical Society of Nigeria
IPOB	The Indigenous Peoples of Biafra
ING	Interim National Government
JHSN	Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria
MEND	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
MLK	Martin Luther King
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Countries
UMY	Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University

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Timeline of Key Events 1960 -1999

- 1960** Independence from Great Britain on October 1—"First Republic" is established as a parliamentary system of government with Sir Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (Muslim Hausa-Fulani) as prime minister.
- 1966** 15 January - Balewa is assassinated in a military coup, ending the "First Republic." Johnson Aguyi-Ironsi replaces Balewa.
- 1966** 29 July - Ironsi is assassinated in military coup. Yakubu Gowon replaces Ironsi.
- 1967** 4–5 January – Negotiations between Eastern Region and Federal Military Government result in Aburi Accord.
- 30 May – Ojukwu declares independence of Republic of Biafra.
- 3 July – Three-year Nigeria-Biafra civil war begins.
- 1969** 22 April – Nigeria captures Umuahia, the new Biafran capital.
- 25 April – Biafra captures Owerri.
- 1970** 15 January – Biafra surrenders –War ends.
- 1975** Gowon overthrown in a military coup. Murtala Muhammed replaces Gowon.
- 1976** Muhammed is assassinated in an abortive military coup. Olusegun Obasanjo replaces Muhammed.
- 1979** Shehu Shagari is democratically elected president, replacing Obasanjo and establishing the "Second Republic."
- 1983** Shagari is overthrown in a military coup. Muhammed Buhari replaces Shagari.
- 1985** Buhari is overthrown in a military coup. Ibrahim Babangida (Muslim from the "middle belt" of the country) replaces Buhari.
- 1993** Babangida is pressured to resign and accede to a caretaker government after annulled elections in 1993 (the aborted transition period has been categorized as the "Third Republic"). Ernest Shonekan is appointed as government caretaker.
- 1993** Sani Abacha replaces Shonekan in a military coup.
- 1998** Abacha dies suddenly. General Abdulsalami Abubakar assumes power and presides over a transition government.
- 1999** Start of the "Fourth Republic." Former military leader Olusegun Obasanjo is democratically elected as president; he is reelected in 2003 to a second term.

Nigeria – Regimes Post-Independence

Table I: Nigerian Leaders since 1960 Independence from Britain

Years	Head of State	Type of Regime
1960-1966	Tafawa Balewa	Republic
1966	J. T. U. Aguiyu Ironsi	Military
1966-1975	Yakubu Gowon	Military
1975-1976	Murtala Muhammed	Military
1976-1979	Olusegun Obasanjo	Military
1979-1983	Shehu Shagari	Republic
1984-1985	Muhammadu Buhari	Military
1985-1993	Ibrahim Babangida	Military
1993	Ernest Shonekan	Transition Government
1993-1998	Sani Abacha	Military
1998-1999	Abdulsalmi Abubakar	Military
1999-2007	Olusegun Obasanjo	Republic
2007 - 2015	Umaru Yar'Adua /Goodluck Jonathan	Republic
2015 - 2023	Muhammadu Buhari	Republic
2023-Present	Bola Tinubu	Republic

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Thank you to Angelica Baschiera with whom I had a random conversation about my desire to embark on a PhD and who then within days connected me with Dr. Easton. Angelica also introduced me to Professor Ibrahim Kankara when on his month-long sabbatical in SOAS from Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University in Katsina; just over a year later, Professor Kankara would be my field trip supervisory contact – schooling me on the culture, terrain and histories of Northern Nigeria, whilst finding time to welcome me in his home and gift me produce from his farm where the goats know not to eat the hibiscus. Thank you, Angelica, you are as I said once, the great connector. Thank you, Ibrahim, for making my field trip experience informative, interesting and tranquil!

Thank you to Dr. Sarah Pett whose supervisory insights encouraged me to find and engage new ways of seeing. In her determined yet calm manner, I admired her ability to prompt and alight on solutions even before the problem was fully articulated; hers was not a light at the end of the tunnel approach but let's try and illuminate the whole tunnel from the outset.

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Dedication

To my late parents, Rays Matthew and Mary Dumuje, who cherished education and instilled in me a quest for knowledge; to my children, Söl and Ovié, who are thrilled by learning and appreciate its value: may you teach me many things in the years to come. To God, whose mercy triumphs over judgement, who makes everything possible and who brings to completion the works He starts in us.

'Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'English,' 'Welsh,' or 'French.' The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria and those who do not'.³ **Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Premier of Western Nigeria, 1947**

'When we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise'.⁴ **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Author, 2009**

³ Obafemi Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (London: Faber & Faber 1947), pp. 47–8.

⁴ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," filmed at TEDGlobal 2009, July 2009, TED video, 18:43, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story. [Accessed 4th February 2017].

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Historians have never agreed about the nature of their craft; and yet this has never prevented people from continuing to engage in historical investigation and debate. For centuries, western conceptions of history have combined, in different measures, views of history as a branch of literature or poetry, an ingredient of politics in the sense of praising heroes and denouncing villains, a contribution to collective memory in the keeping of chronicles and annals, and an essentially religious stamping ground for moral lessons for the present and future.⁵ **Mary Fulbrook**

Since the evidence is always incomplete and often inadequate, it is not surprising that historians sometimes disagree. They disagree, not so much about the particulars of the evidence, as about the conclusions to be drawn from the whole mass of evidence.⁶ **Michael Stanford**

⁵Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002) p.12.

⁶Stanford, *A Companion to the study of History*, p.4.

Introduction

Contested roots: *Abachaland*

In the 1990s, a popular anecdote circulating on the streets of Lagos concerned General Sani Abacha's hair. The suggestion was that the peculiar curls atop Abacha's head showed clearly that he was not Nigerian, but rather of likely Toubou stock.⁷ The Toubou inhabited foreign caliphates in places like Chad or Niger, to the north of Nigeria. Nigerians viewed such nations as more pronouncedly Islamic than anything at home, due to the particular cultural, national and historical identities these nations assumed. So, in the eyes of many who conferred a foreign status upon Abacha, no real 'history' existed between the allegedly alien Abacha and the peoples of Nigeria. For many, this speculated heritage explained the dictator's apparent detachment from the people he governed.

The conjecture regarding Abacha's roots appeared exclusively a Southern Nigerian sentiment. I saw, in following the speculative trail regarding Abacha's ancestry, the ease with which conjecture could germinate: a map I perused of Chad and its regions yielded the town *Abéché*. I was struck how this homophone in the hands of imaginative speculators, with a hop, skip and simple vowel adaptations, might have started the whole thing; from *Abéché* to *Abacha*, a genealogical route summoned, then reverse-charted to the imposter dictator's true Chadian roots. Foreshadowed in the repudiation of Abacha's origins and authenticity, were shades of Donald Trump's *birtherism* campaign against Barack Obama:

⁷ The Toubou, or Tubu, meaning 'rock people', are traditionally an ethnic group inhabiting northern Chad, southern Libya, northeastern Niger and northwestern Sudan. They live as herders and nomads or as farmers near oases.

the unsubstantiated rejection of a national leader's legitimacy along racial, tribal and/or religious lines.⁸

Fig.1: *Abachaland?*



Map of Abéché⁹

In relation to religion, Islam was hardly absent from Nigerian cultural life. Warrior-heroes such as the *jihadist* Usman Dan Fodio appeared in Nigerian children's history books in the 1960s, 70s and 80s.¹⁰ Exploits of other Islamic Nigerian legends such as Queen Amina also featured; these celebrated icons were presented as beings with admirable purpose and ruthlessness. As a seven year-old Lagos schoolboy in the 1970s, the image of the turbaned Dan Fodio sword in hand atop a white horse remains an enduring image. For the impressionable Nigerian child like myself, notions of comic book cold-bloodedness were fostered regarding Islam and the Northern Nigerian citizen. This was especially true when juxtaposing the daring images of Dan Fodio *et al* with their southern counterparts who appeared meeker by comparison. Southern icons such as Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a former slave from the south who became a celebrated Reverend, appeared placid by contrast. Comparing in particular different religious icons from the north and south, created in my head a dichotomy that existed between an apparently audacious Islam and a mundane Christianity. This impression of a bold, ruthless Islam was

⁸ *Birtherism* was a movement in the U.S.A, which denied that the 44th US President, Barack Hussein Obama, was a natural-born U.S. citizen. The denial implied that Obama was ineligible to be President as required by Article Two of the Constitution.

⁹ "Country of Chad", *Chad's National Identity*, March 3, 2016, <https://countryofchad.wordpress.com/2016/03/03/chads-national-identity/> [Accessed 11 December 2016].

¹⁰ He is sometimes referred to as *Uthman* Dan Fodio.

further consolidated by the fact that the northern male – of Hausa or Fulani heritage – in accommodation of customary Islamic law, was permitted in Nigerian society to carry a dagger upon his person. These nomadic figures when I chanced upon them in daily life appeared as exotic as the *Sinbad* of my favourite TV programme. The eponymous Sinbad, if ever his sword failed for whatever reason, had always a trusty dagger as recourse.¹¹ Watching these *Sinbad* series on television around the same time as learning about Dan Fodio, I made unavoidably unconscious, conflated connections between these two turbaned heroes, as the fictional one in Technicolor spouted memorable lines like ‘Trust in Allah, but tie up your camel’.¹² Lines that troubled me not, a Christian boy from the Nigerian south dazzled mostly by the swordplay.

Whilst I will not be arguing that the *fragmented memory/identity* of my thesis title is largely due to a dichotomy between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria, inevitably this dichotomy is notable in a nation Max Siollun called ‘the only country in the world with its population equally split between Christians and Muslims.’¹³

¹¹ The *Sinbad* features, by Director Ray Harryhausen, were shown repeatedly on Nigerian TV in the 1970s. Loosely based on the fictional mariner *Sinbad*, a later addition to the classic *One Thousand And One Nights*, Harryhausen stayed faithful to Sinbad’s Baghdad and Islamic origins. In all the films, Sinbad is turbaned and explicitly Islamic, with lines in the films that faithfully extol Allah and Allah’s wisdom.

¹² This line from *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* (1973) - ‘Trust in God, but tie your camel’ – is an ancient phrase relayed by the scholar Al-Tirmidhi in the *Hadith* and attributed to Prophet Mohammed. It was said that when chancing upon a Bedouin leaving his camel without tethering it, Mohammed instructed the Bedouin to have faith but to ally faith with commonsense.

¹³ Max Siollun, *What Britain Did to Nigeria: A Short History of Conquest and Rule*, (London: Hurst & Company, 2021) p.251.



Fig 2: *Illustrated representation of Usman Dan Fodio in battle mode*¹⁴

Chapter-by-Chapter: Overview

As underlined in the abstract, this thesis aims to advance the notion that military governance in Nigeria engendered and operated within anti-historical spaces, with self-preservation being a major motivation. Alighting on the Abacha regime as a focal study serves a practicable purpose. Abacha's 1993-98 government, the last military regime in Nigeria – a nadir of military dominance dating back to the first 1966 military coup – serves as an overt composite of prior regimes; thus affording the thesis a wide-ranging gauge to determine the historic *cumulative* breadth of governmental anti-historical intent since independence.

A focus on Abacha's regime serves to ground and centre the perimeters of this complex, overarching phenomenon that manifests as the anti-historical tendencies of successive Nigerian military governments (of which Abacha's regime was just one of many). Consequently, this thesis adopts an inverted, segmented approach whereby the Abacha regime ostensibly holds the 'centre' of this study,

¹⁴ **Source:** Textbook illustration of Usman Dan Fodio on horseback courtesy of [University of Dakar Library](#).

but does not dominate the narrative; instead Abacha's tenure represents a component of the greater parts that mass around, inform and ultimately justify that centre. The analogy of a tyre might help. As a tyre rotates, all its parts rotate equally in tandem – the hub centre, the spokes, the valve stem, the rim. As all the tyre parts comprise inseparable segments of the tyre's mass and motion, so Abacha's regime epitomizes a connective central hub, enfolded and yoked to myriad, inextricable parts: significant parts that relate and give fuller understanding to the broader anti-historical story. These broader 'inextricable parts' are represented in chapters (summarized below) which address variously the Abacha regime's mindset to and understanding of the uses of history (Ch III), historical memory (Ch IV), the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War (Ch V); the history of the Historical Society of Nigeria (Ch VI); the abolition of history as a stand-alone Secondary school subject (Ch VII); and the production of dissertations at Nigerian universities (Ch VIII & IX).

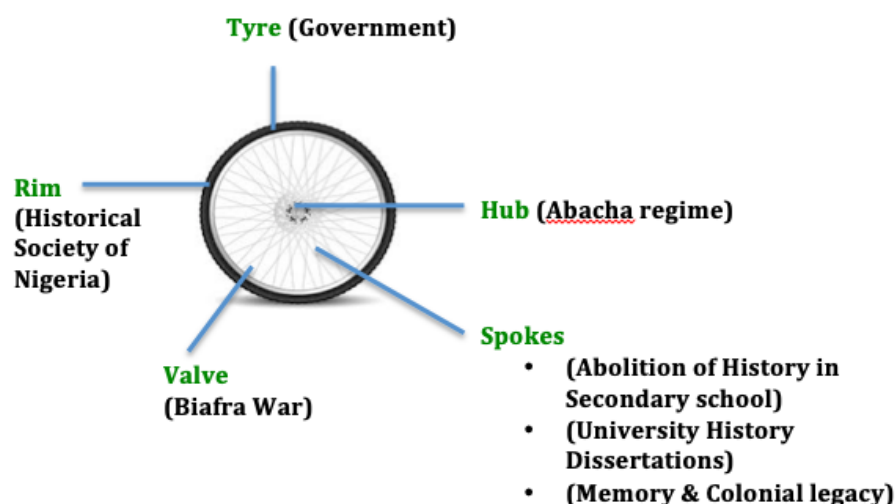


Fig. 3: Thesis breakdown/Tyre analogy?

Chapter-by-Chapter: Structure & Argument

The aim of the *main* chapters is to demonstrate ways in which certain enacted, adopted actions contributed to practices that limited and/or undermined historical pursuits and research. These

chapters implicitly or explicitly reference Nigerian military governments – up to and including Abacha’s regime – as defenders and executors of anti-historical positions; whilst also presenting other key actors, scenarios, unique circumstances, impetuses and objectives that helped shape and embed these anti-historical ideations into tangible spaces.

Ultimately, the chapters perform the dual task of not only confirming the overall thesis – the absence of history in the Abacha dictatorship of Nigeria – but also illuminating *different* aspects of a complex phenomenon: namely, a historical predisposition to suppressing history – whether conscious or reflexive - perfected in continuity through the governance of manifold military regimes which punctuated Nigeria’s history.

Chapter III - A history of *History*: The Construction of ‘Nigeria’

This chapter illuminates the interlinking issues of *development* and the fiscal elements that attended independence, which arguably helped construct an anti-historical foundation. The roles of the Ashby Commission and institutions like the World Bank in shaping Nigerian education policy is highlighted, with a focus on their post-independence exhortation for business and commercial subjects over the arts. Consideration of the colonial roots of anti-historical standpoints is explored, alongside an understanding that the bequeathed western education model, seemingly impervious to *Africanisation*, constituted a contributing factor to a future anti-historical culture.

Also presented is the stance of modern African statesmen who challenged the value of history and deemed its study useless – (in blunt echoes of the Ashby Commission and World Bank positions) – which helped underscore the complex geopolitical-neocolonial roots of the phenomenon, as well as demonstrating its long entrenchment.

Abacha’s and his predecessor Ibrahim Babangida’s grasp and appreciation of the *uses* of history and its apparent dangers is examined and exemplified, for example, with the detainment of a prominent

Nigerian historian – whilst also Abacha's pronouncements on assumption of the presidency is explored to illustrate anti-historical tendencies.

Chapter IV- Historical Memory & Fragmentation: Legacy of the Colonial Experiment

The concept of 'Historical Memory' and its significance to a nation is explored here, both from a historiographical (past) and identity (present + future) perspective. Presenting historical memory as a prone site of national struggle, this chapter re-interprets and enlarges the legacy of colonial debris to indict also Abacha and his associates' actions; designating the regime 'new colonialists' who circumvent the land and its *moments* in a refashioning of imperialists who condemned Africa as a history-less place. *Myth* is engaged in this chapter as a counter to historical truth and reality, with activist Ken Saro-Wiwa's killing presented as a case-in-point. Saro-Wiwa's murder triangulated a nexus of entanglements, illustrating Abacha's actions went beyond the mere extra-judicial murder of an activist by a dictator, but displayed intersections of neocolonial positions and disavowed histories, all performed within the venal theatre of Nigeria's oil trade.

An exploration of physical sites of historical memory such as preserved slave fortifications and museums in Ghana and Senegal is contrasted with its lack in Nigeria; highlighting also the archival disregard - funding issues also considered - which underpins elements of willful anti-historical actions.

A juxtaposition of Abacha's rule and Nelson Mandela's concurrent ascension in South Africa is also contrasted to illuminate amongst other things, the value of strengthening historical memory through vehicles of historical reckoning such as South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Committee; the absence of such a vehicle in Nigeria foreshadows the succeeding chapter on the Nigeria-Biafra war.

On the *identity* facet of historical memory, the application of 'falsified' historical memories as an anti-historical strategy is explored in both Abacha's and Gen. Babangida's Nigeria – with both cases involving a covert and counterfeit part-islamisation of the nation; events which in constituting a clear challenge to

the pursuit of an authentic national history, degraded historical veracity and thereby contributed more generally to the undermining of historical research.

Chapter V - Forgetting Biafra: The 'Memory Lapse' of a Nation

This focus on the Nigeria-Biafra war represents a seismic post-independence cleavage, implications of which first codified a *home-grown* anti-historical stance into governance; specifically military governance, as first initiated through Gowon's regime.

The Biafra-Nigeria war symbolizes a critical juncture and genesis of the subsequent institutionalization of anti-historical control, crystalized through regimes from Gowon to Abacha. The legacy of Biafra's strategic importance may be discerned in the full-circle fact explored here, that upon assuming power in 1993, one of Abacha's notable first acts involved issuing a decree banning discussion of Biafra.

This chapter elucidates facets of the secession issue and its role in provoking anti-historical impulses – not least viewing Biafra through the lens of the Nigerian military, which circumstantially self-identified as a *government* that effected Biafra's crushing, not ordinarily as *armed forces* or *tool* of government. In this reading of the military as 'One Nigeria' overseers, this chapter explores their self-appointed mindset as the nation's custodians; a mindset that ensured military rule abided persistently wedded to an anti-historical dimension originating in the crucible of Biafra. Arguably, this saviors' mindset also accounted somewhat for Nigeria's prevalent coup culture.

Governmental obstruction to the archives as well as its willful degradation is explored to exhibit the administrative framework of the anti-historical in action, contrasted with the colonial authorities who archived earnestly, even if their motives were suspect.

The genocide question is examined on several fronts; from considering the viability of claims, to expounding on how the unresolved question exacerbated ethnic enmity and triggered ruptures with enduring political implications.

The issue of war literature is also presented to highlight the relative outpourings of fictional accounts of Biafra in contrast to a dearth of contemporaneous histories of the war. In this vein, the paucity of Biafra research outside Nigeria for many years, particularly Anglo-Saxon research, is explored to demonstrate the inexorable intersections where the anti-historical again may meet with neocolonial and geopolitical considerations.

Chapter VI: Excavating the past

This chapter considers, from the cusp of independence and the years following, the emergence of the Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN) and its eponymous journal, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (JHSN) produced bi-monthly. The contributions of the HSN and JHSN is analysed to illustrate amongst a number of things, the complexity of generating a new historical narrative and output in the face of prior European resistance to African history, as well as explaining seeming incongruities with the journal submissions in the background of unfolding, turbulent current affairs emphatically linked to historical anchors.

The content of the JHSN is highlighted to display strategies employed to counter-balance the deficit of documented African history – in addition to an evaluation of a key basis of these newly-presented histories, which tends towards concerns with the nature of political power on the continent. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the disappearance of the HSN and JHSN from the mid 1980s at the height of Babangida's and through Abacha's tenures, further underlining the intellectual loss suffered as a result of the decline of Nigeria's pioneering historical society and its influential journal.

Chapter VII: Bring Back Our History

This chapter considers the emergent Nigerian nation, and a deeper analysis into how the stage was arguably set for anti-historical tendencies by institutions like the World Bank regarding education provision. The influence of the World Bank is also investigated to discern its potential contribution to

formative governmental actions such as the abolition of history as a standalone secondary school subject in Nigerian schools.

Governmental policy and foundational initiatives on education is further explored commencing with the new 1976 military regime of Gen. Obasanjo, who convened a National Policy on Education Conference the following year. A focus on a technology-based education from Obasanjo's time as first articulated at the 1977 conference migrated faithfully through other regimes up to Abacha's tenure; in the midst of this stance, the chapter contemplates the limitations of the idea of Nigeria, namely: how the ensuing imprecision of national identity sits at the nexus of considerations that may adversely influence the nature, approach to and regard for historical study and research.

The chapter advances by engaging a movement that originated as a publicized campaign for the defense of history and history scholarship in Nigeria, which evolved into the *Bring Back our History* campaign that became instrumental in the fight for restoration of history in Nigerian schools' curriculum.

Chapter VIII: The Northern Archives - On the Ground in Kano, Kaduna, Katsina
and

Chapter IX: Perusing a Southern Archive: The Abuja Gateway

The subsequent chapters VIII and IX, centered mainly on my fieldwork analyzing the production of history dissertations at Nigerian universities. Chapter VIII featured universities in the north of Nigeria and commenced in Abacha's birthplace and adopted hometown of Kano. Chapter IX centered on Abuja and the main federal university there. In analyzing the production of history dissertations at the universities in the north and the federal capital, these chapters sought not only to confirm the overall thesis premise claiming an entrenched, consequential anti-historical culture but also served to elucidate the varied aspects of this multifaceted phenomenon. Thus, analyses of the dissertations - Bachelors (B.A.), Masters (M.A.) and PhD history theses produced mainly in the years 1993-1998 – also uncovered via other cultural mechanisms like religion and kinship, just how components of the anti-historical might take asymmetrical shape and find expression.

Exploration in Chapter VIII also of non-tertiary institutions ('spheres of knowledge') such as Arewa House Museum and the Katsina State History and Cultural Bureau - the latter established by Abacha himself – represented a useful pivot in appraising institutions set up specifically for the furtherance of northern history and culture; thus providing rare insights into how these constructed *spheres of knowledge* part explained the north-south power deployment and dynamic, in seeming contradiction of an anti-historical tradition and in the shadow of narratives of political control and influence.

Imprecise Histories

In a notable echo of Abacha's disputed citizenship, several writings scrutinized the circumstances of Dan Fodio's origins. Most scholarship agree that Dan Fodio was a nomadic migrant of Guinean extraction.¹⁵ For some, the fact of Dan Fodio not being of original Nigerian heritage is used to present him as a proprietor of a fraudulent legacy. Femi Fani Kayode, prominent Nigerian Lawyer, calls Dan Fodio a 'fundamentalist Muslim' and 'the greatest evil that ever afflicted our shores closely followed by an Englishman by the name of Lord Frederick Lugard who recommended and decreed the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914.'¹⁶

Although post-independence accommodations for Islamic law was woven into the cultural Nigerian space without explicit constitutional endorsement - (i.e. the aforementioned dagger-carrying; Muslims excused from work on Fridays for *Jumu'ah*¹⁷; Muslim festivals occasioned national holiday status etc.) - it seemed self-evident that Nigeria was *not* a Muslim nation. In fact, as a former colonial entity birthed by the Christian nation of Great Britain, I grew up like many southerners with the tacit conceit that Nigeria

¹⁵F. H. El-Masri, 'The life of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio before the Jihad' - Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria Vol. 2, No. 4 (December 1963), p.p. 435-448.

¹⁶ Femi Fani-Kayode, "The Bloody Legacy of Usman Dan Fodio (Part 1)", online, Daily Nigeria Post, September 20 2016, <https://dailypost.ng/2016/09/20/femi-fani-kayode-bloody-legacy-usman-dan-fodio-part-1/> [Accessed Jan 10 2017].

¹⁷ Jumu'ah (Arabic: الجمعة صلاة, ṣalāt al-jumu'ah), also known as Friday Prayer or Congregational Prayer, is a prayer (ṣalāt) that Muslims hold every Friday.

via its colonialist begetting, was essentially Christian. So: in line with colonialist claims that Africa's history commenced when European feet disembarked there – we disregarded long-standing cultural practices and communion with spirit gods that permeated the Nigerian space long before Islam and Christianity took hold – and we imagined that Nigeria by virtue of its British connection was a Christian state. A Christian state that happened to have Muslims practicing *within* it.¹⁸ Muslim northerners undoubtedly perceived the nation's religious status differently. Neither perspective reflects constitutional reality: Nigeria is a secular state (even as we understand that secular law is rooted in Christianity). Still, in the mind of many Southern Nigerians *and* moderate Muslims regarding the nation's legacy and customs, a sharp contrast could be drawn when comparing Nigeria with those foreign states of unequivocal Islamic designation. Those unquestionably Islamic states, when juxtaposed with Nigerian law and customs, were viewed as lending themselves to a more punitive and harsher interpretation of *Law*. For example, states such as Niger and Chad encompassed Islamic law in its legal apparatus whereby restitution and revenge was permitted in ways absent in secular law in Nigeria. Thus, some commentators who had settled Abacha's origins in North-central Africa argued that this heritage also clarified the legend of Abacha's perceived brutality. My late father, a former soldier who served with and knew Abacha did not entertain the idea Abacha hailed from anywhere else but Nigeria.¹⁹ However, my father did declare to me in a conversation in December 1993, shortly after Abacha seized power in November that year that Abacha was a 'no-nonsense' individual who 'took no prisoners.' This conversation took place two years prior to Abacha's shock execution of Human Rights Activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, after Abacha reportedly assured Nelson Mandela that he would spare the activist's life.²⁰

¹⁸ The British saw fit to entrust the firstly created Republic to the Muslim Tafawa Balewa and so evidently did not conceive Nigeria with any bias towards their own Anglo-Christian heritage.

¹⁹ My father, who joined the army in 1948 had been in the army for almost 15 years when Abacha was first commissioned in 1963. Their paths crossed during years of active service from 1964 up to my father's retirement in 1984.

²⁰ Kingsley Obiejesi, "Nelson Mandela begged Abacha not to execute Ken Saro Wiwa and Companions", *International Centre for Investigative Reporting*, July 18 2018, <https://www.icirnigeria.org/mandela-begged-abacha-not-to-execute-ken-saro-wiwa-and-companions/> [Accessed 6 September 2018].

If the murmuring regarding Abacha's origins seem frustratingly hard to debunk conclusively, it illustrates also the extent to which histories in a nation such as Nigeria can assume a specious quality. For example, my own father had no definitive idea about his exact age due to the historically commonplace practice of births not being certified at that time. Instead, my father – and we his children consequently – worked with a birth date taken to be concrete fact due to various sequential calculations made by my father's family. We respectfully never questioned the calculations that told us my father was born on June 24th 1929 – and died at the age of 79 on 9th May 2008. At my father's passing in 2008, his surviving brother informed the family, by way of recounting oral histories and certain signposted events, that my father was closer to being 84 years of age - not the 79 recorded in the memorial program we distributed during his Service of Songs. My uncle was persuasive in this revelation by alluding also to amongst other things, a regatta he attended with my father in 1940, which my father had previously spoken of. By way of a long-standing ancestral tradition, under-16s were forbidden from attending this particular regatta at the time (By 1960, after Independence, the age limit was deemed a superstitious relic and dispensed with). In 1940, my father would have been a mere 11 years old if born in 1929.

Yet, it was from the year 1929 in mind that we had celebrated several milestones with my father during his lifetime. The subsequent re-adjustment that caused the ground to shift slightly beneath my feet was not limited to the familial. My being both a Religious Education and History Teacher, there was personally a wider, noteworthy consequence related to my practice. When annually teaching the impact of the 1929 Wall Street Crash to A' Level History students, I often in class paid an automatic, silent tribute to my father's birth. Sometimes, the tribute was uttered aloud as I juxtaposed and referenced just how far-reaching the economic collapse in the Europe of 1929 was to impact the distant Africa of my father's birth. Similarly, when instructing and annotating with students the *Divini Illius Magistri*

encyclical of Pope Pius XI written in 1929, my father was invoked.²¹ When we examined Pope Pius' words – 'The third society, into which man is born when through Baptism he reaches the divine life of grace, is the Church; a society of supernatural order and of universal extent'²² – I triangulated for my students the baptismal ideas of *sacrament*, *grace* and *redemption*. Consideration of Pope Pius' words was underpinned by challenging my students to consider lands impervious to the holy convictions of Rome. Lands such as the Africa of 1929; a hinterland of Christianity where a certain Rays Matthew Dumuje was born and despite his apostolic middle name, would have had libations poured to honour his arrival as opposed to a head wetted in dedication to a one true God. Fast forward: my father gained five more years of life at his death; those extra five years came to symbolize the tenuous, disjointed nature of certain histories.

Thesis Focus: Mapping History

The anecdotes of Abacha's origins and the shifting history of my father's existence both encapsulate a fragmentary aspect of history in relation to Nigeria. Consequently, in this research, I will consider amongst other things, Nigeria's colonial legacy and how being an imperial construct might have impacted how history was both received and delivered. For Nigeria, like all postcolonial African nations, it is in the shadow of its colonial past that its post-Independent history is to some extent shaded.

Still, my central focus will be *mapping history* in Abacha's Nigeria; in locating the sites from where history is usually delivered and determining that history's relevance or even more categorically, its *presence*. Thus, the focal premise of my research is in summation: To explore Abacha's Nigeria (1993 - 98) and determine whether the delivery of history became something fragmented, absent even, in ways

²¹ The *Divini illius magistri*, The Divine Teacher, was a letter written by Pope Pius XI in December 1929 in his capacity also as Bishop of Rome - and sent to Bishops, Archbishops and 'all the faithful of the catholic world' entreating the need for Christian over secular education.

²² *Divini illius magistri*: 'The Divine Teacher', Vatican Website (n.d.) https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_31121929_divini-illius-magistri.html [Accessed 12 March 2018].

that perhaps mirrored the country's own disjointed legacies. Within this determination, I will consider the interplay between the tyrannical authority in the shape of General Abacha and the colonial legacies of this invented land the British in 1900 christened Nigeria.²³

This project draws on my academic expertise as a historian and literary studies scholar who specialised in War Studies. But it also draws on my personal experience as a British-Nigerian whose early adulthood was shaped, in part, by both first and second-hand memories of Abacha's rule. As such, this project not only sits at the intersection of political and cultural history and African studies, but is also informed by critical work from, naturally, postcolonial studies, as well as a range of other fields. Whilst the project is not autobiographical *per se*, I understand my British-Nigerian hybridity and academic background in tandem with being raised in a Nigerian military household, affords me a unique perspective in tackling this project. In that sense, it could be argued that my personal motivation comes certainly from an autobiographical place. How, then, might this autobiographical right of admission affect my objectivity? And what measures might be put in place to ensure said objectivity in pursuit of my research?

In this instance, I do not believe my autobiographical privilege compromises objectivity. For whilst I might have been privy to the Nigerian military lifestyle and traditions – (knowledge which certainly attended a part of my interest in the study) – the study's fundamental focus on the contemplation of history and how it may have been discharged within the ruling military leadership is a novel preoccupation outside of my experience or prior discourses. I formulated and embarked on this study with marginal experiential links to and little to no preconceived notions of my thesis question. Thus, any specific requirement to put in place measures to ensure objectivity is redundant here, beyond the usual requisite of objectivity expected from all meaningful academic interrogations.

²³ From 1886 the 'country' was ruled through the establishment of the Royal Niger Company, which oversaw two territories – Southern Nigeria Protectorate and Northern Nigeria Protectorate. At Lugard's urging, when the protectorates passed from company to Crown, the two territories were amalgamated as the 'Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria'.

As a War Studies graduate, I recognise how the weight of war and conflict propels political actors and their actions. This dynamic is especially pertinent in regions of traditionally high volatility and complex histories such as modern West Africa, where coups have been prevalent. Coups by necessity usher in dictatorships. Dictatorships, in holding a population at both literal and metaphorical gunpoint, amount to a war declaration of sorts and inhabit an existentially conflicted space between ruler and the ruled. Thus, I will examine Abacha's rule against the dictatorial backdrop and the wider ideological conflict this arrangement provoked – all in the context of my thesis question, which seeks to ascertain whether the delivery of history in Abacha's Nigeria was purposefully fragmented or absent – or both.

History: A many-weighted thing

In this research, *history* will be a many-weighted thing: it will represent a collective remembering; a kind of tribal memory. History becomes too, a fluid, inter-disciplinary receptacle; a place where strands intersect and where they latch may be surprising and challenging – for as Richard Evans notes, 'the first prerequisite of the serious historical researcher must be the ability to jettison dearly held interpretations in the face of the recalcitrance of the evidence.'²⁴ History also could be where roots form to illuminate the ancestral and national character through a confluence of narratives. Falola reminds us history is primarily about connections and relationships, declaring that 'history does not emerge in a vacuum' but must be 'located in the context of the interaction of people in society, and of the interactions of that society with other places and spaces.'²⁵ John Arnold refers to these *spaces* as

²⁴ Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), p.104.

²⁵ Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010) p.3.

‘chaotic’, expounding that ‘history is about making sense of that mess, finding or creating patterns and meanings and stories from the maelstrom.’²⁶

A contrarian side of *rootedness* is of course alienation; I will explore how the otherness of the Abacha regime coupled with the oddity of a former British colony in many ways itself a fiction helped foster an anti-historical space that operated outside the boundaries of normal historical discourse. Achebe called the emergent Nigeria a ‘tragic colonial manipulation.’²⁷ In referring to Nigeria thus, Achebe cites the imposition of a British Governor General on Nigeria following a seemingly democratic process that culminated with Tafawa Balewa elected as the republic’s first Prime Minister. Achebe sees this imposition as a contradiction of the democratic ideal and as confirmation of Nigeria’s inauspicious start, stating ‘Nigerian independence came with a British governor general [Sir James Robertson] in command, and, one might say, popular faith in genuine democracy was compromised from its birth.’²⁸

Achebe’s use of ‘tragic’ in his assessment of Nigeria’s creation, underlines a number of themes that have bedeviled Nigeria since its creation, namely that:

- The nation was ill-conceived by an alien Western power that did not have the region’s best interests at heart.
- The creation was doomed from the start due to its *arbitrary* creation and duplicitous foundation.
- Nigeria has subsequently been culpable in using its own hand to effect its ruination.

Achebe further notes that within six years of independence, ‘Nigeria was a cesspool of corruption and misrule. Public servants helped themselves freely to the nation’s wealth. Elections were blatantly rigged. ... judges and magistrates were manipulated by the politicians in power.’²⁹

²⁶ John H. Arnold, “Professor John H. Arnold,” Professor John H. Arnold, Faculty of History, University of Cambridge, <https://www.hist.cam.ac.uk/people/professor-john-h-arnold>. [accessed January 14, 2023].

²⁷ Chinua Achebe, *There Was A Country – A Personal History of Biafra* (New York: Penguin, 2012) p.51.

²⁸ Ibid. p.50.

²⁹ Ibid. p.51.

The author J.M. Coetzee has spoken of an alienation caused by 'diasporic exile'.³⁰ That memorable term brings into sharp focus via Achebe's words, the possibility of a double exile in the Nigerian condition. In Coetzee's use of *diasporic exile*, a situation is evoked where one might find oneself cast from a dubious center. In other words, as a wanderer wandering from a place that never was. The Nigeria of independence, in a time that should have engendered profound optimism, despite being a creation of the British, engendered internal cynicism from the outset. The cynicism of those who behave and act as though they are perpetual outsiders. This is the suggestion of Achebe's words, highlighting the irresponsibility of a suddenly elevated administration abusing new-found powers. Arguably also, those actions greater emphasize a leadership insufficiently invested in the *idea* of Nigeria, that it places such limited value on the nation's statecraft from its inception. In that case, no real center existed from the outset for these 'outsiders'. Outsiders who may have felt as foreign to their situation and each other; as those who later leveled the 'outsider' charge on Abacha by conferring an alien foreignness upon him.

During Abacha's tenure, 33 years after Independence, the national landscape and the concept of what it meant to be Nigerian remained as undefined as it had been in 1960. Prior to Abacha's crackdown on the media from 1994, several commentators including journalists from national papers, increasingly referenced the perception that the nation had an unresolved aspect to it. The civil war, the coups, the religious and tribalistic skirmishes that blighted the country, was all cited as symptoms of a greater malaise in relation to Nigeria's national identity and psyche. This emboldened and dissenting journalistic voice, which ultimately provoked Abacha to effect said crackdown, was triggered by the annulment of the 1993 democratic elections on the eve of Abacha's takeover. It could be argued that annulling what was seen as Nigeria's freest and fairest elections up to that point (and arguably since), not only heightened sectarian feelings of injustices within certain groups, but also deepened for the

³⁰ J.M. Coetzee, *Stranger Shores: essays 1986 – 1999* (London: Vintage, 2002) p.198.

nation the fragmented sensibility of the citizens.³¹ Thus, the people's sense of being outsiders too – of being both estranged from the other and from their homeland, evokes again Coetzee's maxim; conjures the idea of Diasporas from within. Subsequently, the nation at the time Abacha seized power was a nation marooned from the past and adrift from its present. Consideration of this marooning, of dislocated or disrupted histories, sits to some extent at the heart of my research. For in locating these absented, thwarted and/or diverted histories, we learn also how nations such as Nigeria come to see themselves; we grasp better the rationale and deeds of these nations and how the past informs present actions. For as Tosh points out, what is history for after all, if not 'to provide the basis for informed and critical understanding of the present?'³²

Consequently, from the above question my core enquiry can best be distilled in its most practicable sense as follows: in what way is this *absence of history* I refer to during Abacha's time *measurable*? I address this question fully in the following chapter entitled 'Methodology and Research Methods'. Notwithstanding, on the question of measurability and research focus, all PhD research programmes necessitate the trimming and elevation of proposals from a multiplicity of uneven, open-ended possibilities, to enquiries of singular aim and methodology. In this opening chapter, I have thus far presented the varying 'tentacles' that attach organically to the *history* at the center of my thesis – i.e. tentacles of *religiosity, conflict, imperialism, nationhood* and *despotism*. These themes typify 'open-ended possibilities'. The challenge lies in discerning how to utilize these so-called tentacles to inform, support and elucidate better my thesis – whilst knowing also when to cut loose; to relinquish once purposes have been served, lest the tentacles overwhelm and obscure my chief identifiable aim.

³¹ Chief M.K.O. Abiola was a Yoruba presidential contender from the south and widely viewed to have won the election. However, outgoing Head of State, Gen Ibrahim Babangida, a northerner, annulled the election citing 'electoral irregularities'. Abacha's subsequent coup further diminished the possibility of Abiola's ascension to the presidency and the fact Abacha was also a northerner aggrieved the Yorubas who felt this was a blatant case of tribalism.

³² John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) p.5.

To this end: the singular aim and approach of my thesis will be a focus on the institutional offering of history as a subject/discipline during Abacha's time, with a concentration on sites of history dissemination. These sites, both functional and unconventional, include Institutions of higher learning; universities, archives; and depositories of history created through government-funded programs, related bodies and affiliated satellites such as 'history bureaus' and cultural sites.

Research Purpose: Scholarship & Originality

Every research undertaking provokes the question of originality. Having met with a paucity of documented research related to my specific research focus, I am led to conclude that an original contribution can be made by my enquiry. Due to this dearth of studies investigating the Nigerian nation's interaction with history during Abacha's rule, I propose to examine it in overlapping terms:

- A fragmented historicity and national self-awareness *in*
- The shadow of a disconnected colonial past *within*
- A purposefully invented geographical and tribal space

In encountering also a pronounced lack of contemporaneous academic works on Abacha's Nigeria, I concluded that this was less surprising considering the prevailing zeitgeist of those times. In 1989, just a few years before Abacha seized power, the Berlin Wall tumbled. With the communist model capitulating in favour of a capitalist, Western democratic ideal, the world transfixed in the '90s on a changed order as articulated throughout Fukuyama's seminal *The End of History and The Last Man*.³³ In the shifting light of a post-Cold War era and the advent of a fresh historical paradigm, Abacha slipped out of gaze of the new European-focused big idea. On a localised level, if Africa was to be accommodated within this new Eurocentric paradigm, the main news of course was Nelson Mandela; freed from Victor Verster

³³ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History And the Last Man* (London: Penguin Random House, 1992).

prison almost exactly three months after the Berlin Wall fell. Mandela was the iconic African embodiment of this post-Cold war, postcolonial era of progressive government. Abacha would have appeared passé in comparison; an embarrassing African anachronism in those forward-looking times. I return later to this juncture – and contrast Abacha’s rule contextually, in the background of this historic 1989 shift embodied by the pseudo-scriptural theatre of a Jericho-like Berlin Wall crumbling in full public glare.

Sources

Regarding archival material, I seek to forge links in Nigeria with a number of local university departments, in both the northern and southern part of the country. In the predominantly Christian south, Abacha was largely perceived to be an interloper following his coup after the election purportedly won by M.K.O Abiola - whom Abacha subsequently imprisoned.³⁴ In the south, I have made advances to the University of Abuja, the University of Lagos and the University of Ibadan. The University of Lagos is of interest given its union and student body activities of the 1990s were sufficiently vocal against Abacha’s government to warrant a two-year closure imposed upon them. The University of Ibadan is of interest as Nigeria’s oldest university, founded in 1948 and arguably Nigeria’s most respected institution of higher learning with distinguished alumni. The University of Abuja is relevant for a number of reasons. Firstly, Abuja being the nation’s capital has long been representative of and invested with the aspirations of governments over the years, since Babangida’s military government officially migrated the capital from Lagos to Abuja on 12th December 1991. Secondly, although categorised here as south, Abuja, sits geographically almost exactly at the median centre of Nigeria, thus representing the nexus of a cultural blend that is uniquely neither northern or southern, with northerners and southerners, Christians and Muslims alike asserting their own cultural strongholds

³⁴ When Gen Babangida resigned soon after annulling the elections and installing a so-called ‘interim government’, he left Abacha *in situ* as Chief of Army Staff. After Abacha seized power in a bloodless coup, Abiola subsequently declared himself president, prompting Abacha to detain and imprison Abiola.

across the city. Finally, Abuja is also of strategic importance regarding my thesis question, for it is from here Professor Philip Afaha, Head of the Department of History and Diplomatic Studies at the University of Abuja, launched a campaign called *Bring Back our History* as covered in Chapter VII. The campaign was instrumental in placing the issue of history scholarship at the forefront of the government's in-tray regarding the removal of history from Nigerian schools. In Chapter VII, I address Afaha's campaign which chronicles both the end of history scholarship in Nigerian schools, as well as the dissenting voices opposed to the subject's banishment.

In the north of the country, I explore records and documentation at universities and cultural bureaus in Kano, Kaduna and Katsina. In exploring the northern universities, the aim is to get a view also of possible disparities between ways history scholarship may have been discharged in the generally Christian south in comparison to the mostly Muslim north. This consideration is of particular import given Abacha was from the north – and in this, Kano is of significance given Abacha was born there.

Abacha himself left little in the way of personal writings; another famous aspersion cast against him was the assertion that Abacha was illiterate.³⁵ However, there is a body of resource available in the form of speeches Abacha delivered over the years, which survive intact and are freely available.

I utilise as a resource, theories of history - and identity - with works such as Mary Fulbrook's *Historical Theory*.³⁶ Also proving useful is Michael Stanford's *A Companion to the Study of History*,³⁷ alongside works deliberating on ideas of nationhood and nationalism such as Anderson's *Imagined communities*,³⁸ and Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*.³⁹ Regarding postcolonial theory and discourse especially within the framework of citizenship, I explore commentators such as Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and its*

³⁵ Credence was added to this rumour when in 1999, after Abacha's death, records were leaked to the Nigerian press alleging that Abacha had failed most of his military promotion exams but had been promoted nonetheless.

³⁶ Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002).

³⁷ Michael Stanford, *A Companion to the study of History* (Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell 1994).

³⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* [2nd Ed.] (London: Verso, 2006).

³⁹ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism: New Perspectives on the Past* [2nd Ed.], (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

Fragments,⁴⁰ and Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture*,⁴¹ and *Nation and Narration* amongst others.⁴² I also plan to interview Professors of History in Nigeria and in the Diaspora – in particular, Professor Toyin Falola who has proven to be one of the foremost thinkers and prolific historiographers of the Nigerian history scene in recent years.

⁴⁰ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁴¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁴² Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

SECTION ONE: AIMS & OBJECTIVES

CHAPTER I

Literature Review

Empire and War

I found it instructive that the array of literature I looked to survey, review and draw from had its core messages ensconced around issues of conflict. My literature review followed a non-linear path given I found little to no existing literature on my chosen question. The cogent solution to the 'no literature' problem is to reframe the boundaries of one's enquiry and investigate other related or pertinent texts. In my re-framing, a broader scholarly conversation emerges around particular texts that centre on historical issues of note, which provide gateways to my central investigation. These historical issues or 'gateways' are diverse and included writings on topics that almost exclusively had at its centre, overt conflict scenarios that required acrimonious resolution. For example: British Imperialism; the colonial and post-independence experience; the Nigeria-Biafra civil war; coup d'états; terrorism; writings on Nigerian history scholarship; and references on the state of education in Nigeria.

Any exploration of the relational impact of conflict on modern Nigeria (as in any other British colony), cannot in the first instance be extricated from the violence – both ideological and real – of imperialism. The ideological violence of imperialism and its negation specifically of the victim's history was addressed by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon argued that whilst colonialists used violence to pillage human and material resources to perpetuate and maintain power, a more reprehensible violence lay in the *ideological* destruction of the indigenous cultures and values (language, dress, religion, social codes etc.) which was supplanted with distorted, bastardised versions. As Fanon asserts:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content! By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and disfigures and destroys it.⁴³

From Fanon's words, a case in point: one can today speculate on the purported ideological damage inflicted on Zimbabwe *vis a vis* Nigeria in relation specifically to cultural dress. As recently as 2012, Zimbabwe engaged in a national conversation about its lack of traditional dress. The mooted proposals to remedy this conundrum of Zimbabwean identity apparently lay not in re-imagining or constructing a costume rooted in the customs, histories and traditions of the southern African Shona peoples, from whom most Zimbabweans originate. Instead, it was to West Africa the governmental national dress task force turned. The West African *headwrap* and the Nigerian wax print *wrapper* became strong contenders for Zimbabwean national attire – as was more preposterously, that ironic remnant of colonial adventurism: the safari suit. Nigerian national dress in comparison, prior to and since colonialism, has maintained a constant and visible presence, even in large progressive sites of African modernity such as Lagos and Abuja. This hardly excuses the Nigerian experience from the psychic wounding of colonialist policy. Instead, the Nigerian-Zimbabwe illustration here, to employ a medical analogy, may merely highlight how patients suffering from the same ailment manifest dissimilar symptoms due to their unique vulnerabilities. A question for further exploration is in what other ways might Fanon's 'ideological damage' manifest in Nigeria's own sense of self, identity and history?

Several studies referencing Nigeria's colonial past address the specific issue of the violence of imperialism. David Birmingham's *The Decolonization of Africa* addresses the violent legacy of imperial domination from the outset.⁴⁴ Birmingham notes that the sit-down affair of the so-called 'carving up' of

⁴³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Pluto Press, 1986) p.42.

⁴⁴ David Birmingham, *The Decolonization of Africa* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996).

the continent at the Berlin Conference of 1885⁴⁵ was followed with the deployment of troops. Birmingham informs us that the European parties 'sent armies to Africa in order to turn boundaries on their maps into frontiers on the ground. Owners of the land who resisted the arrival of the self-styled forces of 'civilisation' were to be 'pacified' by conquest.'⁴⁶ Falola's *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria* (Falola 2009) is another instructive text. Falola's text studies closely the conditions that created a legacy of violence in Nigeria and further examines how violence as a tool of domination and resistance as utilised by the British, contributed to Nigeria's instability over the years. Falola's analysis covers the last quarter of the 19th century, where violence and domination formed part of the British conquest, as well as the first half of the 20th century, which was characterised by violent rebellion and an emergent national political consciousness.

Richard Bourne's *Nigeria: A New History of a Turbulent Century* provided a useful study of the legacy of imperialism by focusing on a 100-year period from 1914, when Lord Lugard amalgamated three separate protectorates - Southern Protectorate, Northern Protectorate, Colony of Lagos - into one Nigeria.⁴⁷ Bourne's is an insightful study that commences by informing us that the naming of the nation alongside its conception was an exclusively European conceit: Lord Lugard's wife, Flora Shaw, coined the name *Nigeria* in a letter to the *The Times* to define the territories abutting the River Niger.⁴⁸ Bourne, whilst not being soft on Nigeria's post-independence leaders, largely argues that a significant failure of British colonial administration created in part the conditions for Nigeria's modern malaise.

In contrast, other works on British imperialism such as Niall Ferguson's *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* provides a rebuff to the deprecatory conclusions of Bourne and others.⁴⁹ Historian Linda

⁴⁵ The Berlin Conference signified the apex of European competition for the territory and resources of Africa, the process of which came to be known as the 'Scramble for Africa'.

⁴⁶ David Birmingham, *The Decolonization of Africa* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996) p.3.

⁴⁷ Richard Bourne, *Nigeria: A new History of a Turbulent Century* (London: Zed Books, 2015).

⁴⁸ Ibid. p.3.

⁴⁹ Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2003).

Colley calls Ferguson's *Empire* a 'bracing corrective to those cruder critics who persist in analysing the empire only in terms of racism, violence and exploitation.'⁵⁰ Ferguson's work serves at least as a contemporary reference point and insight into the long line of traditional patriarchal texts whose chief function was as an apologist for the British Empire. Notably, not all works on imperialism and the British Empire rationalize it wholly in terms of 'racism, violence and exploitation' as Linda Colley asserts. More complex works exist which whilst acknowledging the exploitations inherent in the building and sustenance of the British Empire, present nuanced and typically unexplored angles in relation to the composite players and disassemblers of empire. These works are both a counterpoint to the apologists, as well as a disavowal of the prevailing patriarchal works that tend to hold a fixed British-centric view. Antoinette Burton's *The Trouble with Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism* is one such atypical example that provides uncommon perspective in comparison to prevalent literature on empire.⁵¹ Gavin Rand lauds Burton as the progenitor of a 'new imperial history',⁵² and by illustration Burton subverts the usual patriarchal and British-centered voice by presenting, for example, the feminist and subaltern histories not usually part of the empire narrative. Where other works, evident in their titles, present a linear waxing and waning of empire and imperialism – e.g. Philippa Levine's *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset*,⁵³ Lawrence James's seminal work *Raj: The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*⁵⁴ – Burton argues that empire had an inherent weakness; a 'perpetual insecurity'⁵⁵ that defied its longevity. In challenging and dismantling what Denise Gonyo calls 'the hegemonic construction of

⁵⁰Linda Colley, 'Into the Belly of The Beast' – *The Guardian*, Jan 18 2003, Book Review Section, p.4.

⁵¹ Antoinette Burton, *The Trouble with Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵² Gavin Rand, 'Empire In Question: Reading, Writing and Teaching British Imperialism', *Journal Of Victorian Culture*, 17 (2012), 2-5 (p3).

⁵³ Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (Harlow: Longman, 2007).

⁵⁴ Lawrence James, *Raj: The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (London: Abacus, 1995).

⁵⁵ Antoinette Burton, *The Trouble with Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) p.4.

imperial superiority'⁵⁶, Burton is a disruptor of the business as usual offerings on empire as she widens the lens and possibilities of what empire in reality may have been.

Other works such as John Darwin's *Unfinished Empire: The Global expansion of Britain*, though more ambiguous than Burton in relation to the ethical question of empire, agrees with Burton in emphasizing the accidental and precarious aspect of the entire enterprise. As Darwin notes, 'it is easily forgotten that across much of the world empire was 'made' as much if not more by the local auxiliaries that 'empire builders' recruited as by the imperialists themselves.'⁵⁷ Darwin continues, to emphasise empire's complexity, that 'the result was an empire of hybrid components, conflicting traditions, and unsettled boundaries between races and people: a source of constant unease as well as extraordinary energy.'⁵⁸

In a similar spirit to Burton's challenging of the prevailing narrative of empire's untrammelled self-assurance, Richard Gott's work is also of interest as a disruptor of received wisdom. In *Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt*.⁵⁹ Gott like Burton argues persuasively on the constant volatility and 'insecurity' of the so-called Empire project by chronicling that nemesis of empire – *rebellion* – that not only stalked the Imperialist project but also had its dress rehearsal in the slavery venture which preceded colonialism. In Gott's 576-page tome, it is the episodic rebellions and revolts that fill the pages and ensures that empire is never comfortable enough to self-sustain. As Gott states 'belief survives in Britain that the Empire was an imaginative, civilizing enterprise, reluctantly undertaken, that brought the benefits of modern society to backward peoples.'⁶⁰ Gott adds that it is often proposed that the British Empire represented 'a model experience, unlike that of the French, the Dutch, the Germans, the Spaniards, the Portuguese – or, of course the Americans. There is widespread opinion that the British

⁵⁶ Denise Gonyo, "Review of *The Trouble with Empire* by Antoinette Burton": *Reviews in History*, September 2016. <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/1980> [Accessed 09 May 2018].

⁵⁷ John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global expansion of Britain* (London: Penguin, 2013) preface XII.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Richard Gott, *Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt* (London: Verso Books, 2012).

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.3.

Empire was obtained and maintained with a minimum degree of force and with maximum cooperation from a grateful indigenous population.’⁶¹

Historian William Dalrymple, author of prize-winning histories of India such as 2001’s *White Mughals*, echoes Gott’s views with a generalized indictment of British imperialism stating, ‘the British still have this ridiculous view of our own imperial story. The idea that the Empire was this great civilizing mission, as we were taught at school, is historical nonsense.’⁶² In similar vein, John Newsinger’s *The Blood Never Dried* challenges the chorus of claims that the British Empire was a kinder force in the world of imperialism, as it tracks a history of repression and resistance.⁶³

Returning to Burton, her approach is further of interest in that her historical enquiries come from as varied disciplines as cultural geography, anthropology and literary studies. This rich cross-pollination Rand again commends in describing Burton’s work as ‘bridging the interplay of imperial past and postcolonial present.’⁶⁴ In coming myself from a multidisciplinary place – War Studies, History, Literature and Postcolonial Studies – Burton’s varied approach is something I admire and aspire to apply where I may, in order to achieve an extensive expression of my research.

In relation to conflict-centered text and revisiting my assertion that war and conflict ‘propels political actors and their actions’, nowhere is this truism more relevant in Nigeria’s history than in the Nigeria-Biafra civil war (1967-70). Regarding texts on the Nigeria-Biafra civil war – sometimes referred to as the Biafran War – there existed a volume of writings to choose from. The writings I discerned provided a ready gateway to my thesis question focused on not only the justifications of the civil war or how the war was fought, but on the war’s legacy. Concerning legacy, I encountered a focus on the impact on governments and future generations in the socio-cultural context of the nation’s history. The author

⁶¹Richard Gott, p.3.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ John Newsinger, *The Blood Never Dried: A People's History of the British Empire* (London: Bookmarks, 2006).

⁶⁴ Richard Gott, p.3.

Barnaby Phillips referred to the Nigeria-Biafra civil war's legacy as 'a suppressed trauma'.⁶⁵ Toyin Falola and Ogechuckwu Ezekwem's *Writing The Nigeria-Biafra War* is a useful reference for its multiple perspectives.⁶⁶ And as scholars such as Falola, Keith Somerville, Alexander Madeibo *et al* have noted within its pages, the Biafran War has long cast a great shadow over Nigerian political life. In this Abacha and his regime was not excepted. I shall also consider the echoes of secessionist claims that originally emerged with Biafra protagonist Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Odumegwu Ojukwu from 1966, which replayed in Abacha's time in the person of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his cause for 'Ogoniland'.

With some irony and added poignancy, another useful text in relation to Biafra is *Sozaboy*, authored by Ken Saro-Wiwa. *Sozaboy* tracks the fortunes of a young naive recruit in the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, from his excited enlistment to ultimate disillusion. Whilst the author's use of 'rotten English' — a mixture of Nigerian pidgin English, broken English and idiomatic English—makes this a unique novel in Nigerian literary tradition, Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham in his 2017 research article on *Sozaboy* pinpoints the book's main contribution. In Perera-Rajasingham's *Ken Saro-Wiwa as Public Intellectual* (Perera-Rajasingham 2017), Perera-Rajasingham notes that *Sozaboy* shows how 'war can refashion postcolonial sensibilities'⁶⁷ and writes of how the Biafran War was 'the point at which the Nigerian state and society transitioned from post-independence.'⁶⁸ In these observations, Perera-Rajasingham underlines the significance of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war as a juncture that was both the result of Nigeria's colonial legacy and the moment where the uncertainties of a new Nigeria, which endure to the present day, was born.

Several other useful scholarship exists in relation to Biafra. Most recently, Edlyne Eze Anugwom's *From Biafra to The Niger Delta Conflict – Memory, Ethnicity and the State in Nigeria* is useful for its reading of

⁶⁵ Barnaby Phillips, 'The Top 10 Books about Nigeria', *The Guardian* (September 10, 2014).

⁶⁶ Toyin Falola and Ezekwem Ogechukwu, *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*, (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2016).

⁶⁷ Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham, 'Ken Saro-Wiwa as Public Intellectual', *Research in African Literatures Vol. 48, No. 4*, (Winter 2017), pp. 1-20.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

the Biafran War's ongoing repercussions in modern Nigeria. One of Anugwom's persuasive assertions is that in Biafra's aftermath as things remained unresolved despite the war's end, this 'non-systematic closure',⁶⁹ ultimately resulted in a national 'memory lapse'⁷⁰. This 'memory lapse', Anugwom asserts, has further provided openings to other 'social conflicts and dissensions in the socio-geographical region of the erstwhile Biafra Republic.'⁷¹

John de St. Jorre's *The Nigerian Civil War* - re-issued on October 1st 2009 as *The Brothers' War: Biafra and Nigeria* - is a valuable primary account by journalist John de St. Jorre who covered the war as a foreign correspondent for the *The Observer*. The British John de St. Jorre's account is widely recognised as fair and impartial, with the journalist having unusual access to both sides during the war. St. Jorre later stated that 'the war ended with a nation intact although it failed to resolve Nigeria's seemingly intractable political, economic and social problems.'⁷² I garnered further insights from St. Jorre via a telephone conversation we had and document his observations in this thesis. Chinua Achebe's *There Was A Country: A Personal History of Biafra* is a notable source on the history of Nigeria's bloody civil war, due to it being Achebe's firsthand personal account of a war he ultimately had to flee.⁷³ A postscript in which Achebe contrasts the example of Nelson Mandela with other less illustrious African leaders, including Nigerian ones, serves to bring into sharp focus issues concerning nationalism and accountability; topics which exercise this research. Achebe's *There Was A Country*, his swan song, is notable for another reason: it charts the evolution of Achebe's ideas regarding colonialism, which was first espoused in *Things Fall Apart*.⁷⁴ In *Things Fall Apart*, his most famous work, Achebe delivers a

⁶⁹ Edlyne Eze Anugwom, *From Biafra to the Niger Delta Conflict – Memory, Ethnicity and the State in Nigeria* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2019,) p.20.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p1.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² John de St. Jorre – "The Nigerian Civil War" – *JohnStJorre.com*, 2016, <http://johndestjorre.com/book/the-nigerian-civil-war/> [Accessed 5 July 2018].

⁷³ Chinua Achebe, *There Was A Country – A Personal History of Biafra*. (New York: Penguin, 2012).

⁷⁴ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: William Heinemann, 1958).

stinging critique of the colonial experiment. Authors David Whittaker and Mpalive-Hangson Msiska note of *Things Fall Apart*:

Achebe created a narrative that placed the African at the historic center of the colonial encounter, with the imperialistic Europeans as the usurping outsiders, whose intervention brings about cataclysmic upheaval for the traditional African civilization being colonized.⁷⁵

Whilst *There was A Country* focuses on the everyday experience of Biafra from a vantage first-person perspective, it also delivers a surprising, thought-provoking commentary on Nigeria's colonial legacy; one which sits at odds with the idealism of *Things Fall Apart*. Bruce Gilley makes note of Achebe's shifting position in his review of *There Was A Country*.⁷⁶ Gilley notes 'while Achebe was a critic of the forms that the colonial encounter often took, he also believed that the challenge of modernity put to Africa by colonialism was a healthy one.'⁷⁷ Gilley further states that whilst Achebe 'decried the ways that colonialism disempowered African societies, he believed that re-empowerment required embracing, not spurning, many of the same forms of governance practiced under colonialism: educational, administrative, and social.'⁷⁸

In relation to colonial discourse, it is useful to be mindful also of the concept of *decoloniality*, which critiques prevailing postcolonial thought and application as problematic and in thrall to western epistemological criteria. As decoloniality focuses on the production of knowledge and specifically the western monopolisation and exploitation of knowledge production through, for example history dissemination, the concept helps me to reshape the epistemological boundaries in my thesis in relation to knowledge production in the Nigerian setting. These related issues and focus of decoloniality center

⁷⁵ David Whittaker (ed.), Chinua Achebe's *Things fall apart: 1958–2008* (Rodopi: New York, 2011) p. xi.

⁷⁶ One is mindful still, of the controversy that surrounds Gilley's work in light of his article 'The Case for Colonialism', published in *Third World Quarterly* in 2017.

⁷⁷ Bruce Gilley, "Chinua Achebe on the positive legacies of colonialism." *African Affairs* 115, no. 461 (2016): 646–63. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44507522>. [Accessed 14 May 2017].

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

particularly around the interpretation and ownership of history – concerns that exercise my thesis. As Walter Mignolo stated in *Local Histories/Global Designs* ‘during the period 1500 to 2000, one local history, that of Western civilization, built itself as the point of arrival and owner of human history. Ownership was expressed by building a system of knowledge as if it were the sum and guardian of all knowledges, past and present.’⁷⁹ Mignolo goes on to expound that ‘G.W.F. Hegel’s lessons in the philosophy of history remain the single and most telling document of that epistemic victory.’⁸⁰

These foremost commentators on decoloniality, Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, Achille Mbembe, Catherine Walsh and Arjun Appadurai, also tackle in their current scholarship one of the tenets of decoloniality which looks at the ‘history behind our geographies’⁸¹, which in turn informs my approach in interrogating a complex, diverse region like Nigeria.

On the issue still of internal or civil conflict, Michael Crowder’s *The Story of Nigeria* proves a useful contemporaneous resource.⁸² By showcasing the precedents in precolonial and colonial Nigeria of Dan Fodio’s Holy War and the Yoruba Civil Wars, Crowder both inadvertently foreshadows and helps to contextualize some of the dynamics inherent in the coming Biafran War; undercurrents that resurfaced after the hiatus of a colonial era that concluded two years after Crowder published his work.

Other notable texts that deal with internal conflict at its center focuses on *Terrorism*. In particular, texts that examine mostly religious-based terrorism within Nigeria as opposed to purely politically motivated insurgencies, helped contribute to the conversation about history in Nigeria. In relation to religious terrorism, given that the social construct of Nigeria is equally divided between Christian and Muslim communities, this issue is undeniably a combustible and urgent matter that unavoidably influences

⁷⁹ Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, (New Jersey: Princeton Press, 2012) p11.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Arjun Appadurai, ‘Beyond Domination: The future and past of decolonization’, 6 March 2021, *The Nation*, <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/achille-mbembe-walter-mignolo-catherine-walsh-decolonization/> [Accessed 7 March 2021].

⁸² Michael Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1962) p.96.

political decisions. Falola covers this very issue in *Violence in Nigeria: The crisis of religious politics and secular ideologies*. However, the most notable violent groups and militarism, whether religious or not, that have emerged in Nigeria and which to varying degrees still trouble the present-day have mainly emerged post-Abacha (even if their roots have been firmly in place historically). Thus, the violence and conflict that comprise the Niger Delta insurgency groups such as MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta) and NDA (Niger Delta Avengers), the notorious Boko Haram, the Fulani Herdsmen and others such as secessionist groups like IPOB (The Indigenous People of Biafra) and Oduduwa Republic have arisen mostly due to a complex set of causes and grievances that are not particularly relevant to this study.

In relation to texts documenting the issues that bedeviled higher institutions of learning in Nigeria such as funding problems, as well as the influence of institutions such as the World Bank, I have found Ajayi, Goma & Johnson's, *The African Experience with Higher Education* particularly of use,⁸³ as well as Tim Livsey's *Nigeria's University Age: Reframing Decolonisation and Development* amongst other texts.⁸⁴

Elusive Abacha

Cognizant also of a lack of contemporaneous literature related to Abacha's time in power, I sought post-Abacha literature following the dictator's demise. Post-Abacha works such as *Nigeria During The Abacha Years* by Kunle Amuwo *et al* (Amuwo & others 2013), a collection of essays, serve as an informative, chronological retrospective on the Abacha junta. However, at heart its emphasis is on Nigeria's democratization process and troublesome transition to civil rule. In this work and others, the underlying focus is of the squandering of the country's political potential and of economic mismanagement. Of Amuwo's collection, only Michèle Maringues' piece references history in addressing an aspect of

⁸³ J.F.Ade Ajayi, Lameck K.H. Goma & G. Ampah Johnson, *The African Experience with Higher Education*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996).

⁸⁴ Tim Livsey, *Nigeria's University Age: Reframing Decolonisation and Development*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

Abacha's regime: Maringues marvels at how the roots of a semi-independent press born in colonial times, managed through the years to survive even up to and during the repressive Abacha regime.

Segun Adeniyi's *The Last 100 Days of Abacha* is firstly a political analysis on the machinations and alliances that empowered Abacha.⁸⁵ Whilst useful in part in increasing our general knowledge of the period and its attendant wrangling, the sole history-focused chapter settles exclusively on electoral development since the colonial period. Other works such as Ekanem's *Beyond the Execution* focuses energies, justifiably, on the infamous murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa.⁸⁶ Only Saddam Hussein, five years prior, attracted similar condemnation from the international community for a similarly startling extrajudicial killing, when on 21st March 1990 Hussein hanged Iranian-born journalist Farzad Bazoft – claiming without evidence that the journalist who worked on the British weekly *The Observer* was a spy. Ekanem's work which documents Abacha's similarly hasty and indulgent incaution in the killing of Saro-Wiwa, in its historical analysis, extends little further than an exploration of Abacha as an abomination personified.

Fictional and literary accounts of Abacha's rule number only nominally more than their scholarly counterparts. Yet even in the likes of Helon Habila's Caine Prize-winning *Prison Stories*, the dictator is notable for his absence from their pages.⁸⁷ The same can be said of Nwokolo's aptly named *The Ghost of Sani Abacha*.⁸⁸

Like the proverbial elephant in the room, the stories skirt around Abacha; hinging instead on the hardships and oppressions that his regime spawned. As a literary tool, invisibility can be effective – Gene

⁸⁵ Olusegun Adeniyi, *The Last 100 Days of Abacha*. (London: Bookhouse, 2005).

⁸⁶ Tom Mbeke-Ekanem, *Beyond the Execution: Understanding the Ethnic and Military Politics in Nigeria*. (London: iUniverse, 2000).

⁸⁷ Helon Habila, *Prison Stories*. (Abuja: Dean G Umukoro, 2001).

⁸⁸ Chuma Nwokolo, *The Ghost of Sani Abacha*. (London: County Books, 2012).

Washington described this device as the ‘presence of absence in imaginative writing’⁸⁹ and further declared that ‘absences as negation are more dramatic than presences.’⁹⁰ Still, it is an ironic reverse this near-invisibility of Abacha in historical fiction, when paralleled with the invisibility of history under Abacha’s rule, which my research proposal posits. Nonetheless, à la Burton who brought a multiplicity of disciplines to her work, some literary sources alongside historical scholarship and archival material contribute a more layered and nuanced understanding of my thesis question. I am thus positioned to make a valuable methodological and real contribution in African Studies, which straddles and sits at a confluence of multi-disciplines from the historical, to postcolonialism, to literary studies. In relation to the literary though, an obvious pitfall would be to conflate the fiction for reality and draw hard conclusions from there. As Professor Marwick states:

It is becoming fashionable, for historians to work with novels, films, paintings, and even music. Doing this is not evidence of some superior virtue, or sensibility; in fact, most of what we know about most periods in the past will continue to come from the more conventional sources. Historians have had a habit of quoting odd lines from novels, as if these, in themselves, somehow provided some extra illumination. If cultural artefacts are to be used at all in serious historical writing (and I believe they should - they can be invaluable for attitudes, values, and quality of cultural life), they have to be used seriously.⁹¹

On Marwick’s point about the limitations of fictional works illuminating aspects of cultural life, this is especially evident if we consider Abacha’s invisibility in those aforementioned fictional pages. Beyond the simulacrum of the reclusive Abacha’s near invisibility in public during his rule, the literary symbolism fails to advance what we already know *off* the page. Still, for certain research, closer examination of these works and their interaction of characters operating within the Abacha-filled void, may yet yield cultural and societal insights that further our understanding and appreciation of those times.

⁸⁹ Gene Washington, “Shots In The Dark: The Presence of Absence in Imaginative Literature”, *Utah State University*, January 2014, https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1639&context=english_facpub ([Accessed 16 December 2016]).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Professor Arthur Marwick, “The Fundamentals of History: What is History?”, *The Open University*, (n.d) <https://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Whatishistory/marwick1.html> [Accessed 11 February 2017].

The exiled Wole Soyinka writing at the height of Abacha's rule, posed his question on Abacha's actual invisibility in an essayed piece *'The Last Despot and the End of Nigerian History?'*⁹² On a literal level, history as a subject had indeed been removed from secondary schools' curriculum at Soyinka's time of writing. Conceptually, it was to shades of Fukuyama that Soyinka in his title alluded: of Fukuyama's big 1992 idea on how western liberal democracies, in its self-narrating thrust of history, secured an irreversible ideological triumph at the expense of previous East-West paradigms.⁹³ In truth, Soyinka's allusion to Fukuyama is both aspirational and tenuously distilled when re-translated to Abacha; what Soyinka offers here is the concept of a national historical impasse as represented in the immovable and ahistorical person of Abacha. For Soyinka, the nation became an unrecognizably vague place under Abacha due to Abacha's poor grasp of the country as a historical entity. 'Abacha,' Soyinka wrote, 'has no *notion* of Nigeria.'⁹⁴ We have returned full circle to the Lagos Market Women's Association.

On this weighted question of notion's of nationality tied with expressions of leadership, at a recent televised talk that headlined Mr. Soyinka, I asked him if Abacha was unique in this alleged lack of awareness or if leaders in Nigeria have historically grappled with this dilemma. Mr. Soyinka's response was that Abacha was indeed unique. Soyinka, in citing other governments including the current one of Gen. (Rtd.) Buhari, stated that at least other regimes deigned to recognise in part that aspects of progress – cultural, economic, structural, political – was a civic duty, whereas Abacha blatantly showed a wholehearted disregard.⁹⁵

⁹² Wole Soyinka, "Introduction: The Last Despot and the End of Nigerian History" in *The open sore of a continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) pp.3-16

⁹³ Fukuyama's argument in summary stated that with the ascendancy of Western liberal democracy — following the Cold War (1945–1991) and the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991), a resultant 'end of history' ensued, which translated as a new world order of liberal democracy becoming the final form of government for all nations.

⁹⁴ Soyinka, *The open sore of a continent: A personal narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*, p.15.

⁹⁵ 'Al Jazeera: Studio B: Unscripted with Wole Soyinka and Elif Shafak', 24th May 2019, Al Jazeera Studios, London. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvcUANjP_6o [Accessed 22 November 2019].

If historical inquiry is moved to seek interpretations of the past in the service of explaining historical causality (i.e. how and why change occurs within cultures or societies), then herein lies an ultimate big-picture objective within the parameters of my thesis. Yet, the chorus of voices explicating Abacha's Nigeria, when not decrying the nation's political bankruptcies, grapple on the other hand with the spectacle of Abacha's kleptocracy. Whilst of value in the annals of Nigeria's political and economic history, my premise proposes that in the broader tradition of historicity, a distinctive seminal history was taking place in Abacha's Nigeria – or in *Abachaland* as I termed it in my introduction. It happens that my central contention in stating that this was simultaneously – and consequentially – a time in which history itself receded from view, represents a conceptual adjunct that further encourages a thesis of engagement with aspects of Historical Theory.

Still, in relation to scholarship and the widening of my scope, it was clear that there existed in addition to orthodox scholarship on Nigerian history and politics, a tapestry of discrete enquiries and ready-made body of work – papers, journals, articles, interviews, publications, archival material etc. – which could contribute to a wider knowledge of Abacha's Nigeria. Further, though many as mentioned did not directly address the issue of historicity during Abacha's rule, several works posed interesting queries that formed a part of the composite aspects of historicity – works, for example, on *nationalism* and on *citizenship*. I make a note of some of these works below.

On nationalism and citizenship, a number of efforts and collaborations involving Toyin Falola proved of particular benefit. *Nigeria, Nationalism and Writing History* is one such seminal work notable for its reinstatement and elevation of the African historical voice.⁹⁶ Similarly, Falola and Heaton's *A History of Nigeria* offers an extensive cultural and social history overlap of the region – and delivers also a multi-

⁹⁶ Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010).

disciplinary treatment by traversing diverse canons from art, music, literature and drama.⁹⁷ In relation to timelines, the text displays impressive range spanning from early states and societies (9000 BCE – 1500 CE) up to the 2007 election (thus inclusive of Abacha's rule).

Obaro Ikime's *History, The Historian And the Nation* is useful in its focus on inter-group relations in the context of history and its importance to a Nigeria engaged still in nation-building. In focusing on the practice of history instruction, Ikime's writings highlight and evidence the disappearing art of historical compilation and bemoans the receding imprint of history studies and its application:

Today, the times have changed. Parents now tell their children not to read History. There are states in which graduates of History are not considered for employment. History and Geography have disappeared from the Junior Secondary Schools, replaced by something called Social Studies, which has very little History in it.⁹⁸

Similarly, Ikime's *Groundwork of Nigerian History* proved an excellent reference particularly for the pre-colonial and colonial regions that later constituted Nigeria.⁹⁹ With its data-heavy illustrations of pre-independent life, this work serves as a comprehensive counterpoint to the post-independent existence where skeletal government records and scanty archives seemed to mirror the austerity of the nation's latter years.

Femi Ojo-Ade's *Death of A Myth: Critical Essays on Nigerians* is notable for its chapter dedicated to the relationship between Nigerian governments and university lecturers.¹⁰⁰ Ojo-Ade affords us an insight into Nigeria's education system and successive government's attitude to sites of learning; a consideration at the centre of my thesis and related to the idea of governmental culpability. 'Talking to them [lecturers] and others,' Ojo-Ade informs us, 'reading newspapers and statements by the Academic

⁹⁷ Toyin Falola and Michael Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁹⁸ Obaro Ikime, *History, The Historian and The Nation: The Voice of a Nigerian Historian* (Ibadan: Oluseyi Press, 2006) p.16.

⁹⁹ Obaro Ikime, *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: HEBN Publishers, 1980).

¹⁰⁰ Femi Ojo-Ade. *Death of A Myth: Critical Essays On Nigeria* (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2001).

Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), I have come to some conclusions: The government of Nigeria does not give a damn about education'.¹⁰¹

Karl Maier's work *This House Has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria*, recognises the disconnect that colonialism perpetuated, which became explicit in the dysfunction following independence.¹⁰² This thread between colonialism and a broken-down independence prevails in Maier's account of Nigeria up to and beyond Abacha's time. This same thread connects the broad timespans encapsulated within the premise of my research, from the pre-colonial to Abacha's aftermath. A fundamental question posed also in my research, which Maier's account examines to some extent, is whether within the context of African post-colonial dysfunction, Abacha's reign constituted an anomaly. In this, Maier's work is notable in that a sizeable aspect of the book is dedicated to the government of Abacha's predecessor, Gen. Babangida, and thus presents a background and clear comparison between Babangida's policies and that of Abacha's.

Daniel Bach and Yann Lebeau's offering *Nigeria During The Abacha Years 1993 – 1998* is of note because whilst the Abacha junta like all juntas cannot separate itself from its intrinsic authoritarian nature, Bach and Lebeau's observations highlight deeper aspects at hand beyond the conventionally authoritarian interplay:

The Abacha dispensation was characterized by the unleashing of violence and terror on private citizens, resulting in a general feeling of insecurity among the citizenry, combined with disinstitutionalization – through the manipulation, distortion and destruction of whatever autonomy still remained in the legal and judiciary institutions – and the deterritorialization of the Nigerian state, as a result of regionally selective patterns of government intervention.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Femi Ojo-Ade. *Death of A Myth: Critical Essays On Nigeria* (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2001) p.64.

¹⁰² Karl, Maier, *This House Has Fallen: Nigeria In Crisis*. (London: Penguin, 2000).

¹⁰³ Daniel C. Bach and Yann Lebeau, *Nigeria During The Abacha Years (1993-1998) – The Democratic and International Politics of Democratisation* (Ibadan: Open Edition, 2013) Preface p. V-VII.

This *disinstitutionalization* as Bach and Lebeau term it may adhere to run of the mill authoritarian patterns of wresting control from democratically troublesome independent bodies. However, their use of the term *detrterritorialization* is more revealing. In investigating ways in which the Abacha regime sought to compromise the integrity of the Nigerian nation as set up in 1960, Bach *et al* illustrate the Abacha regime's nihilistic willingness to disregard the apparently indivisible and historic federal character of the nation as conceived at independence. In disavowing Nigeria's post-British restructuring, Bach *et al* show how the Abacha regime in effect operated within Nigeria in a *pre-independent* mindset. This is further insinuated when describing Abacha's *detrterritorialization* of Nigeria with its 'regionally selective patterns of government interventions'¹⁰⁴, as tantamount to a divide and rule strategy. Of course the concept of 'divide and rule' evokes the infamous strategy the British practiced in their colonies and in Nigeria specifically in the Islamic north and Christian south/animist regions.

Bach *et al* also alluded to the Nigeria-Biafra civil war and underlined how the Abacha regime conspicuously eschewed the restraints that had inhibited previous governments. Where Abacha's predecessors – with the shadow of Biafra very much a cautionary factor in their deliberations – deigned to promote regularly the idea of a singular national entity (even if cynically), the Abacha regime abjured such pretensions. For Abacha, Nigeria was no federation of states with a shared national interest or history at heart but an almost arbitrarily devolved grouping of standalone city-states, with no real historical or socio-political ties. This was an anarchic approach to the country's usual codified traditions and nationalistic self-expression, which Bach *et al* alighted on:

The 'federal character' doctrine and broader concerns for intra-elite accommodation through consociational engineering were replaced by the unrestrained instrumentalization of fear, greed,

¹⁰⁴ Daniel C. Bach and Yann Lebeau, Preface pp. V-VII.

violence and disorder, and the politics of prebendalism were subsumed under the shroud of warlordism.¹⁰⁵

Richard Sklar in his essay *An Elusive Target: Nigeria fends off sanctions* also notes the divide and rule tactics of the Abacha regime in relation to the north/south partition of old. Sklar discusses the issue by relating to how Nigerians 'nurture both subnational and supranational political identities at the expense of a national identity based on citizenship of a sovereign state.'¹⁰⁶ By addressing the matter of citizenship, Sklar's words introduce here the connective components of nationhood and *sovereignty* entrenched in a country's historical narrative and traditions. Sklar's address on citizenship cuts to the heart of my enquiry in relation to the Abacha regime's expression of and relationship with the people through the language and agency of historical discourse.

Soyinka had stated that Abacha had no 'notion of Nigeria'; Sklar speaks of a national identity forgone. The issue of identity is what underpins all these positions; an identity borne of a distinct and shared historicity the essence of which the *memory* of my research title seeks to address. This fragmented memory, which begets a disjointed political dialogue between the state and its people, is explored by Yusuf Bala Usman in *Federalism And Nation Building In Nigeria*. Usman states:

One of the most striking features of the current public discourse on the future of the federation of Nigeria is the degree to which it is divorced from the actual historical experiences of the peoples of Nigeria.¹⁰⁷

Writing a year after Abacha took office, Usman poses the perennial existential post-independence question of what kind of nation Nigeria reckons itself to be. His implicit response, encapsulated in the above quote, is that the government's reply to the age-old question appears lost in a dishonest, suspect

¹⁰⁵ Daniel C. Bach and Yann Lebeau, Preface pp. V-VII.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Sklar, *An Elusive Target: Nigeria fends off sanctions*, in *Nigeria During The Abacha Years (1993-1998) – The Democratic and International Politics of Democratisation* ed. By Daniel C. Bach and Yann Lebeau (Ibadan: Open Edition, 2013) pp259-287, (p262).

¹⁰⁷ Bala Usman, *Federalism and Nation Building in Nigeria – The challenges of the 21st Century* (Abuja: NCIR, 1994) p.13.

memory. Ebenezer Babatope's *The Abacha Years: What Went Wrong* published two years after Abacha's death, also touches on the multi-layered and concomitant issues of identity, memory and colonial legacy in relation to the Abacha regime. This text serves as a useful study in disentangling how these concepts overlapped between the colonial period and Abacha's rule - and addresses the consequences of Abacha's approach:

All the forces at play in the Nigerian political conundrum since the amalgamation of the country in 1914 had been active players in the Abacha years. The struggles for a proper definition of Nigeria's federal existence assumed wider dimensions in the Abacha years.¹⁰⁸

Whilst chronicling Abacha's manoeuvrings into power, Babatope further delves into the postcolonial Nigerian landscape and the likely motivations of the Abacha regime's policies. Babatope's argument that Abacha's actions are not the standalone deeds of a capricious autocrat but the actions of someone operating (and reacting) purposefully, helps illuminate the historical threads that run through the country's colonial past.

On history, if Abacha was a denier of the legitimacy of Nigeria and had little 'notion' of the country as a political and nationalistic entity, this arguably can be most blatantly perceived in the annulment of the historic Presidential election of June 12 1993. Although Abacha's predecessor General Babangida was responsible for the annulment, it is noteworthy that Babangida tendered his resignation whilst simultaneously annulling an election devised to usher in his legitimate replacement. Notably too, as the self-retiring Babangida also retired several senior officers as he himself departed, he saw fit to leave in post his most senior ally and historical co-conspirator: Chief of Army Staff General Sani Abacha. As Ebenezer Babatope again stated:

General Sani Abacha was a key player in the Babangida regime which conducted the 1993 presidential election in question. In fact, he was the

¹⁰⁸ Ebenezer Babatope, *The Abacha Years: What went Wrong* (Lagos: Ebino Topsy, 2000) p.112.

defacto No 2 man in that regime and was not unaware of the circumstances that had led to the annulment.¹⁰⁹

So much of a key player was Abacha, that Babatope reminds us of Abacha assuming chief henchman role for Babangida during the street protests that followed the June 12 annulment:

Nigerians first came face-to-face with the hard military stance of Sani Abacha when during the June 12, 1993 street protests of Nigerians, Abacha appeared on national television giving an ultimatum to the then civilian Governor of Lagos State Sir Michael Otedola to nip the demonstrations in the bud or face military intervention in stopping the protests. Twenty-four hours after this ultimatum was given, the streets of Lagos, particularly those around the Ikorodu Road area of Lagos city, became littered with the corpses of many civilian demonstrators for democracy and justice.¹¹⁰

The *The New York Times* explained that despite Babangida's resignation, this was a 'duplicitous attempt at an indefinite extension of military rule',¹¹¹ whilst confirming that 'foreign observers generally described the elections as free and fair.'¹¹² Peter Lewis echoed this view stating 'the run-up to the 12 June elections confounded many popular expectations...the electoral campaign was conducted with unprecedented decorum.'¹¹³ Similarly, other commentators have condemned the military's actions in 1993 as reflective of those with no plans from the outset to relinquish power; thus J. Shola Omotola refers to 'the abortion of the Third Republic through the *criminal* annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential elections,¹¹⁴ and Ian Campbell called the 1993 elections 'the election that never was',¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Babatope, p83.

¹¹⁰ Babatope, p.xii.

¹¹¹ Kenneth B. Noble, 'Nigerian Military Rulers Annul Election' – *The New York Times*, June 24 1993 - <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/06/24/world/nigerian-military-rulers-annul-election.html> [Accessed 18 Aug 2017].

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Peter M. Lewis, "Endgame in Nigeria? The Politics of a Failed Democratic Transition." *African Affairs* 93, no. 372 (1994): 323–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/723365>.

¹¹⁴ J. Shola Omotola, "Elections and Democratic Transition in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic." *African Affairs* 109, no. 437 (2010): 535–53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40928362>.

¹¹⁵ Ian Campbell (1994) Nigeria: The election that never was, *Democratization*, 1:2, 309-322, DOI: [10.1080/13510349408403394](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510349408403394).

evoking Andreas Schedler's designation of a pre-determined election ritual or charade as 'electoral authoritarianism'.¹¹⁶

Abacha's entry into the June 12 impasse and his appropriation of power is a defining moment: by sacking the transitional Interim National Government (ING) which was Babangida's parting gift and duly continuing with military rule, Abacha was flagrantly rejecting the most democratically positive statement the nation had made since colonial rule. It is fitting then that when Babangida gave his televised address to the nation to explain the annulment, he referenced colonialism, claiming 'this administration has built the foundation that would take Nigerians away from their previous colonially-induced motivations and the encumbrances of colonialism.'¹¹⁷

The duplicity the *The New York Times* speaks of forms part of my research enquiry in asking the extent to which the Abacha regime self-consciously pursued a policy to devalue and excise the historical – and therefore political ties and bonds between the nation and its citizens. This question is addressed in part by Kunle Amuwo in *Transition As Democratic Regression* as he tackles the issue from where Babangida departed and Abacha took over:

In particular, the military institution was systematically emptied of its nationalistic characteristics of yesteryear, leaving by the end of Babangida's macabre dance, an empty organizational shell that lacked both political and military esprit de corps. By the same token, the Nigerian state had become severely criminalized and de-legitimized, the rulers having forgotten, in the language of Janet Coleman, that 'political life is about a balance between the needs of citizens and the needs of the state'. This twin-process has had pernicious consequences on the dynamics of state-citizenship relations.'¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Andreas Schedler (ed.), *Electoral Authoritarianism: The dynamics of unfree competition* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 2006), pp. 1-26.

¹¹⁷ Jide Ajani, 'Why we annulled June 12 Presidential Election – Gen. Ibrahim Babangida', *Vanguard News*, June 8 2013 <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/06/why-we-annuled-june-12-presidential-election-general-ibrahim-babangida/> [Accessed 18 October 2016].

¹¹⁸ Kunle Amuwo, *Nigeria During The Abacha Years (1993-1998) -Transition as Democratic Regression* (Ibadan: Open Edition, 2013) p.63.

In using the term 'de-legitimized', Amuwo follows on from the *The New York Times*' point about duplicity; about treacherous vacuums in place of a progressive discourse between the rulers and the ruled – where rulers in leech-like abandon, succeed only in bequeathing an 'empty organizational shell' to the nation. Bala Usman commented on the parallels of negligence in Nigerian leadership during the colonial period:

In the context of the world in the late 19th century, the polities in the Nigerian area became unable to exercise their right to self-determination and to defend their sovereignty, largely because political power was usurped by particularly parasitical emirs, chiefs, warriors and traders.¹¹⁹

It is unsurprising that a roll call of future African rulers and dictators, including the 'no-nonsense' Sani Abacha, were considered by their fellow citizens to be the new colonialists.

On the subject of internal conflicts, that notorious recurrence of post-independent Nigeria – the *coup d'état* – is revealing. Of the eight official coups that occurred in Nigeria between 1966 and 1993, Abacha reportedly was involved in seven of them (Max Siollun describes him as 'by some record the most successful coup plotter in the history of Nigeria's military.'¹²⁰) In exploring *conflict* as an analytical tool, despotism necessarily appears as a sub-category, since conflict is the obligatory condition under which dictators must perpetually operate (democracies in contrast thrive on agreed *consensus*.) Regarding conflict outside Nigeria, a part assessment of Nigeria's involvement in the Sierra Leone's Civil War (1991-2002) serves as a useful barometer of the Abacha regime's relationship to and appreciation of history from a broader historiographical viewpoint. Abacha's Nigeria assumed a direct interventionary role in Sierra Leone's war and an enquiry here rubs close to my thesis' core question by investigating whether Abacha – professional soldier, Lt. General – had cognizance of the historical bearing of an internecine conflict so close to home. Did Abacha by some design pursue purposefully fragmented and disjointed

¹¹⁹ Bala Usman, *Federalism and Nation Building in Nigeria – The challenges of the 21st Century* (Abuja: NCIR, 1994) p.8.

¹²⁰ Maz Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture -1966–1976* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009) p.97.

policy in Nigeria, which fostered an anarchic, philistine void where history – in particular the recounting of it - might have taken shape? My thesis seeks to determine exactly what was pre-meditated and/or official policy, in relation to the telling and delivery of history during Abacha's time in office.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Research Methods

My research adopted predominantly a qualitative historical research method. Due to little to no existing literature on my chosen topic and thus no theory to test, my method encompassed an inductive research approach exploring ideas centred on formulating a novel theory or hypothesis. This novel theory/hypothesis promulgated broadly the concept of an *anti-historical* framework applied by Nigerian military regimes as a tool of governance. The Abacha regime (1993-98) served in my thesis as a compound representative and focal case study of prior Nigerian military administrations. Conceptually, the idea that anti-historical spaces existed within the Nigerian experience is not new – in 2012, Historian Olukoya Ogen said this:

Since the early 1980s, the historical profession in Nigeria appears to have been plagued by a crisis of relevance and identity. There is even a growing anti-historical bias in contemporary Nigerian “culture.” Indeed, apart from the fact that history has been suffering from low enrolment in our universities, the subject has been expunged from the Nigerian junior secondary school curricula. Thus the most pressing challenge faced by Nigerian historians today is how to make this very important discipline relevant to the needs of the Nigerian society.¹²¹

In Ogen’s reading, the anti-historical aspect and ‘bias’ reads as a symptom plaguing Nigerian historiography; in my thesis proposal, I largely delimit the source of the malady to military governance.

¹²¹ Olukoya Ogen – ‘Mainstreaming the Contemporary context of Historical Scholarship in Nigeria’, in *The Third Wave of Historical Scholarship On Nigeria*, ed. by Saheed Aderinto and Paul Osifodunrin, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) pp359-370, (p359).

Due to my applying a fundamentally historical model of research, I explored primary and secondary historical sources, comprising original and archived documents including letters, newspaper articles, speech transcripts, news broadcasts, as well as artifacts. Other sources comprised texts; History B.A, Masters and PhD theses submissions from Nigerian students; news media; interviews, talks and informal conversations.

In most cases throughout this thesis, I utilised a small 'h' when referencing history as a socio-cultural occurrence or referring to the subject as an academic discipline – except when quoting directly from a commentator who utilised a capital 'H' or when denoted as a proper noun classification as part of or related to a course, e.g. History graduate or History Faculty.

Cultural Vs Social History

My research comprised an interdisciplinary exploration. This incorporated in addition to the core branch discipline of history, disciplinary specialities such as postcolonialism, political science, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. Due to the interdisciplinary and cross-sectional overlap, classifying my research initially defied easy categorization. Still, despite the manifold paradigms that interdisciplinary studies swivel between, there were a number of deductions attendant to my study that allowed arrival at a plausible, singular categorisation. The fundamental retrospective base of my enquiry, with its foundation in a now defunct phenomenon – i.e. military governments in Nigeria – situated my enquiry primarily within historical research. In its postcolonial context, the Nigerian military's propensity to assume and appropriate the nation's political reins and thus configure and pervade Nigerian postcolonial cultural life and signifiers, designates military governance in Nigeria as a *cultural* phenomenon.¹²² My premise promulgated that within this politically acculturated military

¹²² This mirrors how Pakistan's Army too constituted a cultural phenomenon in Pakistani history and political economy. The Pakistani example also latterly mirrors the Nigerian experience in that this phenomenon has receded largely from political view as the army have retreated to the barracks.

leadership, a process of history subversion in its multi-forms was actively pursued in aid of governance. I argue that this purported subversion constituted in itself a cultural phenomenon in the milieu of Nigerian governance, since martial rule was not the foundation upon which Nigeria was founded – yet became the dominant form of government citizens experienced post-independence. It is from these deductions that my thesis can be legitimately placed within the category of Cultural History.

So: why not Social History? To be clear, a close alliance exists between social and cultural history with both overlapping and/or often complementing the other. As Paula Fass stated, 'social and cultural history have always been related to each other in strategic ways, correcting each other's blindspots and blunders, while they have also emphasized different elements of the past.'¹²³ Fass states that she simultaneously sees herself as 'a social and cultural historian and encourage my students to engage the issues of culture with which they are now primarily concerned with tools and perspectives drawn from social history.'¹²⁴ Notwithstanding the overlaps, Fass employs a distinct clarification between the two paradigms:

In describing the behavioral tendencies of social groups and emphasizing normative behavior, often in the abstractions of numbers and charts, social historians had moved beyond an elite- dominated political paradigm, but had ignored both the uniqueness of individual experience and the ways in which social life is created through politics and culture. And their attachment to group categories and social structural explanations had begun to deaden history as an exploration of contingent experience. Cultural historians sought to bring some life back into the exploration of the lives of ordinary people and to open them up to arenas of freedom and choice.¹²⁵

Whilst my thesis does not explore the lives of ordinary people at microlevel, on another level it concerns the collective import of citizens' *individual* lives. This occurs in my addressing the purported anti-historical conduct of ruling powers in relation to the 'arenas of freedom and choice' Fass references.

¹²³ Paula Fass, 'Cultural History/Social History: Some Reflections on a Continuing Dialogue (The Cultural Turn and Beyond)', *Journal of Social History* (37), Oxford University Press, Fall 2003, pp39-46.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

Arenas rooted foremost in the cultural masts of nationhood and nationalism – these ties that bind – before these dual concepts may be socialised into the disassembled actions and interactions of the citizenry. That is if the anti-historical gestures of the ruling powers do not automatically inhibit the transmission of nationalist sentiment into the peoples' lives.

Analysis: *anti-historical*

In order to measure the *anti-historical* aspect that my premise proposed, one had to define its *form* in tangible, practicable terms. Firstly, the term *discipline of history*, due to the suggestive particularities of the subject as already referenced, denoted the study of the subject as bound within an academic process and template – but sometimes would comprise both the academic enfoldments and the broader day-to-day cultural import of various metanarratives. One of these overlapping narratives, as referenced above in invoking nationhood, is the existential narrative that weaves around a country's intrinsic self-expression and identification; what we have termed *nationalism*. Ultimately, in brief summation, my focal study sought to measure how the discipline of history fared within the Abacha regime – even as the country's broader and pressing historical narratives inescapably seeped into my enquiry and shaped proceedings.

I arrived consequently at a definition of the anti-historical as: actions or processes that either indisputably or on the balance of probabilities sought to thwart the furtherance of history *study* or *appreciation* in the nation. Within this definition of the anti-historical, is allowance also for government actions - as referenced in this thesis' *abstract* - which seeks to *advance* interpretations of history consistent with the government's political objectives; interpretations seemingly inconsistent with the nation's actual history. Thus, whilst the anti-historical comprises aspects of historical memory suppression, as we shall investigate for example in relation to Biafra in both Gowon's and Abacha's regimes, we shall also explore in the Abacha regime the implementation of a Katsina State History and

Cultural Bureau, as well Nigeria's enrolment into an Islamic Club – actions both which fall outside history suppression but qualify as anti-historical on account of government's intention to reframe or revise the national historical narrative according to partisan interests.

Notwithstanding, as also mentioned in the abstract, this thesis recognizes the multi-causal reasons for anti-historical tendencies, such as funding and under-resourcing of universities (see **Chapter III**) but also for reasons related to imperial debris: the legacy and consequence of inheriting a Western education system historically and fundamentally opposed to the championing of African history.

In seeking to measure in practicable terms how the discipline of history fared during Abacha's regime, it was incumbent to gauge appropriate forms this measurement of the anti-historical might take, as well as simultaneously ascertaining the required scope. I determined analyses of the following would satisfy both criteria of form and scope:

- Military Decrees promulgated between (but not limited to) 1993-98
- Newspaper articles in relation to history during (but not limited to) 1993-98
- Nigerian Historical Journal Articles published before, during and post 1993-98
- History Theses – B.A., M.A. and PhD – from both southern and northern universities produced between (but not limited to) 1993-98
- Activities of the Nigerian Historical Association from outset to 1993-98, through to 2000s
- Speech extracts and other selected texts and publications
- Interviews with current Nigerian Professors of history

Despite the dearth of literature addressing my central question as reported, a range of literatures pertaining to Nigeria still proved relevant as cited in my **Literature Review**. I drew on these to enhance my background knowledge and determine any contribution, as well as to map the limits of those texts vis-à-vis the theoretical limitations of my enquiry. As my research was a historical-based investigation, platforms that provided a bridge to my enquiry comprised a range of historical investigations pertaining

to seminal events in the nation's history. One such event, for example, was the Nigeria-Biafra civil war (1967-70). Aspects of my analysis in also setting forth contextual background to the historical precedents and dynamic of the nation, assumed the character of historical narrative; a facet particularly prominent in my exploration of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. In this sense, investigating seminal topics such as the civil war provided a key podium for exposition and interpretation in direct relation to my thesis question. In addition to the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, other investigations (and subsequent texts that I referenced and analysed) which also assumed in part a narrative style, included:

- Nigeria's pre-colonial legacy
- Nigeria's colonial legacy
- Nigeria's Independence
- Nigeria's intervention in Sierra Leone civil war

Interviews

The objective with interviewing Nigerian history professors was to determine professional perceptions of Abacha's attitude towards history and its scholarship. Regarding participants, my main criteria was selecting candidates who i) were *currently* active as practitioners of history instruction ii) were conversant with the Nigerian educational landscape and iii) were of explicit Nigerian heritage.

The participants - Professors Toyin Falola, C.B.N Ogbogbo, Olayemi Akinwumi, and Ibrahim Kankara – all fulfilled the stated criteria. The interview with Professor Kankara was more specific to his institution and was an in-person interview that took place on field trip in Nigeria in 2018, on the site of Bayero University, Kano. The other three interviews took place over a week period in August 2020 via skype (Falola), telephone (C.B.N Ogbogbo) and online submission (Olayemi Akinwumi). Responses were recorded respectively, with consent of the interviewee, by filming, recording and notetaking. The questions were designed to elicit a viewpoint regarding the interviewee's perceptions on: my enquiry's

premise in purporting the Abacha regime promoted an anti-historical platform; Abacha's attitude to the discipline of history; Abacha's outlook on the *idea* of history.

Outside of the Nigerian history professors, I secured a telephone conversation with Mr. John St. Jorre, former journalist of the *The Observer*, author of *The Brothers War – Nigeria and Biafra* (St. Jorre 2009) and embedded witness of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. The questions I put to Mr. St. Jorre were designed to: get a 'bird's-eye-view' of the war and elicit St. Jorre's assessment and to ascertain if Mr. St. Jorre had any new insights regarding the Nigerian condition as viewed through the lens of Biafra. With Mr. St. Jorre's consent, responses were recorded through note taking. Mr. St. Jorre further made available to me his 'Nigeria civil war notebook', which he described as 'an outlet for some thoughts and impressions that could not be covered by my book.'

Theories of History

Along with postmodernists, we can now agree that there is no single true master narrative or overarching metanarrative.¹²⁶ **Mary Fulbrook**

The main intellectual theories that I invoke and reference within my investigations are Theories of History, theories that overlap along the anthropological paradigm and to a lesser extent literary theories.

In relation to Theories of History, I have engaged thinkers such as Foucault, Gramsci and Fanon whose history-based theories also straddle easily the political science sphere. I found Mary Fulbrook's expositions of various Historical Theory and her writings on the discipline illuminating. I lent on the perspectives of Fulbrook to interpret and elucidate aspects of my approach and to situate my thinking and conclusions more clearly within a particular theory or tradition. In short, I utilized the theories of these afore-mentioned theorists and thinkers in places to scaffold and clarify my positions, to

¹²⁶ Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002) p.53.

contextualize my arguments, to explain the main thrust of these arguments and to assist in the deconstruction and resolution of conclusions reached. For example, Foucault's theory of *History and Power* helped situate in my exploration, the power dynamic inherent in the relations between ruler and ruled and how *history* as an existential force animates those relations for good or ill. Gramsci's concept of *hegemony*, which comprised and linked ideas about historical unity with gestures of consent between ruler and ruled, helped explicate my examining of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war in relation to Gowon and Abacha's leadership and these leaders' relations with the general populace.

As my thesis is founded on a historical footing and sought also to formulate a hypothesis rooted in historical thinking, established Theories of History helped to secure a sturdy, intellectual platform around which my arguments could be credibly formulated and presented. Engaging with time-honored Theories of History also proved useful in permitting me to make grounded assumptions through considered extrapolation, which helped advance my argument. Or at the very least aided the processes of eliminating redundant or previously-held views.

Further, the anthropological paradigm, as it overlaps with historical investigation, deconstructed areas of my enquiry. On ground level so to speak, where history may be unpacked into discrete sub-concepts, auxiliary notions like *culture* and *identity* co-exist within the anthropological sphere – where they accommodate a broader interpretive handling. The triangulated aspect of the concepts of culture and identity integrated within *history* as a socio-cultural event, widened my purview regarding the scope of governmental sway. For example, as regards the behavioural and political reasoning behind certain governmental actions and motivations, the dialectic link that anthropological study addresses between personal and collective identity proved insightful in my exploring government and citizen relations. This factor was especially pertinent when my analysis required a view through the lens of a relational amalgamation of culture and identity equated to notions of *nationalism*. As the anthropological approach entails a combination of humanist and social science strategies, underpinned by ethnography

rooted in investigations of human expression, culture and behavior, one area anthropological insights illuminated my understanding concerned the banning of History from Nigerian schools, with government replacing 'History' with 'Social sciences'. Another noteworthy area concerned the existence of 'bureaus of history' in Northern Nigeria – cultural agencies set up to propagate the cultural and social history of northern peoples. I examined the fact Babangida and Abacha respectively established and advocated these bureaus, which ran contrary to the anti-historical inclinations that I ascribe to both leaders: anthropological preoccupations of language, values, customs and social organization featured highly as motivational influencers in driving these anomalies. Thus, the anthropological overlaps – and interpretations - in Theories of History I engaged, helped me formulate and clarify my overall standpoints, as it provided a robust framework from which to reach for other positions, deductions and suppositions.

Postcolonial and Literary Theories

I employed critical literary theory from within the delineated cultural and sociological mandate of my research question, as may be applied to certain literary or fictionalized texts. Thus, literary theory aided my interrogations in determining the sociological and cultural roots that were pre-eminent or took root in producing specific works with a particular historical timeline in mind. In this regard, I employed literary theory to examine fictional texts produced mostly after Abacha's reign, which connect to Abacha directly or vicariously, such as works highlighting the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. On Biafra, for example, literary theory helped illuminate the emergence of works such as Adichie's *Half of A Yellow Sun* and the conjunction of issues they addressed that intersected with an historical appraisal: the postcolonial condition, authorial responsibility, the limits of historical narrative and whether historical fiction could and/or *should* serve as proxy for historical truths when those truths appear absented from traditional mediums.

My engagement of postcolonial theory in my thesis appends with a framework of the literary criticism, which intersects with the post-independent political reality of Nigeria. In this regard, the voices of Fanon *et al* are augmented by those of Spivak and Bhabha, whose layered interpretations of postcolonial dimensions with their focus on language and its textual properties, offered various opportunities from which to tease political insights on Nigeria.

Fieldwork: Dates, Times, Reflections

I planned to undertake fieldwork and be on ground in Nigeria from July 18th 2018 to December 28th 2018. I had arranged to affiliate and embed with universities in various regions comprising the north (Bayero Univeristy, Kano and Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina), south (University of Lagos, Lagos and University of Ibadan, Ibadan) and central (University of Abuja, Abuja). I surmised that this selection of universities reflected more than a geographical cross-section on a number of levels; for example, the university of Ibadan was Nigeria's oldest university, founded in 1948 and affiliated with the University of London, and serviced a typically southern intake; University of Lagos' profile was not dissimilar to that of Ibadan but came later, being established after Independence in 1962; the Northern Universities were also established post-independence, went through a number of progressive evolutions and serviced a typically northern clientele – whilst the University of Abuja, founded in 1988, was a recently established institution which in light of Abuja's strategic political importance, as well as the capital's central location, I surmised would likely draw a more modern influx and potentially more diverse student body.

I planned to head to the north from July 20th to September 19th, accessing also in addition to the universities, the Arewa House Museum in Kaduna and the Katsina State History and Cultural Bureau in Katsina. I consequently planned to travel down to Abuja and be on ground at the University of Abuja from 3rd October to 28th October, and then travel to the south and be on ground to shuttle respectively

from University of Lagos to University of Ibadan between 6th November and 28th December.

Kano: Bayero University

July 20 – 19 August 2018

Archives: Details and Reflections

My starting point was Kano's main institution of higher learning, Bayero University. Bayero University is the largest learning institution in Northern Nigeria and named after Abdullahi Bayero, Emir of Kano. It was to Kano that Abacha's parents, originally from northernmost Borno state, migrated as economic migrants; it was in Kano that General Sani Abacha, future Head of State, was born.

At Bayero University (and later also at Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina), I was privileged to have been chaperoned by Professor Ibrahim Kankara who lectured in History at both Bayero University and Umaru Musa Yar'adua University in Katsina (his main university). Professor Kankara was previously engaged in an African History exchange program with SOAS where he was embedded in 2017 and where I was fortunate to have met with him a year before my planned field trip to Nigeria.

One of my first unavoidable observations in the archives at Bayero was the almost unbearable heat and humidity of the room I was stationed in – I noticed a broken air-condition unit I was informed had not worked 'for some time.' Unsurprisingly, the state of some of the archival material I surveyed reflected the conditions – they appeared frayed, faded and disintegrating. My experience humbly recalled that of arguably the founder of the Nigerian Archival Service, Kenneth Dike, who in his studies came across valuable historical records in governmental offices but found 'the greater number of which were exposed to decay and destruction and some of which were damaged by insects and water.'¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Simon Heap, "The Nigerian National Archives, Ibadan: An Introduction for Users and a Summary of Holdings." *History in Africa* 18 (1991): 159–72. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3172061>.

In the archives, sifting through B.A., M.A. and PhD theses, I located material and theses produced outside of and also during the Abacha years, 1993 to '98. My original thesis question had speculated on the possibility that history as a subject may have received short shrift from the Abacha regime, due to amongst other things, the longstanding governmental policy of removal of history from schools' curriculum, consequently resulting in both a degradation of the subject and potential contraction in uptake and rigorous output. Encountering the submissions I found at Bayero did not entirely debunk that hypothesis – the output, particularly at M.A. and PhD level were slim. Still, at the very least there was no suggestion that the study of History was in any way explicitly considered a useless endeavour, even if from the numbers it appeared perhaps a niche undertaking. Undergraduate students did see fit to pursue even more advanced studies, though as indicated, from M.A. programs to doctoral research, the numbers again tapered off notably. Another part-discovery at the Bayero archives was my being disabused of certain preconceptions related to gender within a pronouncedly Islamic environment. I was surprised to encounter theses that engaged the plight and station of women. Although the relevant titles were neither copious or variegated as that, say, of Women Studies of progressive western tradition, the lesson duly imparted was that archival research may not move in straight or expected lines (Please see Chapters VIII & IX for in-depth sample and analyses of theses produced).

Initial conclusions I drew from the B.A., M.A. and PhD theses I analyzed at Bayero University was that despite the superficially diverse titles on offer from histories of hospitals and cattle grazing to accounts of Emirs and royal personages, there appeared minimal straying from two main canons: Religion (Islam) and Localized History (Northern Nigeria). Within these canons, I further discerned that offerings diversified generally into these areas: The Royal House and lineage; Town Planning; Revolts, Entrepreneurship; Economic History; Literary life; Transportation; and Farming. As mentioned, I found almost collectively that the geographic boundaries that the theses explored tended not to go beyond the indigenous locality: they were mostly *made-in-Kano* deliberations. On this observation, conscious of

the pervasive and wretched reality of university funding in Nigeria, I appreciated how funding restraints might inhibit the embarking of research foci further afield.

In studying a faithful representative of the totality of submissions made accessible to me, I was able to further deconstruct and categorize submissions accordingly in the following thematic sub-groupings: **Personages, Economic, Agrarian, Religious**. Consequently, I conceived of these groupings collectively and acronymically as a **PEAR** categorization and subsequently referred to them as such.

In conclusion, funding issues aside and in light of the PEAR categorization that operated fixedly within a localized environ, as well as considering also the content of the theses' main thrust and course of arguments presented, I was able to deduce the following: generally, the theses produced from 1993-98, in their notable collectivity, engaged seemingly narrowed *non-contentious* histories. This part-substantiated the claim, in consideration of other determinant connectives such as the prior abolition of history at secondary school, that the Abacha regime fostered an anti-historical culture that arguably inhibited these otherwise useful stand-alone studies, from presenting a more disruptive, diverse offering.

Katsina: Umaru Musa Yar'adua University 24 August – 12 September 2018

Archives: Details and Reflections

In this same year of my field trip to Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Dr. Waisu Iliyasu Safana, History professor of the Department of History and Security Studies at Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, published *The Phobia of Studying History among students of Umaru Musa Yar'adua University*.¹²⁸ Safana attributed the students' phobia to a 'lack of historical consciousness' – caused again by minimal prior exposure to the subject due to the government ban – explaining that students are not minded to study

¹²⁸ Dr. Waisu Iliyasu, *The Phobia of Studying History among Students of Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina*, (Sokoto: Udu Press, 2018).

history because they lack the requisite mix of historical curiosity and appreciation of things historical, which would support an academic commitment to the subject.¹²⁹

In uncanny parallel to Bayero University, in being acquainted with the archives I noted an Idle air-condition unit built into the wall that I was similarly informed was 'broken'. In addition to the sole air-condition unit, the poor state of the archives - weather-beaten archival material stacked unprotected in dry, dusty rooms – again brought to the forefront of my mind the immediacy of funding issues in Nigerian universities. The north of Nigeria, the portion closest to the Sahara desert is both Nigeria's driest zone and can be stiflingly hot; it was profoundly hot in the archives, despite my being in Katsina at the tail-end of the supposedly cooler rainy season. It was not hard to see how records might degenerate quickly given the conditions; I struggled to prevent beads of sweat dropping onto the fragile paper coverings. Opening the windows for air, I learned, was not an option; it was high season for mosquito breeding.

Fig.4: Archival documents *sans* protective coverings; faded and dusty



¹²⁹ Dr. Waisu Iliyasu, *The Phobia of Studying History among Students of Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina*, (Sokoto: Udu Press, 2018) p.316.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given Professor Safana's privileged insight of his institution's students, I found at Umaru Musa Yar'adua University – as in Bayero University (in effect their sister institution) - similar outcomes: my PEAR classification was very much in evidence in the works considered. PEAR was apparent across the board and adhered so uniformly not only in content but in *titles* that it seemed at times I was examining studies I had already viewed at Bayero university (Please see Chapter VIII for a full breakdown of these sample).

I found also, encouragingly, more studies focusing on the role of women in society – with 'society' again delimited to the northern sphere. However, the pool of B.A.s, M.A.s and PhDs I accessed was smaller in comparison to Bayero; of the PhD offerings, in particular, the small aggregate of scholarship seen at Kano was even more pronounced here at Umaru Musa Yar'adua. I was told the sample was all that could be made 'available' to me 'at this time.' I speculated on whether batches of records had simply disintegrated, as I couldn't fail to notice both the extreme heat of the archive room – (the administrator had earlier apologized that the sole visible air-conditioner unit was 'broken') – as well as the poor, frayed state of some of the records I examined. Ultimately, as in Bayero, the work examined here at Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University (UMY) substantiated the claim that *during* the Abacha regime the topical and political was demonstrably eschewed for non-controversial, localized topics.

Katsina: Katsina State History and Cultural Bureau 14 September – 16 September 2018

Details and Reflections

Over 2.5 days, I was given access to the Katsina State History and Cultural Bureau in Katsina.

Abacha commissioned the building of the Bureau in 1993, shortly after assuming power by bloodless coup the same year. As one of Abacha's first actions upon taking office, the Bureau's establishment demonstrably registers as of especial significance. The grounds comprised a main building and

repository (archive and museum), as well as an open-air theatre - the Katsina Open Air Theatre. It dawned on me upon touring the grounds that many Nigerians, as I was prior to my field trip, would be completely unaware of the existence of the Bureau and of Abacha's role in its construction. Following further investigation, I discovered that the Katsina History and Culture Bureau was the only one of its kind that Abacha created in his time in office.



Fig. 5 Katsina State History and Cultural Bureau – Open Air Theatre



Fig.6 Open Air Theatre (West-Facing View)

Prior to and in anticipation of my visit to the Bureau, whilst still at Bayero University, I had met with Dr. Ismaila Tsiga who was a current lecturer at the Department of English and Literary Studies at Bayero but also a former director of the neighboring Katsina State History and Culture Bureau. Professor Tsiga spoke of the linkage between Islamic scholarship and a culture of learning and argued that the Bureau was conceived in this spirit. Earlier in 1997, during Abacha's tenure, Tsiga had expressed the view that the history of learning 'not only in Katsina, but also of the entire Hausa kingdoms' could not easily be separated from Islam.¹³⁰ In other words, the pursuit of history scholarship and learning in the north must necessarily come in Tsiga's words, intertwined 'within the Islamic framework', which he argues 'provides an avenue for greater understanding of the cultural and intellectual development of the

¹³⁰ Ismai'la A. Tsiga and Abdalla U. Adamu, *Islam and the History of Learning in Katsina*, (Ibadan: Kenbim Press Ltd, 1997) p.80.

various societies in Northern Nigeria.¹³¹ Whilst there is truth in Tsiga's comments from a historical standpoint, progressively, the statement appears intellectually restrictive moving forward. Further, in light of Nigeria's religious architecture and the tensioned, power dynamic between north and south, there is a dimension of Tsiga's observation that construes it as political.

In accordance with Tsiga's words, much of the works that I surveyed had an Islamic focus: whether it was on Islamic culture, education or history as related to the north or more generally. The Islamic factor in some ways mirrored the religious preoccupation of some of the theses seen at Bayero and Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University. However, the pronounced preponderance of Islam across the board at the Bureau imbued it with a more dominant statement and political hue, as mentioned – which more critically, had the effect of acquiescing the historical to the religious factor, in an ostensible power-play in relation to the Bureau's objectives. In this regard, Abacha's aims in establishing the Bureau, appears rooted in the concept of utilizing and harnessing power to *specific* ends, and mirrors the same principle in which the suppression of history could be used as a tool to aid governance and control. Here, the power that is utilized is harnessed selectively for an equally selective posterity in aid of consolidating and extending the reach of northern interests. In this way paradoxically, far from contradicting the regime's alleged anti-historical propensity, I concluded that Abacha's implementation of the Katsina Cultural Bureau instead highlighted it.

Kaduna: Arewa House Museum

18 September – 19 September 2018

Details and Reflections

Arewa Museum House, commissioned by Gen. Gowon and opened in 1975 as a site of history scholarship and research, is unapologetic about its aims. Its mission statement underlines that it serves as a 'research-based reference point' to help generate 'new knowledge that would be the catalyst for

¹³¹Ismail'a A. Tsiga and Abdalla U. Adamu, p.80.

social, political and economic transformation of Northern Nigeria in particular.’¹³² In contrast to the dominant Islamic lens through which, say, the Katsina Cultural Bureau operates, Arewa House Museum represents a more diverse, quintessentially history-leaning portfolio.

Upon visiting Arewa House, I noticed at once the higher level of organization compared to my experience elsewhere, particularly at the universities, as well as the discernible cool of the appropriately air-conditioned archive rooms. The offerings were diverse and included: Records from the Premier’s office, Colonial records from Secretariat of Northern Provinces, Executive Council Papers (over 12,000 files), manuscripts, audits, religious reports, education files and reports and administrative and intelligence records (See **Chapter VIII** for a more extensive listing).

I was struck by the amount of portraits that adorned the walls of Arewa Museum House or *Gidan Arewa* as the museum is known locally in Hausa. This was not the photographic exhibition masquerading as history that Noo Saro Wiwa encountered in the Lagos museums (Please see Chapter IV). There was documented history to accompany the photographs. It felt educational.

Arewa House itself, built originally in the 1950s, has evolved to become an important historical museum as well as a site of historic import being in the 50s the official residence of Sir Ahmadu Bello – descendant of jihadist Uthman Dan Fodio and a member of the Sokoto Caliphate dynasty who was both Sardauna of Sokoto and the first Premier of Northern Nigeria.¹³³ The museum houses cultural artifacts, photographs, books and all manner of archival material including ancient manuscripts, some of which are accessible to the public. The significance of Arewa House today is that as well as being a conduit of Kaduna history, it serves as a centre for historical documentation and research for the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, also in Kaduna State. Thus, via its alliances, the museum acts as a hub for archival

¹³² ‘Mission and Vision’, ArewaHouse.ng, <https://arewahouse.ng/> [Accessed 22 March 2020].

¹³³ Sardauna (Crown Prince) of Sokoto was a chieftaincy title conferred upon Bello by the Sultan of Sokoto.

material related to the cultural history of Kaduna, as well as academic archival material from the History Research Department of Ahmadu Bello University.

The photographs on the wall displayed many famous sons of Kaduna; on occasion straying to the neighboring regions of Kano and Katsina. Amongst this sea of indigenous sons, two photographs stood out. One was a large portrait of Queen Elizabeth II in the balcony of an impressive white building, in a familiar waving pose at an indigenous crowd below. That building is known today, as it was then, as Lugard Hall (it now serves as Kaduna's Legislative Assembly Building). The second photograph, of roughly equal size, was of Lord Lugard himself. In Kaduna, Lord Lugard's image seemed ubiquitous. Lugard's public love for Kaduna - he once expressed a desire to make Kaduna the capital at Lagos' expense - appeared reciprocal. So, at the Nigerian National Archives, Kaduna, there are photos and paintings of Lugard; at the Library of the Lugard Memorial Hall, naturally Lugard's likeness took pre-eminence. There's even a Lord Lugard Footbridge in Kaduna to traverse the city. The ubiquity of Lugard's image here, in addition to structures erected in his honor, demonstrated in our current age where sculpted odes to slavers and colonialists alike are increasingly challenged, torn down or quietly replaced, the north-south divide in Nigeria; the contrasting mentality between the two Nigerias separated not only by religion and culture but also by an overarching ideology with differing historical perspectives. In Lagos State, since 2020, elected officials have called on the governor to rename some of the city's streets 'in order to remove the reminders of colonialism and slavery', with house speaker Mudashiru Obasa stating that 'those who dehumanised Africans should not be celebrated.'¹³⁴ The first exhibit on Obasa's list is Lugard Avenue in the expensive Ikoyi district of Lagos State.

The heroic Lugard of northern imagination contrasts with that of southern imaginings. Patently, history is an inexact science. In this thesis' **Introduction**, Femi Fani-Kayode condemned Lugard as 'the greatest

¹³⁴ 'Law makers propose to decolonize street names' (n.d), *Channel Africa* --<https://myjoyonline.com/lagos-lawmakers-propose-to-decolonise-street-names/>—[Accessed 22 July 2022].

evil that ever afflicted our shores' principally for his 'amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914.'¹³⁵ Lugard is viewed in the south as the chief architect of Nigeria's distress by forcing together what advocates such as Fani-Kayode believe are the incompatible peoples of southern and northern heritage.

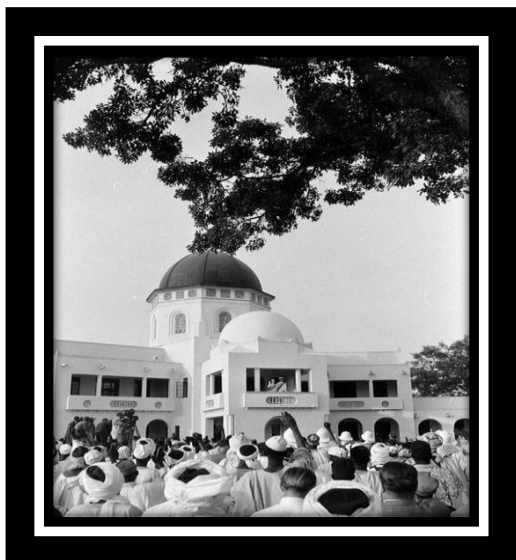


Fig.: 7 – Queen Elizabeth waving from balcony of Lugard Hall



Fig.: 8 – Lord Lugard portrait hung in Lugard Hall

Of its stated goals, Arewa House further declares that it 'is primarily concerned with procuring, preserving, analyzing and discussing issues of national and international interest, particularly as they affect the development of Northern Nigeria.'¹³⁶ Key words are the *development of Northern Nigeria*. Arewa House Museum thus represents an unambiguous celebration of northern life and history and symbolizes a strategic outpost of northern culture that arguably both Babangida and Abacha sought to emulate with their latter, respective implementation of history *Bureaus*. It should be noted, as with Babangida and Abacha who set up historical bureaus and stand accused still of helping perpetrate an entrenched anti-historical culture in the nation, so it is with Gowon who established Arewa House Museum. For it is Gowon that originally stands accused of initiating an anti-historical approach to

¹³⁵ Femi Fani-Kayode – The Bloody Legacy of Usman Dan Fodio (Part 1), online, Daily Nigeria Post, September 20 2016, <https://dailypost.ng/2016/09/20/femi-fani-kayode-bloody-legacy-usman-dan-fodio-part-1/> [Accessed Jan 10 2017].

¹³⁶ 'Mission and Vision', ArewaHouse.ng, <https://arewahouse.ng/> [Accessed 22 March 2020].

governance following the Nigeria-Biafra civil war (see Chapter V), which successive military governments such as Babangida's and Abacha's adopted.

It was apparent to me, ultimately, that Arewa Museum House, in contrast to other museums I had visited along the way, and in contrast also to the university archives I had accessed, functioned operationally at a superior mode. This takes funds. The distinguishing factor between the likes of Arewa Museum House and the History and Culture Bureaus all established by ruling presidents, and other museums and even the federal universities and their archives on the other hand, was the extent of *personal* governmental involvement. Thus, of the former, Arewa House and the Bureaus, governmental involvement was direct; of the latter, museums generally, the universities, personal governmental support was lacking. This further consolidated my premise in relation generally to government's use of history as a tool of anti-historical implementation and control. In these instances of government-implemented depositories of history, seen through a Foucauldian lens, the control – the power – is expressed via the atypical and reverse gesture of the championing of something normally disregarded. The level of investment in this selective championing exposes other aspects of the customary suppression. This is what we see in Abacha's and Babangida's personal investment in their Bureaus – and in Gowon's governmental investment in Arewa Museum House which since its 1975 inception, in addition to its museum offering, boasts a library, well-stocked archives, a research center, a book shop – and hosts international history seminars and conferences, publishes several journals and even offers accommodation for visiting academics and laymen alike.

Abuja: University of Abuja
03 October – 28 October 2018

Archives: Details and Reflections

The University of Abuja was established in 1988 – ten years before the death of Gen. Abacha and five years before he took power in the bloodless 1993 coup.

At the university archives, I requested B.A., MA and PhD theses covering the years 1988 – 2005. These submissions covered the inaugural year of the university and up to seven years *after* the collapse of the Abacha regime. My rationale, as it was when also approaching the northern university archives, was that perusing theses *prior to, during* and *after* Abacha's regime would help yield broad-based empirical insights into long-term trends, as well as offer a basis for comparative judgement. As the university was founded just five years before Abacha's takeover (and inaugurated in the early years of the Babangida regime), I was keen to seek out any thematic preoccupations that may have been present in the theses produced in their founding year and the years afterwards.

The Department of History and Diplomatic Services at Abuja University archives informed me upon arrival that in relation to the span of years I requested, they were only able to meet my requests partially. For reasons not fully established, history theses from the years 1988 to 1993 were unavailable. In varying extent, this issue bedevilled my field trip archival exploration in Nigeria (see Difficulties below), from being steered to irrelevant archival material, to being denied access to certain material without real explanation.

I speculated that the unavailability of theses for those years underlined a functional disorganization, whereby in those heady early years of the university's operation, theses were negligently unaccounted for, damaged or misplaced. Theses made available to me came from these cohorts: BA 1994, 1995; BA 1997, 1998; BSc 1998, 1999; 1998-1999 Masters (MA); BA 1999, 2000; Undergrad (BA 2001, 2002); PhDs (2002, 2003); BA 2003, 2004 session. The above selection, whilst not covering the full gamut of years I requested, still represented a submission of theses produced *prior to, during* and *following* Abacha's tenure - and in that regard remained useful in relation to my purposes and thesis enquiry.

In the northern universities I had not been formally privy to information regarding the students' ethnic, tribal or state origins. However, in the University of Abuja, I was able to deduce this information. This meant I could take this fact into consideration in reaching conclusions concerning thesis choices of somewhat monolithic student cohorts. In this way I was able also to divide students into northern (**N**) and southern categories (**S**). The percentage of northerners in the submissions for history theses I surveyed in Abuja averaged at around 17% of total submissions. This figure reflects the view that Abuja represents a more diversified gateway of the country than the monolithic north and though the 17% figure may appear relatively small in relation to conceiving of Nigeria as an evenly split north/south duality, this is a somewhat misleading demarcation. Firstly, the delineation works best as a religious divide between the Christian south and the Muslim north. However, as an ethno-tribal divide, the north lends itself more easily to the Hausa-Fulani homogenous arrangement whereas the south comprises diverse heterogeneous tribes from the Yoruba and Igbo, as well as other minor tribes with their own states. Hence, the 'south' is in effect a sub-division of South (Yorubas), West (Yorubas, Igbos and other minor tribes such as Uhrobos, Itsekiris etc.) and the East (Igbo, Ijaw, Ibibio). Thus, the designated '**N**' in the student matriculation records related to those of northern origin, whereas the designated '**S**' related to students not just from the south per se, but who also originate from eastern and western Nigeria. If we sub-divide the Nigerian nation into these four provisional groupings of north, east, west and south, then each grouping equates to roughly a 25% representation. Without being privy to the number of northerners that enlist to study history yearly in comparison to other disciplines the 17% figure I arrived at for submissions of northern origin is not far off the representational model figure of 25% as discussed.¹³⁷ The *overall* non-monolithic student intake in Abuja University, in comparison with the near monolithic intake of the northern universities sampling, means the concept of cultural-homogeneity pressures that applied to the northern sampling may be discounted when reaching our conclusions

¹³⁷ I approached the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics in Abuja with this and other enquiries close to a year and a half ago but to date the data is still pending.

given the multi-ethnic, multi-religious enrolment of students from all regions of the country in the Abuja sampling.

Ultimately, still, my findings were similar to those of the northern universities. I expected a little more variation based on the noted fact that Abuja was geographically more central and culturally more diverse with a variety of ethnicities resident there; I had speculated earlier that this may influence and draw a particular student intake. The results were also surprising given that in the roll-call of students within the university's demographic and regarding their ethnic origins, it was clear the northern Islamic monolith one encountered in the northern universities would be less of a numerical factor here. The conclusions reached, which mirrored that of my northern universities archival exploration, further consolidated the fact that there appeared an entrenchment within the academic environment of avoiding non-controversial histories or any overtly political accounting that potentially referenced or evoked topical or contemporaneous happenings within the political sphere. I thus maintained the possibility also that due to Abuja being the governmental seat of power during Abacha's tenure from 1993-1998, history expression in the University of Abuja scholarship between those years might have been even more self-consciously constricted as a result.

Strike action:

4 November 2018 – 8 February 2019

Details and Reflections:

On November 4th, two days before I was due to travel to the south and explore respectively the University of Lagos and University of Ibadan archives, the Nigerian Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) following their National Executive Council meeting, declared an indefinite nationwide strike. This strike, which the ASUU national president Professor Biodun Ogunyemi declared would be 'total,

comprehensive and indefinite', was effected with immediacy.¹³⁸ The strike entailed the shutting down of more than 90 public universities in Nigeria - including the universities of Lagos and Ibadan, as well as the universities I had recently engaged with in Kano, Katsina and Abuja.

The main reason for this strike, as with the majority of previous university strikes in Nigeria's history, centred around the poor funding of Nigerian universities, in addition to ASUU's contention that given this outstanding funding issue the government's plan to increase students' fees was unacceptable. As reported by Al-Jazeera, since 1992 until 2013, 'ASUU has embarked on industrial action nearly every year' with the longest strike lasting 170 days 'from July 1 to December 17, 2013.'¹³⁹

This 2018 strike which interrupted my fieldwork was to last 95 days, ending on February 8th 2019. In light of the strike, I was left with little option but to cut short my trip to Nigeria. I resolved I would aim to return to Nigeria within the next year or so (schedule and finance permitting), whereupon I could complete the theses and data analysis at the Universities of Lagos and Ibadan as originally planned. However, my plans to re-visit these universities at a later date were subsequently aborted due to the emergent worldwide Covid-19 Pandemic.

Covid-19: Reflections, Limitations

The *COVID-19 pandemic*, also known as the coronavirus pandemic, greatly impacted my plans to re-visit Nigeria and resume my field research following the 2018 ASUU strike. The subsequent worldwide lockdowns grounded me, as it did others, for the entirety of 2020, making it impossible to physically travel to Nigeria and be on ground at my targeted universities. Critically also, the pandemic ensured that the universities in Nigeria remained shut and consequently, the Covid-19 pandemic imposed a double-edged limitation on my research by not only preventing me from extracting data from a wider pool of

¹³⁸ Linus Unah, 'Misery for students as university lecturers strike', *Al-Jazeera*, Published on 5 Dec 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/5/nigeria-misery-for-students-as-university-lecturers-strike>

¹³⁹ Ibid.

universities as initially planned, but also restricted my contact with university personnel and facilitators who might have been able to assist remotely.

Another notable consequence of Covid-19 was its disruption to ongoing fiscal issues in relation to remuneration, staff salaries, student fees and general funding. At the best of times, these issues have proven problematic since the 1980s and proved even more so during the forced Covid interval. For example, the deferring of much needed revenue due to a lack of clarity in the expectations regarding student fees whilst students remained in absentia, as well as the suspension of funding conversations, programmes and agreements upended by the uncertainties and costs wrought by the virus. As Obiakor and Adeniran reported, 'the fiscal space to fund education has further shrunk with the shock on government revenue and economic downturn arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.'¹⁴⁰

The knock-on and long-term effects of the pandemic would be multi-faceted; still, in relation to funding gaps, one most notable ramification that in the not-too-distant future directly affected me concerned the invariably worsened financial condition of the universities post-Covid, which inevitably invoked another prolonged ASUU strike, which coincided with a post-viva visit I embarked upon to Nigeria.

Post-Viva return to Nigeria

Following my viva examination, and recommendations that I attempt to remotely and through contacts established collate quantitative data showing the decline of history entrants in Nigerian universities over the years, I contacted the current President of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Prof C.B.N Ogbogbo on March 2022 to explain my predicament and prior difficulties. Professor Ogbogbo had spoken extensively regarding the decline of history graduates in Nigerian universities – as presented here in this thesis – and had also been part of a delegation that had campaigned and visited the nation's president, in an

¹⁴⁰ Adedeji Peter Adeniran and Thelma Obiakor. "COVID-19: Impending Situation Threatens to Deepen Nigeria's Education Crisis." (2020), Centre for the Studies of the Economies of Africa (CSEA).

ultimately successful drive to return history as a stand-alone subject to the national curriculum. Professor Ogbogbo noted that at the time of our speaking, ASUU had called a strike on February 14th 2022 and Nigerian universities had duly been on strike since then. However, he advised that he envisaged that only an in-person visit to Nigeria would suffice for my requirements and further advised that in light of the university closures, I travel to Abuja and visit both the offices of the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Joint Admissions Matriculation Board (JAMB) to extract the data I was seeking. Dr. Ogbobo was of the view that given these two national bodies were tasked with collating and recording national student records, they ostensibly constituted more superior options to trying to extract said data from individual universities. Before confirming travel plans to revisit Nigeria, I enquired of Professor Ogbogbo, as well as the other Nigerian history specialist contacts I had established, namely Dr. Kankara, Dr. Akinwunmi and Dr. Okpoh, whether they had access to the data I was seeking and they unanimously reported in the negative.

Subsequently, in a self-funding capacity I returned again to Abuja between 27 April 2022 – 6 May 2022 and frequented both the NUC and JAMB institutions over a week period. I liaised with the executive secretary of the NUC and following confirmation of my status as a bona fide research student from SOAS was given a couple of return dates to presumably allow the data I required to be collated before being released to me. On both occasions, excuses were made as to why the data was not forthcoming; my visits to the Abuja Jamb headquarters, where I liaised with the Registrar's office, followed an eerily similar pattern to visiting the NUC: my identity and status verified – a back and forth – and then an a final admission that the 'data was not available at this time.' On the eve of my return to the UK empty-handed, the NUC secretary I had liaised with, perhaps out of pity asked that I keep in touch with him on my return to the UK and he will see what he can do. I duly did and on June 30th was invited to again put in writing the request I had tabled in-person over a month before at the NUC's offices. I received a written response from the NUC approximately a month later on the 26th July 2022 (See **Fig.9** below).

Despite my requesting 'B.A, M.A. and PhD enrolment data' identical to my in-person request which then received no objections, the NUC response letter claimed 'the level of study (postgraduate or undergraduate) was not indicated in your letter' and my request deemed 'too vague and ambiguous' – I was further invited to 'differentiate between courses and programmes for clarity purposes' yet ultimately advised to 'contact Nigerian Universities of your choice to specifically obtain information on the enrolment of students in the years stated.' My further attempts to contact the NUC to *clarify* my request went unanswered.

In returning to the UK empty-handed, I spoke later about my difficulties with the NUC and JAMB with Professor Kankara, who had assisted me on the northern leg of my original field trip. He had this to say, particularly in relation to JAMB, as to why the data was not forthcoming: 'Indeed the problem is that some of the students actually are not passing through the Jamb approved list and the JAMB personnel knows that. It is part of the implications of admission racketeering in the universities. So the actual data of graduation can only be found in the convocation books.'¹⁴¹

My experiences here, on my second trip to Nigeria, underlined for me the archival and bureaucratic issues and limitations that I had prior witnessed and report in this thesis (see also **Conclusion**) – as a result of a combination of things from admittedly underfunding, to entrenched administrative inefficiencies, to nepotistic hires and professional, endemic corruption – which Professor Kankara referred to as *racketeering*, which I understood likely entailed the exchange of bribes between officials and members of the public for favours granted.

¹⁴¹ In telephone conversation with Professor Kankara 14 August 2023.

NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION SECRETARIAT

PROF. ABUBAKAR RASHEED, mni, MFR
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

TEL: +234 802 7455412-13, 703 925 4081-2
FAX: 07098212004



AJA NWACHUKWU HOUSE,
NO 26, AGUIYI IRONSI STREET,
MAITAMA DISTRICT,
P.M.B 237, GARKI G.P.O.,
ABUJA-NIGERIA.

NUC/DRIT/ II/Vol.1/4

26 July, 2022

Gromyko Dumuje
Africa Department
Languages and Cultures
University of London
10 Thornhaugh St
London WC1H 0XG

RE: NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION (NUC) DATA

Your letter dated 30 June, 2022 on the above subject refers, please.

I am directed to acknowledge receipt of your letter seeking evidentiary and comparative statistical data (figures, graphs etc) on the decline of enrolment numbers in History courses studied in Nigerian Universities from the 1970s -1990s.

I am to also inform you of the following:

- i. The term 'History courses' as found in the request is too vague and ambiguous
- ii. You may wish to differentiate between courses and programmes for clarity purposes
- iii. The level of study (postgraduate or undergraduate) was not indicated in your letter; and
- iv. Lastly, you may wish to contact Nigerian Universities of your choice to specifically obtain information on the enrolment of students in the years stated.

Meanwhile, may I, on behalf of the NUC wish you the best in your research work.

Please, accept the assurances of the Executive Secretary's highest regards

L.M. Faruk
Ag. Director, Research, Innovation and Information Technology
For: Executive Secretary

Website: <http://www.nuc.edu.ng>

Fig.9: NUC response letter to my data request – 26, July 2022

Field Trip observations:

The difficulties I encountered in accessing archived theses in relation to my enquiry highlights also the limitations of the infrastructural realities of the universities in question, and consequently the limitations of my enquiry. At the universities I was able to visit, I discovered also that digitized records of past theses were 'unavailable'. This meant I was 1) unable to undertake a more targeted and comprehensive audit of theses done in the 1990s, by utilizing say a simple word-query such as 'Abacha' -

and 2) of the physical copies I encountered and trawled through in the History Department archives, there were significant gaps where certain years were registered. For example, there were minimal offerings of theses for the years 1994 in particular (the year after Abacha came to power) and 1996. The other difficulty regarding the physical copies I was given access to was that many of these theses were in a deteriorated state such that it made consistently intelligible and meaningful analysis challenging. Another key difficulty lay in the fact that, as discussed in detail, I was unable to secure enrolment data from the universities; this meant I couldn't verify the extent to which the archives that were purported to be 'unavailable' was significant in number or if the records I examined represented a near-approximate figure in relation to total enrolment figures.

Also, in being unable to explore the southern universities in selective and equal measure to my trips to the north – and also being unable to secure the data reflecting the potential decline of history entrants over the years, these constraints potentially limited my originally intended research. These difficulties demonstrated to an extent, as Antoinette Burton and Carolyn Steedman intimated, the half-told inevitabilities of stories we tell due to the fragmentary aspects of archives we source from – or in addition, as I found also in my research in Nigeria, systematic dysfunction that sometimes rendered those archives part-inaccessible. As Steedman stated 'you find nothing in the Archive but stories caught half way through: the middle of things; discontinuities.'¹⁴² Also, much of the difficulties I encountered during fieldwork and in my post-fieldwork return put into context and illuminated for me the much more severe struggles faced by Nigerian historians certainly during Abacha's regime but also at various points in Nigeria's history post-independence.

In conclusion, in liaising with several Nigerian history experts from Professor Toyin Falola, to home-based Professors, namely Dr. Ogbogbo, Dr. Kankara, Dr. Akinwumi, Dr. Okpeh and Dr. Suberu, it was

¹⁴² Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2001) p.45.

evidential that in and through their practice, they had engaged with and articulated the issue of both a degradation of the subject generally, which they claimed had naturally impacted intake and enrolment numbers over the years. In fact, these elements had been, in the eyes of these professors, a significant part of their drive to re-establish history as a respectable and desirable subject, with many in their literature having published accounts that bemoaned both the dwindling numbers, as well as the increasingly apathetic quality of candidate in that purported ever-declining pool.

Whilst the potential capture of data that reflected a decline in history intake would have invariably strengthened my thesis, the main thrust of my premise, which argued on the issue of an anti-historical culture perpetrated by a willful entrenched policy by military regimes (with the Abacha regime providing a central case study), has proven sound. The soundness of my argument has been upheld in light of requiring validation not from a sole quantitative exhibit but from a multiplicity of qualitative strands that have comprised explorations of, as follows: the trajectory of education history in Nigeria since independence; the establishing and experience of the Historical Society of Nigeria and their bi-monthly journal; the Nigeria-Biafra war and the Gowon regime's strategic importance in initiating an anti-historical culture through government; the banishment of history from Nigerian schools' curriculum; the under-funding of Nigerian universities through the 1980s- 1990s; the anti-historical gesturing of the Abacha regime including the enforced inclusion of Nigeria into an Islamic Club and a study of Abacha's intervention into the Sierra Leone civil war; and the analyses of the thematic pre-occupations of history theses produced in the run-up to, *during* and post Abacha's tenure.

Data Analysis: Empirical, Deductive Reasoning, Logic

Arthur Marwick argued that all historians are empiricists; that they utilize the empiricist method in as much as the business of history is extracting interpretive evidence from primary sources in order to

construct a reliable and credible past.¹⁴³ Marwick, and others such as Munslow,¹⁴⁴ pointedly eschew the *reconstructionist* label that is sometimes attached to empiricist historians. The past cannot be reconstructed, they argue: the sources can only be interpreted, justified, and then an *account* of the past arrived at as close as possible to what has been yielded from the sources. Consistent with the empirical approach, Marwick is of the view that the historian should worry less about theory and focus more on 'rigorous standards'.¹⁴⁵ That the process of applying rigorous standards entails applying logic to observations does not contradict Marwick's empiricist claims. Logic and observation of course are not mutually exclusive in the empirical sphere, since logic helps extricate subjectivity from inherent biases. Marwick's point about less theory and more rigour is Marwick changing the points of emphasis, as well as the order of investigation, whilst underlining his antithesis to historians' use of theory as *the* irreplaceable vehicle to reach historical truth. It is more a case of changing gears as opposed to changing lanes.

In summarizing this process of arriving at historical truth or a credible construction of past events, the historian's craft resembles that of investigative detective: the overall case presented is accepted not as an exact facsimile of past events but as an authentic and probable likeness of what may have been. Investigator and historian both follow a methodology of keen observation of sources followed by deductive reasoning that's interspersed with and pruned by the application of strategic logic.

My methodology employed in its analysis and interpretation of findings, a deductive reasoning and logic approach. The main bulk of my research consisted of analyzing and interpreting historical information pertaining to, for example: writings of historians and commentators expert in the field of Nigeria; the Nigeria-Biafra civil war; the promulgation of anti-historical decrees by governments etc.; the removal of History from Nigerian secondary schools; writings on education in Nigeria; History B.A.s, Masters (M.A.)

¹⁴³ Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language* (London: Palgrave, 2001) p.16.

¹⁴⁴ Alan Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (2nd Ed.), (London: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁴⁵ Marwick, p.16.

and PhDs undertaken in Nigerian universities over the years. In most of these cases, statistical data in relation to my specific thesis question was mostly non-applicable; my investigations and explorations relied on trends observed and subsequent deductions engaged with then verified, disproved or discounted. I applied deductive reasoning as a process in reaching evidentiary conclusions which could be substantiated by the application of logic, in relation to probable cause based on what I had already established. An example: in analysing university theses of History B.A., M.A and PhD students over the years in selected Nigerian universities, by applying a thematic analysis to the titles, topics and ideas within the content, I identified specific patterns which addressed the expansiveness of faculty offerings. This deduction, in light of evidence of the politicized reality of history as a discipline within Nigeria, helped construct logical conclusions on the scope of governmental influence, as well as the impetus and political import of students' and History faculties' choices.

Methodology: Obstructions and difficulties

It is accepted that conclusions drawn on utilizing an inductive method can never be conclusively proven though they might be invalidated. In that way, this presented an existential limitation to my research, which I address at the conclusion of this thesis. Similarly, qualitative research differs from its quantitative cousin in that qualitative research refers to study of subjects and topics that are hard to *quantify* (even if a quantitative approach may be employed for some of these subjects and topics). Thus, though some of my conclusions were arrived at utilizing logical deductive reasoning, the question of subjectivity and authorial bias remains a potential charge – in contrast to the categorical way quantitative research arrives at conclusions through data and experiment replication.

Methodology Rationale: Evaluation

The reasons for choosing the approach I alighted on was ultimately determined by the perimeters of my research question. My research plan was predicated on these undertakings:

- Employing textual analysis of selected texts referencing the Nigerian condition, as well as texts of Theory
- Examining theses of History B.A., M.A and PhD students from selected Nigerian universities
- Interviewing currently active Nigerian Professors of History

I address at the close of this project the limitations of my approach but offer here a brief justification and an outline of limitations. The main limitations cover two overlapping areas – limitation of the actual approach chosen in possible yield potential - and the limitation in the literal sense that the processes could have encompassed other actions to better facilitate the research. Firstly, given my choice of thesis – to determine how History was considered during the Abacha regime – I contemplated focusing on a list of various spaces of historical pertinence. These would have comprised museums, schools, universities, government instituted cultural bureaus and tourist sites. It became apparent that such a broad canvas would likely necessitate a superficial treatment. More importantly, it was unclear within the breadth of such a diverse study, how best to configure a unilateral, overarching methodology that would do manageable justice to the central thesis question. It was clear then that the canvas had to be minimized to within a focal, effectual range. In this regard, electing on exploring university History theses during Abacha's time appeared the appropriately reductive choice. This constituted a most direct empirical method of measurement to look at the discipline through the eyes – i.e. scholarship – of university students and exploring their most tangible efforts in the form of their B.A, M.A and PhD offerings. It is worth noting also that these scholarly approaches to history are privileged here, rather than the settling on other forms of historical transmission, due to the formal interpretative constructs they produce. Still, I recognized that inspecting History theses produced between 1993-1998 in selected Nigerian Universities would be an insufficient standalone driver to answer definitively my thesis question. I appreciated my thesis question was an enquiry rooted in broad historical analysis, thus it would benefit from a varied thematic evaluation that would be most responsive to a mixed-methods approach. In this

way, my exploration of various university History theses whilst critical, served mainly as an indispensable adjunct the way an anchor serves a ship; whilst crucial in affixing the vessel to a secured place, proportionally it constituted a compacted part of my entire research. Thus, my chapters and findings on the university theses appear at the *latter* part of my thesis, to affix and confirm (and/or refute) other findings arrived at through prior discourse and textual analysis. In relation to alternative methodologies, I considered surveys as well as more ethnographic research but could not resolve how these might yield any substantial practicable value in relation to my question. Other procedural limitations of my research I reference and address here briefly, include:

- I was not privy or able to secure access to the students who authored the theses I examined
- I was not privy or able to secure access to the History professors who supervised the students whose theses I examined – nor was I able to secure access to Nigerian History professors who worked within Nigerian Universities during the Abacha regime from 1993 - 1998
- I was unable to access the archives of both University of Lagos (Unilag) and University of Ibadan (UI), Nigeria's oldest university founded as a college of the University of London in 1948

Variables

As my study comprised a mixed approach and was not wholly dependent on a sole methodological process of investigation or validation - such as a singular questionnaire-based or ethnographic enquiry - this widened the scope for inter-study variability. For extractable purposes, a main qualitative or categorical variable of my study could be gauged in my investigating the idea that the Abacha regime propagated a national anti-historical space, *correlated* to a link between the choices of History theses produced in Nigerian universities during Abacha's leadership. In relation to the university theses, various dependent variables existed. These variables comprised gender, level of study and religiosity to an extent, which was not directly comparable across universities and was thus unevenly distributed.

Further, given that my exploration was not sourced from a single set of records but from various independent institutions with differing visions and entry requirements¹⁴⁶, this constituted also a dependent variable. However, as all results were sourced from self-identifying History Departments – as opposed to say, Political Science – constituted an unchanging variable that uniformly informed the outcome.

It could be argued that confounding variables within the groups of students' theses was, to an extent, introduced along religious lines: strong evidence existed to credibly demarcate students of the southern universities as predominantly Christians and their northern counterparts as predominantly Muslim. This calculation was further substantiated by a Gallup poll, commissioned by a study from the Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism. This poll found atheism – or 'irreligion' – in Nigeria measured at less than 1% of the population¹⁴⁷, reflecting that in Nigeria alongside most of Africa, atheist and humanist tendencies remain acutely stigmatised. Still, the apparent confounding variable of religiosity within the History theses was complicated by two contradictory aspects. For despite the religiosity aspect registering as a confounding variable in head-to-head comparisons between the different groups of student theses by university region, this variable did not represent an extraneous liability given I actively drew on conclusions involving the assumed religion of the student bodies I analysed. It is also noted that even if I could strongly presume the students' religious status, I could not measure the *extent* of the students' religiosity or *adherence* to their faith in the final analysis.

Efficacy

¹⁴⁶ Requirement scores for entry into university courses in Nigeria, via the JAMB (Joint admissions Matriculation Board) entrance exam which bears some resemblance to American SATs, varies across Nigeria according to ethnicity and state of origin – with some ethnicities requiring a lower pass threshold than others.

¹⁴⁷ WIN-Gallup International Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism (2012), March 2012, WIN-Gallup, <https://www.gallup-international.bg/en/36009/religion-prevails-in-the-world/> [Accessed July 2017].

The study further found Nigerians to be the runners-up of the 'top 10 religious populations' in the world (Ghana took the pre-eminent position).

Ultimately, I found my findings and subsequent results sufficiently conclusive to justify my thesis question and thus reinforced my choice of methodology as fit-for-purpose. As my methodology adopted a mixed approach and was not wholly dependent on a sole methodological process of investigation or validation, I was able to tally all the strands of my methodological processes in the pursuit of a presumption; i.e. a conclusion taken to be true *on the basis of probability*. I considered the mixed approach a strength by virtue of the variety of processes that ordinarily may have registered divergent deductions and yet converged to confirm aspects of my presuppositions. Thus, my main methodological process of examining university theses was supported with information garnered from Nigerian Historical Journals, as well as information noted and interpreted from assorted historical texts and texts deliberating on various theory.

SECTION TWO: A BACKGROUND TO NIGERIA

CHAPTER III

A history of History: A Construction of 'Nigeria'

History offers two different forms of empowerment. On the one hand, it can be used to intensify the sense of belonging to a group (be it nation or community) by anchoring it securely in shared narratives of the past. On the other hand, it can empower through enhancing the intellectual resources available to the active citizen.¹⁴⁸ **John Tosh**

You may find many of these people putting on big academic gowns but have no solutions to many of the country's challenges...these people have nothing to help us because they offered useless courses.¹⁴⁹ **Yoweri Museveni, President of Uganda, 2014**

The Uses of History: A question of relevance

Museveni renders history scholarship obsolete: it is a European invention with no place in a modern, progressive African state. This sentiment is not simply a *Musevenian* conceit or specific to Uganda but as

Richard Reid illustrates has grown to become an Africa-wide concern:

History as a discipline has been in retreat across much of Africa for the better part of the last forty years, as political instability and economic decline have rendered Historical debate and meditation either irrelevant or downright dangerous, and ever more precarious as a profession.¹⁵⁰

Just how dangerous historical debate can be was illustrated by the predicament Nigerian historian

Obaro Ikime in 1990 found himself. Professor Ikime was detained by the Nigerian authorities on

¹⁴⁸ John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) p.ix.

¹⁴⁹ Niyi Aderibigbe, 'Ugandan President says humanities are useless; here's why he's wrong', (Aug 19, 2014), *VenturesAfrica.Com*, <https://venturesafrica.com/ugandan-president-says-humanities-are-useless-heres-why-hes-wrong/> [Accessed 11 February 2017].

¹⁵⁰ Richard Reid, 'Ghosts in the Academy: Historians and Historical Consciousness in the Making of Modern Uganda', 09 April 2014, *Cambridge University Press*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417514000073> [Accessed 11 February 2017].

spurious charges of aiding and abetting coup plotters¹⁵¹ against Gen. Babangida, Abacha's predecessor.

Of his experience, Ikime had this to say:

No connection whatsoever could be established between the coup plotters and me. But on one of the occasions I was taken for interrogation ... the interrogators read out various paragraphs [from a keynote university address]. 'Do you still believe in what you wrote in 1986?' they asked me. "Yes," I was led to answer. I then asked the interrogators why they did not read certain other portions in the address ... As I left the interrogation centre, it became clear to me what the real reason for my detention was. Some people did not like the way I plied my craft as a historian!¹⁵²

Ikime's account above prompted a recollection of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. Solzhenitsyn, writer as well as historian of celebrated works including *Archipelago's* historical account of Stalin's Labour camps, was hauled into Stalin's prison camps on account of 'anti-Soviet propaganda.'¹⁵³ Solzhenitsyn was detained due to an intercepted letter written to friend Nikolai Vitkevich, in which Solzhenitsyn championed regime change. As an insider at the labour camps, Solzhenitsyn created in *Gulag Archipelago* an accurate history of Stalin's forced labour camp system and the excesses of the Soviet state. Even though he first published a volume in 1973, two decades after Stalin had died, the account angered the Soviet authorities – enough for Solzhenitsyn to be stripped of his Soviet citizenship. History was indeed dangerous.

Though Ikime's incident occurred in Babangida's time - three years prior to Abacha's coup - it is instructive for a number of reasons. During Babangida's regime, Gen. Abacha was formally recognised as second-in-command only to Babangida – and though Abacha and Babangida were viewed to be wildly differing personalities, their differences were considered superficial when it came to their convictions,

¹⁵¹ Gabriel Orkar, a businessman, was alleged to have financed a coup against Babangida in 1990.

¹⁵² Obaro Ikime, *History, The Historian and The Nation* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 2006) preface.

¹⁵³ Michael Scammell (Ed.), Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (Trans.) *The Solzhenitsyn Files: Secret Soviet Documents Reveal One Man's Fight Against the Monolith* (Chicago: Edition Q, 1995) p.48.

ideology and matters related to policy and statehood. Thus, known to be close friends and collaborators, Babangida and Abacha were informally viewed more as partners than as respective Head of State and subordinate. Consequently, it would have been inconceivable that Abacha, who was Chief of Army Staff under Babangida and appointed to the security-sensitive position of Minister of Defence in 1990 (he was in post at the time of Ikime's detainment), would not have been party to these proceedings or briefed as to why an historian could constitute an existential danger to government. Regarding incidents that related to the sensitivities of state and detainment of prominent citizens, it is equally inconceivable that the no. 2 man in the regime would be ignorant of this arrest, given Abacha's position as Defence chief to whom the security services reported. What this episode highlights is Abacha's familiarity at least with this idea that history as a practiced discipline could embody a threat to the reins of power. The discipline's own perceived power is starkly presented in the fact that in Ikime's interrogation, the coup-plotting charade is soon dropped as the real accusation emerges.

So history in Africa might be dangerous as Reid notes - as it is also in retreat. Falola and Aderinto echo Reid's wider point on the retreat by stating that 'given the diminishing share by African historians in the global output of literature on Africa, it has become of crucial importance to reintroduce Africans into history writing about Africa.'¹⁵⁴

Like the elaborate academic gowns Museveni cites, the pursuit of history in Africa is equated to an affectation; frivolous, treacherous to the serious business of nation building. In contrast, Tosh generally and Falola *et al* more specifically, present history as something vital and connective. One clique seeks to *disappear* history; another group acclaims it. My research, in exploring the idea of a 'disappeared' history during the Abacha regime, investigates also how these two divergent attitudes to history co-existed and collided in that time. Still, it should be noted as earlier stated and later explored, that the

¹⁵⁴ Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010) p.ix.

authoritarian exiling of history to the periphery in militarized Nigeria or in Museveni's Uganda, was preceded by particular considerations – principally fiscal in nature (In **Chapter VII**, I also highlight the role of the World Bank in shaping Nigerian educational policy). As Ajayi, Goma and Johnson note, 'from the start, higher education in Africa depended largely on external financing and, as the external funding agencies withdrew, most of the African countries found it difficult to absorb the total cost of the universities into their budget.'¹⁵⁵ Thus, since the politics of independence and higher education in newly created Nigeria from 1960-70, the study of history registered an inauspicious absence: 'The curricula of the Colleges were very narrow,' Ajayi, Goma and Johnson highlight, with a notable dearth in 'African Studies, particularly African languages, history, oral traditions, music, drama, art, and culture generally.'¹⁵⁶ More than half a century before Museveni branded history study 'useless' and advocated more vocational pursuits, the Ashby Commission in Nigeria was advocating and 'emphasizing business and commercial subjects' as a more practicable vehicle for a winning post-independence lift-off.¹⁵⁷

In referencing the Ashby Commission and the colonial project, it may be further argued that persistent anti-historical tendencies in Nigeria are in part a colonial consequence and constitute imperial debris; For example, Falola contends that even the disappearance of history from the Nigerian school curriculum is an outcome of a Western educational system bequeathed yet ill-suited to the emergent postcolonial nation. Falola argues that 'the universality of Western education - trimmed to its colonial form - persisted perpetually', manifesting as a 'continuous disconnect between the education system and society'.¹⁵⁸ One result of this disconnect, is that 'in less than three decades to the independence of the country, history as a standalone subject was removed from the school curriculum from the

¹⁵⁵ J.F.Ade Ajayi, Lameck K.H. Goma & G. Ampah Johnson, *The African Experience with Higher Education*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996) p.69.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p.75.

¹⁵⁷ The Commission on Post-School-Certificate and Higher Education in Nigeria (1959), otherwise known as the Ashby Commission, was conceived by the Federal Government of Nigeria to review the development of all post-secondary education against expected manpower requirements over the following two decades.

¹⁵⁸ Toyin Falola, *Understanding Modern Nigeria – Ethnicity, Democracy, and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) p.441.

elementary to senior secondary level.¹⁵⁹ As Falola reasons, ‘the current educational system in Nigeria was introduced as a colonial project ... for the effective administration of the colonial state.’¹⁶⁰ Falola registers the irony regarding history’s removal from the curriculum, in that this ‘somewhat confirmed the “no history, no past” narrative of Eurocentric writers about Africa because what existed in the past was full of darkness.’¹⁶¹ Falola concludes scathingly, ‘whereas the colonial government only sought to relegate or substitute local history with European history, the postcolonial government shut down everything relating to history altogether.’¹⁶²

Falola’s initial point on the legacy of a westernised Eurocentric university system in Nigeria, encapsulates two key interrelated themes, namely notions of *decolonisation* and *development*. Expounding on the historiography of universities in Nigeria, Tim Livsey employs the term ‘frames for development’,¹⁶³ to explain both the conceptual and functional aspirational process in which ‘universities were seen as an important part of this new mission, bringing to colonies modern knowledge and skills, which would drive their development and equip them for transfers of power.’¹⁶⁴ To simplify, frames of development originally entailed in part, those on the cusp of or the newly independent envisioning ‘development using frames that seemed to address their local needs’,¹⁶⁵ – though Livsey is clear that conceptions of development were ‘often complex, ambiguous, and contradictory.’¹⁶⁶ For universities in postcolonial Nigeria, the task of adapting their western legacies to ‘local needs’ has remained an enduring challenge. In 1982 Philip Altbach had cautioned on the difficulty of creating *indigenous* academic models, since the ‘institutional patterns, pedagogical techniques and,

¹⁵⁹ Toyin Falola, *Understanding Modern Nigeria – Ethnicity, Democracy, and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) p.441.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Tim Livsey, *Nigeria’s University Age: Reframing Decolonisation and Development* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) p.5.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p.4.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p.7.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

perhaps most important, the basic structure of knowledge' of these universities are of Western origin.¹⁶⁷ Ajayi, Goma and Johnson in the 1990s posed the conundrum explicitly: 'How, then, are the universities to be made African: how do we adapt the University to African culture so it can provide African development, not westernization?'¹⁶⁸ This question has bedevilled and informs also the difficulties attendant to the study and appreciation of history – particularly an expansive Nigerian History – in Nigerian universities.

Abacha did not explicitly oppose history or its study vocally à la Museveni, still, my study purports that the Abacha regime, unattached to the oddity of a Nigeria the British created, fostered an anti-historical space that operated outside normal boundaries of historical discourse. Peterson and Macola when lauding the efforts of African historians in creating an African-centred history post-Independence, inadvertently alerts us to the probabilities of a dysfunctional scholarship of history in stating 'their [African historians] scholarly work makes it impossible to think of African history as an inert entity awaiting the attention of professional historians.'¹⁶⁹ We can at least conceive, in the context of Ikime's detainment three years prior to Abacha's accession, a harsher landscape for historians – as for everyone else - in Abacha's notoriously rigid dictatorship; especially as contrasted with the new zeal of 1960s African scholars, abuzz with unearthing and liberating formerly hidden, disregarded histories. We can thus imagine a marked inertia for African History in Abacha's time; a time where the thrill of independence had long soured by a succession of military coups, countercoups, states of emergencies and martial law. One question would be whether any such inertia – this absence of history being 'proffered' to the people – was a continuation of approved state policy or the accidental, repressed by-product of chaotic dictatorship. Or the pragmatic, precautionary actions of a jittery regime cognizant of the juncture the country had arrived at in the moment of Abacha's ascendancy. Certainly, Abacha with

¹⁶⁷ J.F.Ade Ajayi, Lameck K.H. Goma & G. Ampah Johnson, *The African Experience with Higher Education*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996) p.3.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Derek Peterson and Giacomo Macola, *Recasting The Past* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2009) p.7.

his own record of propagating coups, would have been conscious of the fact military regimes are seldom built on solid ground – and showed himself amenable in various ways to constricting the platforms in support of open discourse and debate deemed problematic to his regime’s foundation.

Notwithstanding, my research focuses not on the Abacha personality or figure necessarily (inevitably, this is at times inescapable in dealing with despotic rulers) but focuses on the *practice and culture* of history during the Abacha regime from 1993 – 1998. In other words, this research is a cultural study on how history conceptually and as a discipline, was refracted during General Abacha’s rule.

History’s *Consciousness*: Nationhood and An Empire State of Mind

If the historiographical concern of how history refracted in Abacha’s Nigeria sits at the root of my thesis, enquiries on how Nigeria was conceived as a *national historical space* during Abacha also attend to that question. Yet, it is also a distinct line of enquiry in that if the former concentrates on the processes and the historical detail, then the latter focuses on the *people*. Namely, how citizens encountered and experienced both past and prevailing historical discourse and how they might re-articulate it. *Nationalism* in other words.

An exploration of the nationalistic or what Falola refers to as ‘cultural nationalist agenda’,¹⁷⁰ helps us to determine the extent to how *people* as a collective – and *professional historians* as distinctive representations of the people, saw themselves and sought to shape the narrative of their nation. These narratives, Benedict Anderson argued, almost acquire their own perpetuating power so that nationalism becomes ‘the expression of a radically changed form of consciousness’¹⁷¹ – with the capability to invigorate and bind the populace to a shared and positive experience of nationhood. In studying these developments, especially within the backdrop of a newly independent Nigeria where nationalistic

¹⁷⁰ Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010) p.4.

¹⁷¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* [2nd Ed.] (London: Verso, 2006) p.47.

sentiments should have approached a crescendo, we can draw sharp comparisons with the aftermath of Abacha's power grab. One example of this is demonstrated when highlighting Falola's observation on how and why in the years following independence, African historians' material served necessarily as a rejoinder to the insult of colonisation:

The academic historians' careers were shaped largely by the politics of decolonisation, which demanded an African-centred counter discourse to the objectionable idea that Africans could not govern themselves and thus had to be placed under alien rule.¹⁷²

Pursuant to Falola's words, it was under a similar pretext to the colonialists themselves that Abacha seized power in 1993 and imposed too his own alien, unelected rule. In his televised national address following his coup d'état (or 'palace coup' as it was then popularly referred to),¹⁷³ Abacha concluded his address by declaring that his new government is 'a child of necessity', yet one mandated 'to restore peace and stability to our country and on this foundation, enthrone a lasting and true democracy. Give us the chance to solve our problems in our own ways. Long live the Federal Republic of Nigeria.'¹⁷⁴

The brazen rebuttal of the people's will in those specific terms, a few months after what had been adjudged the freest and fairest elections in the history of Nigeria, speaks of an intractable mistrust of the peoples' ability or right to govern themselves – and is thus strikingly reminiscent of imperialist language. By also aborting the next progressed stage of nationhood achieved with elections that should have ushered in the Fourth Republic, Abacha denied the people ownership of the evolving Nigeria story

¹⁷² Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, p4.

¹⁷³ Shonekan's resignation was forced following a meeting held with the military chiefs, thus Abacha's takeover was considered a 'palace coup', as opposed to the traditional military coup d'etat.

¹⁷⁴ Kingsley Kowen, 'The Speeches of Sani Abacha', 15 May 2015, *ConnectNigeria.com*, <http://connectnigeria.com/articles/2012/11/discover-nigeria-the-coup-speeches-of-general-abacha/> [Accessed 21 November 2016].

– in so doing, he denied the people also what Homi Bhabha terms the individual's 'right to narrate',¹⁷⁵ which Bhabha describes 'as a means to achieving our own national or communal identity.'¹⁷⁶

The apparently self-effacing 'child of necessity' reference to his illegitimate incoming junta is a deliberately projected false humility; in its deft reversal, Abacha's use of 'child' labels the Nigerian nation with an infantilism that needs correcting. There is some validation to the counter-argument that Abacha, a seasoned coup plotter and collaborator,¹⁷⁷ was merely an opportunist: that no more should be conjectured beyond this simple Machiavellian fact. This is in part a self-evident truth, for all coup plotters are opportunistic hijackers of their nation's sovereignty. But in addition to the opportunism previously displayed, this episode showed Abacha pathologically exploiting Nigeria's postcolonial reality by utilizing colonial language as justification. The re-introduction of the idea that the issues bedeviling Nigeria could be laid at the door of the western imperialists is illustrated by the insertion of the line 'give us the chance to solve our problems in our own ways.' It may be base but there is a consciousness of history here; an understanding of one of its uses, as those four words – *in our own ways* – simultaneously serve as an indictment of colonial rule, as well as a paean to an imagined nationalism.

If Abacha's use of *child* in his address was revealing, the outgoing Interim Head of State Chief Ernest Shonekan in his farewell address subsequently stated 'it is common knowledge that ING (Interim National Government) is a child of circumstance. It was conceived in crisis and born into crisis.'¹⁷⁸ There is a striking congruence in their phraseologies – Shonekan's *child of circumstance* vis-à-vis Abacha's *child of necessity*. The term puppet government could not be more apt than with this unsubtle exhibition of Abacha's ventriloquism from Shonekan's mouth.

¹⁷⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) p.67.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Abacha reportedly had involvement in every coup in Nigeria's history excepting the Dimka coup of 1966.

¹⁷⁸ Adeyemi Daramola – 'A Child of Necessity: An Analysis of Political Discourse in Nigeria' - *International Pragmatics Association, 2008* <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.663.2661&rep=rep1&type=pdf> [Accessed 7 December 2016].

Ultimately, the careful word placement of Abacha and Sonekan's 'child' references, like ineffective camouflage, draws attention. In choosing the most inopportune time to seize power, at the juncture when a previously elusive democracy beckoned, Abacha and his cabal underscored the disregard in which they held the sanctity of the nation. Unlike other military usurpers who parroted the pretext of steadying the national ship for a promised and imminent democratic crossing, the Abacha regime had no such pretext: the electoral process had already successfully completed prior to Abacha's takeover – with an election M.K.O Abiola was widely viewed to have won.

The 'child' references echo the scorn of European imperialists, who considered Africans infantile subalterns who needed to be firmly chaperoned to a meaningful citizenship. Abacha's 'child' reference provokes, as suggested, the accusation that Abacha and his like represented the new colonialists: new colonialists who had been subject to imperial power, and with perverse mimicry perpetrated on their own peoples a renewed Empire state of mind in that vicious cycle of the abused turned abuser. Sonekan may be partially excused. It is transparent that in Sonekan's brief time as Head of Nigeria's 1992 interim government, his was an emergency stooge government; his pronouncements at this time must be viewed as uttered through the fog of duress generated by his anxious handler(s) waiting in the wings. Abacha's 'child' and 'in our own way' references are also notable for the change of direction they represent in Abacha's usual polemic. Typically, Abacha's 'Fellow Nigerians' address which followed every coup d'état he announced, focused on the perceived failures of the preceding government. These proclaimed failures was entirely comprised of economic miscarriages, the scourge of corruption and the breakdown of the rule of law. Thus, the absence of those usual suspects in Abacha's 1993 address and the nod to the nation's history and nationalism represented an aberration that further confirmed Abacha's conceptual understanding of that particular historical moment. This is starkly seen when you contrast in particular Abacha's 1993 coup announcement address exactly a decade earlier in 1983, when he helped to oust the Shagari civilian government and install Gen. Buhari as Head of State. In the 1983

address, Abacha declared 'you are all living witnesses to the great economic predicament and uncertainty, which an inept and corrupt leadership has imposed on our beloved nation', and berated leaders who 'revel in squander-mania, corruption and indiscipline... in complete disregard of our stark economic realities.'¹⁷⁹ Abacha concluded highlighting that due to 'these deplorable conditions, I and my colleagues in the armed forces have in the discharge of our national role as promoters and protectors of our national interest decided to effect a change in the leadership of the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and form a Federal Military Government.'¹⁸⁰

In the nationalist arena, we may explore societal considerations such as egalitarianism and the individual's relationship and contract with their nation-state. This is a *personal* and devolved relationship, different from the collective aspect as referenced by Falola. In this arena, the concept of identity is most urgent and infused with the idea of a mutualised responsibility – of the individual's responsibility to the state and vice versa. Peterson and Macola touch on this:

In reconstructing history, nation builders and dissidents alike find evidence of how social groups ought to relate to one another, how political leaders ought to behave, and how far citizens ought to obey leaders' direction. History writing is a critical forum of democratic argument.¹⁸¹

If as Peterson *et al* put it, history becomes more than just a telling of a story but a conscience of a nation, we understand why certain governments might seek to denigrate those endeavours or inhibit the discipline. In exploring this aspect of the Abacha regime, we may deconstruct where the delineation lies between the denigration of human rights due to normal dictatorial expression and a purposive attempt to disenfranchise the people. A disenfranchisement not just of the democratic ideal but a

¹⁷⁹ Kingsley Kowen, 'The Speeches of Sani Abacha', 15 May 2015, *ConnectNigeria.com*, <http://connectnigeria.com/articles/2012/11/discover-nigeria-the-coup-speeches-of-general-abacha/> [Accessed 21 November 2016].

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Derek Peterson and Giacomo Macola, *Recasting The Past* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2009) p.22.

cultural disenfranchisement; of the peoples' sense of citizenship, of their history and thus of their individual identities. Homi Bhabha underscores this kind of composite disenfranchisement of the peoples by the state or leader, when he references 'those whose citizenly presence has been annihilated or marginalized.'¹⁸² Citizenship, nationalism here, is evidently not just a contested but also a conflicted space.

Returning to the topic of conflict, the thread of which snakes inconclusively through the story of Nigeria, complications of that unanswered past is evidenced in latter-day incarnations, bloody and otherwise. These incarnations are the spawn and relics of historical struggles and transgressions that remain unresolved from since the violence of imperialism (ideological and real) to the allegorical violence of independence (arbitrarily assembled, flawed). These incarnations have included: The Nigeria-Biafra civil war; the cyclical violence of the coup-recurrent society; and contemporaneously, the Abacha regime in its government takeover in '93 until Abacha expired at State House on 8 June 1998.

In touching on the extraneous categories of *nationalism* and *conflict*, I underline the multi-layered, interdisciplinary flavour of this research. Consequently, to unpick all the constituent parts would be to unscramble a mosaic of the imperial past through to the post-colonial; to disentangle issues of *self* from the nationalistic; to appreciate the ethnographic in Nigeria's supremely pluralistic and multi-ethnic space of over 470 different ethno-linguistic groups. This pluralistic reality makes it more difficult to separate the cultural histories from the singularly political gesture. And in whose interest might this gesture be anyway? Delving into the social anthropology that informs the various customs ranging from family, traditional systems and customary law may help illuminate that enquiry.

To conclude this chapter, a summation: this chapter explored the fiscal elements that attended independence, such as concerns regarding *development* and argued that this helped construct an anti-

¹⁸² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) p.xxii.

historical foundation for the burgeoning nation. Consequently, the role of the Ashby Commission and the World Bank was interrogated to highlight how their recommendations for business and technology-focused subjects over the arts helped shape Nigerian Education policy for years to come. This chapter also established a corollary between a historian's activity and a repressive reaction from the ruling military regime. I explored also Abacha's proximity to the corridors of power and his correlated and verified awareness of history being a tool that could be suppressed and/or had its uses. This suggested the possibility that in the case of a suppressive act by Abacha's regime that might impact history study, that act was unlikely to be accidental. This chapter also contended that Abacha's hijacking and exploitation of what was the most overtly democratic election in Nigeria qualified as anti-historical, given the specific historical currents and turbulent histories that had converged to produce that unique democratic moment. By displaying an impenetrability to the historical currents of the time, this chapter concludes that the Abacha regime's negativistic attitude to the national historical narrative and its legitimacy thereof, relegated Nigeria to a *tabula rasa* ground zero historically, which mirrored the imperialists' argument that Africa had no history until European feet was set there.

CHAPTER IV

Historical Memory & Fragmentation: Colonial Experiment and Legacy

Claims of recognition are, in effect, demands that members of the dominant group learn to see in a certain way, that they bring into focus the distinct normative contours of individuals or groups otherwise obscured in a nation's history of expansion, colonization, or cultural homogenization.¹⁸³ **Christopher Kutz**

Historical Memory

Memory is a loaded word that conjures many layered permutations of human experience, further infused nowadays with various postmodern slants. As regards the texts I have perused in furtherance to my research, I have unavoidably encountered the word in diverse allegorical and abstract representations. However, the 'memory' of my title can largely and commonly be taken to represent the term known as *Historical Memory*. Mamadou Diawara explains:

Historical memory involves a complex set of mental processes that function on different levels: of official rituals and symbols, in historical instruction in school and universities, in historiography as an academic discipline, in monuments and memorials. It has personal, local, regional, national, supranational and universal dimensions, and it integrates nearly all realms of human existence, including religion, morality, political convictions, individual and collective identity. It is an important mental and social site of struggle for differentiation, recognition, political legitimacy, and for perceiving the self and other.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Christopher Kutz, *On War and Democracy*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016) p.293.

¹⁸⁴ Mamadou Diawara, Bernard Lategan, Jorn Rusen (ed.s), *Historical Memory in Africa: dealing with the past, reaching for the Future* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012) p.2.

So historical memory primarily equates to an all-encompassing and expansive national history. Thus, Abacha's Nigeria qualifies as a construct of collective and collected memory, regardless. Nations are like houses with multi-levels; housing rooms of local, regional, national classification; within that, compartments where, like furnishings, we might encounter monuments and memorials and sort historiography from indoctrination; popular culture from legend and mythology.

Yet: to speak of an absence of history in the Abacha dictatorship of Nigeria is not a denial that those historical chambers exist: rather, it is to highlight in just what convoluted format these so-called chambers failed to thrive and how normality – and modernity – may have been circumvented in the process.

One notion explores the idea that the Abacha regime itself sought willfully to negate or to deny the existence of an actual Nigerian historical narrative. That the regime disaffirmed the nation in such a way that was nihilistic; akin to a historical disemboweling of the nation-state ostensibly to further the regime's autocratic ends. Let us return to Abacha's takeover address, which referenced colonialism in an appeal ostensibly to some renascent idea of Nigeria. The referenced memory of colonialism was a historical truth that the Abacha regime seldom addressed afterwards. A reportedly brusque, unsentimental character, it could have been presumed that Abacha's subsequent silence on the matter of colonialism was a kind of stoicism or the practicing of some military-type observance; that to ignore empire and white rule was to free oneself psychologically and psychically from wrestling unnecessarily with the afflicted memories of so-called white superiority. However, this was not a presumption based on any pronouncements Abacha or his regime made. Where the anti-colonialist rhetoric of Mugabe or Mobutu served as rallying points for citizens to weaponise historical memory into nationalistic truncheons to batter colonialist spectres, Abacha remained coolly disengaged.

Another school of thought prevailed that Abacha and his regime lacked the intellectual, nationalistic and moralistic combination required to engage the nation accordingly on matters of colonial history. Whilst

this may have had some aspect of truth, a consciously negativistic approach from the regime could be glimpsed when Nigeria was expelled from the Commonwealth in November 1995, following the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa. At a comparative juncture, the likes of Mugabe regardless of whatever atrocity he stood accused of, would have thundered about colonialist collusions; of wicked Western powers booting an African nation out of their privileged racist club. An unpopular regime such as Abacha's might have adopted such a stance, in the name of unifying the nation against Western meddling, bigotry and entitlement. However, Abacha's spokesman David Attah, at the time of Nigeria's expulsion, simply informed the BBC World service that the Commonwealth expulsion was 'baseless'.¹⁸⁵ More revealingly, Attah went on record to predict (correctly) that the outcome of ongoing discussions about economic sanctions being placed on Nigeria, in tandem with the Commonwealth expulsion, would amount to nothing: the Western powers and Nigeria were as he put it, 'lifelong partners'.¹⁸⁶

Certainly, there is a subtext of arrogance regarding the Abacha regime's understanding of the pull of Nigeria's prized bonny light crude oil and the British state's reliance upon it. Following the commonwealth expulsion, Nigeria-Britain oil export numbers *grew*.¹⁸⁷ Yet, beyond the pragmatic politics of oil trade, Attah's 'lifelong partners' comment coupled with silence on the Commonwealth's moral authority, disrupted the usual refutations postcolonial nations were making against western nations and their institutions, as they reaffirmed their postcolonial sovereignty. Especially given the circumstances of expulsion from an alleged neo-colonialist association. This silence is pertinent given that for years prior to 1995, several African nations were increasingly vocal in their criticism of the Commonwealth union, labeling it a neocolonialist association with roots in the British Empire. The other related charge that had

¹⁸⁵ 'Nigeria Suspended From Commonwealth' –*CNN News*, 11 November 1995, <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9511/nigeria/11-11/> - [Accessed 10 March 2017].

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Paul Lewis, 'U.S. Seeking Tougher Sanctions To Press Nigeria for Democracy', *The New York Times*, March 12, 1996 - <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/12/world/us-seeking-tougher-sanctions-to-press-nigeria-for-democracy.html>, [Accessed 10 March 2017].

grown in the years, likewise unused by the Abacha regime, was that the Commonwealth represented a microcosm of imperialist mores in its allegedly preferential treatment of white member states.

In the fast-tracked matter of Saro-Wiwa's execution, we may consider another facet to Abacha's actions that satisfy an anti-historical benchmark. This concerns a standard fulfilled through the propagation of *myth*. Roland Barthes explained that part of the power of mythology lies in its ability to enlist us into its legend, by short-circuiting our usual pathways of rationale; this is possible because myth, as Barthes informs, 'is a system of communication... it is a message... a mode of signification.'¹⁸⁸ One man's surprise is another man's shock. Richard Brody further expounds stating 'the power of myth is in its impressive character.... this impression is way more powerful than any rational explanations which can disprove the myth.'¹⁸⁹

That power of the surprise – or shock – in unseating our rationale, generates impressions in our minds from which ready mythologies may be transplanted. Shocking the world with Saro-Wiwa's killing, maximized by false trails Abacha scattered in previously hinting at commuting Saro-Wiwa's sentence, Abacha generated for himself a mythology encloded in what I term *autocratic inscrutability*. This is a myth derivative, borne of a kingly declaration whereby the inscrutability subsumes the land and the law within the persona of the leader: *l'état, c'est moi*. It is an anti-historical moment and embodiment of such; a mythic instance of supplantation, where in the shocking moment, the history and national narratives appear subjective to and negated *by* the personality delivering the shock. Barthes explained that embodiments of myth and the mythologizing process in asking 'what is characteristic of myth? To transform a meaning into form.'¹⁹⁰ In the frenzied action of Saro-Wiwa's killing, when Nigeria should have been under Abiola's democratic leadership, the supplanter Abacha's self-consciously provocative

¹⁸⁸ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies – selected and translated from the French by Annette Lavers* (London: Vintage Books, 1972) p. 107.

¹⁸⁹ Richard Brody, 'The Uses of Mythologies' – *The New Yorker*, April 19 2012 - <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-uses-of-mythologies> [Accessed 15 April 2018].

¹⁹⁰ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies – trans. Annette Lavers*, p. 131.

act fulfilled the key Barthean jolt requisite and birthed new mythic realities. Interesting parallels of Barthes' treatise on myth can be teased from Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrines*.¹⁹¹ Though Klein addressed a post 9-11 world, in the rear-view mirror of her arguments we catch a glimpse of Abacha. Klein speaks of 'people with power who are cashing in on chaos';¹⁹² she calls these leaders 'shock doctors' whose deliberate acts produce 'profound disorientation, extreme fear and anxiety, and collective regression.'¹⁹³ Frantz Fanon warned in *The Wretched of The Earth*, a year after Nigeria's independence, of new leaders who may turn dictatorial and become 'the most eager worker in the task of mystifying and bewildering the masses.'¹⁹⁴ The 'profound disorientation' Klein spoke of is conceptually close to the 'bewildering' that Fanon prophesied – all this fits the Abacha myth-inducing playbook of Saro-Wiwa's killing, which stunned the Nigerian nation into a regressive era of tense, compliant silence. I had earlier posed in my **Introduction**, a Fanon-related query regarding consequences of colonial authoritarianism by asking *what other ways might Fanon's 'ideological damage' manifest in Nigeria's own sense of self, identity and history?* Here in the aftermath of Saro-Wiwa's killing is the most extreme manifestation of 'ideological damage' – from a silence that originated in the time of the colonialists' authoritarian repression, which even then was punctured by pockets of vocal and violent resistance; to a silence more complete than it ever was - given that the repression was homegrown. It is a silence in which anti-historical spaces might grow unchallenged by the populace, by educationists and intellectuals, the media and of course those arbiters, chroniclers and managers of the nation's historical narratives – professional historians. To postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak, this kind of silence from the masses is unsurprising, as a reflection of the textual silences of the voiceless oppressed. In her influential essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak', Spivak suggested that to recover the 'voice' of the subaltern – the oppressed colonial subject – was a near impossibility due to the extent of

¹⁹¹ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

¹⁹² *Ibid* p.8.

¹⁹³ *Ibid* p34.

¹⁹⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (St. Ives: Penguin, 2001) p.168.

historical colonial repression.¹⁹⁵ How much more then, if the assault on the people's agency is compounded by the latter-day pseudo-colonialists of despotic military regimes such as Abacha's?

In relation to the matter of historians' compliance in the silence – as opposed to complicity - there is prior form in Nigeria. As Saro-Wiwa's daughter Noo Saro-Wiwa noted, Nigeria for all its size and history seemed a quiet player in the context of engagement with the history of slavery. As she observed: 'Even though our colonial place name made our slavery links clear: Ghana was known as the Gold Coast; Nigeria was unequivocally titled the Slave Coast, you would almost think slavery never took place in Nigeria.'¹⁹⁶

Similarly, Ghana and Senegal have their preserved slave fortifications and museums; these sites of historical memory that Patricia Davison says helped to 'mediate the past, present and future',¹⁹⁷ whilst Nigeria and Abacha's Nigeria especially was marked by a dearth of such spaces. It was not until May 2007 that the Calabar Slave History Museum was built. Additionally, the Abacha regime's so-called 'war on the arts',¹⁹⁸ a knee-jerk component of every autocratic regime's campaign against free speech, extended to letting the only government-owned slave forts slip into woeful disrepair despite appeals from local and international heritage bodies. By comparison, governments of Ghana and Senegal maintained their colonial preservations and forts, regardless of the political turbulence those states on occasion passed through. Abacha's Nigeria, contrastingly, appeared a memory-free zone.

In earlier referencing a 'historical disemboweling', I spoke of a willful separating of a nation from its histories. Diawara referenced the 'site of struggle' in histories: where he imagined opposing and competing histories wrestling to superimpose its own narrative - a clash in which some strands are

¹⁹⁵ Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow-Sacrifice' (Wedge, Winter/Spring) pp.120-130.

¹⁹⁶ Noo Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* (Berkeley: Granta, 2012) p.143.

¹⁹⁷ Sarah Nuttal & Carli Coetzee (ed.), *Negotiating the Past – The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.145.

¹⁹⁸ Nigeria's *Punch* Magazine coined this phrase in 1997 in reference to both the media crackdown effected by the regime – closure of newspapers, imprisonment of news editors etc., as well as the willful withdrawal of funding for most arts and cultural projects including funding for museums.

enriched, others relinquished or re-imagined and new histories are formed, agreed upon and conveyed. According to Nigerian archaeologist Professor Okpoko, the history of museums in Nigeria pre-dates the establishment of museums in Arab or European communities.¹⁹⁹ Historian Benedict Akpomuvie concurs:

During these periods, various cultural materials of ritual, religious and political importance were fashioned, conserved and preserved in temples or traditional shrines and in the palaces of kings and chiefs.²⁰⁰

The development of modern museums in Nigeria however can be dated to 1927 according to Professor Nzewunwa, when Mr. Kenneth Murray, art teacher in the British Colonial Service was commissioned to advise on the effects of colonial education on local art.²⁰¹ Yet between independence in 1960 to the 1990s era when Abacha was in power, the museums brought ever diminishing returns to the general populace as regards to engagement of history, identity and nationalism. Museums were increasingly poorly funded through the years, displayed scant materials and suffered closures. This amounts to a gradual historical evisceration. In 1990, during the Babangida regime and three years before Abacha took power, Nigerian Archaeologist B.W. Andah lamented:

The major objective of museums in Africa is and should be educational. In this direction, museums are suitably placed to correct the distortions of African history as well as major defects of African educational programmes manifest in a general failure to make full use of the cultural potential of African peoples.²⁰²

Post-Abacha, the legacy of this evisceration was evident as the civilian governments of the new millennium sought to rectify the museum cultural-history predicament. Noo Saro-Wiwa again

¹⁹⁹ Benedict Akpomuvie, *African Research Review* – ‘Museums and Development in Africa’ - An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia Vol. 4 (4), Serial No. 17, 2 October, 2010.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ *African Research Review* – ‘Museums and Development in Africa’ - An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia Vol. 4 (4), Serial No. 17, 2 October, 2010 pp. 529-538.

²⁰² Benedict Akpomuvie, *African Research Review* – ‘Museums and Development in Africa’ - An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia Vol. 4 (4), Serial No. 17, October, 2010. Pp. 529-538.

documents a visit to the government-run national museum in Lagos and notes that many exhibits including a photographic roster of previous Heads of state came with no written or explanatory accompaniment – save the dates of the leaders' premierships.²⁰³ It was in effect a photographic exhibition masquerading as history, with scant educational value. This is 'Historical Memory' in its most vacant, inverted format; like negatives of photographs, things are blurred and imprecise. The exhibition Noo Saro-Wiwa observed was so purposefully dismantled of a historiographical narrative that it could not even qualify as a story – it was but an empty simulacrum of grinning statesmen. Here indicted in this parade of empty smiles, was the legacy of Abacha's and previous regimes' neglect of history and the institutions elected to nurture it.

Another significant example of the evisceration of historical memory in Nigeria is present in the context of the Biafran War - which I discuss fully in the next chapter. The war, the consequence of Nigeria's uncertain colonial legacy and shaky independence, was a stab at a new future by the Igbo tribe from Nigeria's eastern region. If the Nigeria-Biafra civil war encapsulates a focal memory site of the nation, it is instructive that Abacha's regime upon assuming power passed decrees that sought to criminalize Biafran discourse. Open dialogue of the war was proscribed on the grounds that it was secessionist and thus a threat to national security. This decreed intervention was an unsubtle case of the suppression of national history. South Africa's truth and reconciliation commission had helped somewhat to settle that nation's Apartheid past and propel it towards an, admittedly, idealised rainbow nation status. It could be said that a Nigeria that sought to suppress – or even excise from its national consciousness the memory of the Biafra experience was a nation both in denial and guilty of trying to impose upon its citizens an ultimate revision. To place in context the momentous opportunity — and responsibility — the Abacha regime had to re-order and honour Nigeria's historical memory, is to revisit again the historic confluence at work when Abacha seized power. Post-independence, the *idea* of Nigeria was never fully reconciled

²⁰³ Noo Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* (Berkeley: Granta, 2012) p.31.

given the recurrence of coups and counter-coups as the armed forces jostled for political power. Just two short pseudo-democratic administrations – at independence from 1960-66 and from 1979-1983 – were crowded out by a civil war and an interruption of successive coups in Nigeria's history. Thus, prior to Abacha's takeover in 1993, Nigeria was a country in dire need of a national resolution. Things were even more urgent given that three years before Abacha seized power, the Berlin Wall had tumbled. So: the communist model of the East capitulated in favour of a capitalist Western democratic ideal, and in the advent of a fresh historical paradigm where Africa could have slipped out of gaze, Mandela's increasingly iconic stature as an internationally-respected statesman showed Africa could be accommodated within this new paradigm. Nigeria, as the most populous Black nation on Earth and a staunch ally of Black South Africa in its fight to dismantle Apartheid, could have held a prominent spot in this new order. The Nigerian election of 1993 that had a declared winner in Chief Moshood Abiola appeared a progressive step.

Even if we excuse Abacha's seizure of power, the subsequent failure of Abacha's Nigeria to engage conscientiously with its historical memory is a major failing. Mandela was defined by the Apartheid struggle but he is ultimately lauded for re-defining South Africa as a space whereupon the nation reclaimed a true African memory after upending the alien narrative facilitated by the Apartheid occupation. Mandela's enduring success, beyond his famous magnanimity in forgiving enemies, lies in the cutting adrift of Apartheid to liberate an authentic, emergent national consciousness. As Rusen stated, once memory 'moves beyond commemorating the past and contemplates its role in the present and its significance for the future, it has to find new ways to integrate negative, even traumatic events of the past to form a new historical identity.'²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Mamadou Diawara, Bernard Lategan, Jorn Rusen (ed), *Historical Memory in Africa: dealing with the past, reaching for the Future In an Intercultural Context* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012) p.9.

The truth and reconciliation commission in South Africa was the chief vehicle that allowed Mandela to achieve a new historical identity for his people. A similar dialogue in Abacha's Nigeria regarding Biafra or at least some type of open dialogue even if limited, was a crucially needed national conversation that the Abacha regime declined to have. Instead, the regime decreed silence on Biafra on pain of death.

Fragmentation: Disordered Identities

Another notion of historical memory concerns the country's sense of itself; its self-image or projection, which we may subdivide into the 'collective' and 'individual' categories and file under *identity*. Elisio Macamo argues that this particular aspect of historical memory overlaps with the Social Theory banner – and is a specific vehicle for peoples to make sense of the past, present and future.²⁰⁵ Without this, lies *fragmentation*. This notion also echoes Diawara's view of historical memory as a powerful tool for orientation in the present. This is a particularly sensitive aspect of historical memory as it is here that Diawara warns of the dangers of 'falsified' historical memories.²⁰⁶ These falsified historical memories brought us the killings in Rwanda, Burundi and Congo. It would have brought unprecedented bloodshed in South Africa, if anyone listened to Afrikaner nationalist Eugene Terre Blanche who encouraged civil war if President F. W. de Klerk handed power to Nelson Mandela's ANC.

Whilst Abacha's Nigeria did not engage in revisionism to the extent of provoking war, one example of a falsified historical memory Abacha perpetrated further highlights his awareness on the uses of history – and his readiness to employ misuse strategically. In June 1997, it transpired Abacha registered Nigeria for a meeting in Turkey to sign an 'Istanbul Declaration' alongside other nations to form a group known as D-8. The D-8 – *Developing 8 Countries Organization for Economic Cooperation* – was ostensibly a group of eight developing countries pledging economic cooperation. To put the Turkey meeting in context, the previous year Turkey's Islamist Prime Minister, Necmettin Erbakan visited Nigeria and the

²⁰⁵ Mamadou Diawara, Bernard Lategan, Jorn Rusen, p.5.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p.2.

formation of D-8 had been one of Erbakan and Abacha's discussion points. However, D-8 was not simply an economic club to uplift developing nations through preferential partnerships and trade agreements. The D-8 was conceived as fundamentally an Islamist club; religion was the commonality that set the basic criteria for admittance. The membership roster was: Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey. Excepting Nigeria, these were countries where variously, Islamism was either the front and centre proponent of governance aims, or in Turkey's case, was becoming an increasingly prominent force nationwide. What was Nigeria doing there?

Nigeria is a secular state, boasting a population of close to 250 million people, with an approximately even split between Muslims and Christians. Yet, Nigeria was not admitted into the D-8 as an honorary member but as a full-fledged participant. The D-8 website today states that regarding the D-8's conception, 'the idea of cooperation among major Muslim developing countries was mooted by Prof. Dr. Necmettin Erbakan, the then Prime Minister of Turkey.'²⁰⁷ Consequently, the submission of Nigeria into the D-8 by the Abacha regime, a unilateral action of bad faith on the Nigerian leader's part, constituted a falsified historical memory. For Nigeria's representation in an Islamic club alongside openly Islamic nations and 'major Muslim developing countries', presents a counterfeit historical narrative; a falsity that distorts Nigeria's past and existential national truth in relation to its cultural and societal realities. Thus, Nigeria's membership of the D-8 alongside others such as Iran and Turkey, presents for Nigeria an alternative reality evoking a nationwide Islamic tradition that never was. The false narrative persists beyond Abacha: Nigeria *remains* a fully-fledged member of D-8 to date. At the group's last biennial meeting in Ankara in 2017 – Covid-19 torpedoed plans for a 2019 gathering – the Nigerian Foreign minister attended, as reported by the Islamic Republic News Agency, as one of the 'foreign

²⁰⁷ 'Brief History of D-8' (n.d), *D-8 Organization For Economic Cooperation* — <http://developing8.org/about-d-8/brief-history-of-d-8/> [Accessed 22 July 2018].

ministers of the eight Islamic developing countries'.²⁰⁸ This historical revisionism perpetrated by Abacha in 1997 was an anti-historical action that substantiated the notion also of an absence of genuine engagement by the regime with the citizens. That there was no consultation prior to Abacha offering up Nigeria to the membership of a global body proved he understood the inauthenticity of his actions and thus proceeded surreptitiously in order to pre-empt any dissent. That Abacha understood the conceptual and symbolic implications of shoehorning Nigeria into an organization bound together by Islamic history – not just Islamic values – was clear, for also there was precedent. In 1986, Abacha's predecessor Gen. Babangida had initiated a similar maneuver by clandestinely submitting Nigeria into OIC (Organisation of Islamic Countries) membership. Falola reported that it was the French News Agency that informed Nigerians of the belated fact of Nigeria's OIC membership.²⁰⁹ Historian Babajimi Faseke reports on the politicking following Babangida's actions:

By the time Babangida left the seat of power on 27 August 1993, the status of Nigeria's membership had been hazy. While, in a bid to satisfy Muslims, Nigeria had not officially withdrawn from the organization, it refused to play an active role or publicize its participation in the OIC so as to placate the Christians.²¹⁰

Nigeria also stopped paying its OIC membership fees. So, Abacha witnessed a dress rehearsal of the ramifications of steamrolling the nation into an unequivocally Islamic organization. In fact, it would be unlikely Abacha was not directly involved in Babangida's actions in 1986, or at the very least confided in. The Abacha regime's own brazen conceit in tampering with the secularity of the Nigerian State in 1997 revealed his ideological leanings. More importantly, it demonstrated his appreciation of the cultural war that may rage within the perimeters of historical narratives – these 'sites of struggle' – as he looked to

²⁰⁸ 'D-8 Summit Opens in Istanbul', 21 October 2017, *Islamic Republic News Agency* - <https://en.irna.ir/service/news> [Accessed 22 July 2018].

²⁰⁹ Toyin, Falola. *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1998) p.94.

²¹⁰ Babajimi Oladipo Faseke, 'Nigeria and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation: A Discourse in Identity, Faith and Development, 1969–2016', Special Issue: Religion and Politics: New Developments Worldwide, 18 January 2019, *MDPI*, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/3/156>.

stomp through where his predecessor stumbled. Abacha's conscious and illegitimate decision to enlist his nation into D-8 without its consent went beyond military stubbornness and underlined his intention to thwart the nation's actual historical narrative in favour of a revisionist version. This episode conjures again the impression of Abacha and his like in imperialist mode. The Western imperialists exercised authoritarian rule and authoritarian rule is of course the defining motor of military juntas; the leap for African coup plotters to morph into indigenous colonizers is a short jump. In fact, the new colonialist tag was also lobbed by Ken Saro-Wiwa to describe Nigerian leaders' rule over the people. Falola reports:

Saro-Wiwa developed the idea of indigenous imperialism, claiming that Nigerian domination of the Ogoni was no different than British rule over Nigeria. Both were two faces of the same type of exploitation. This idea was at the core of his attempts to define what it meant to be Nigerian. For Saro-Wiwa, being Nigerian meant transcending the idea of ethnicity to dominate the country's political scene.²¹¹

Saro-Wiwa's desire to transcend ethnicity and arrive at *being* Nigerian held another significant lesson for the nation's rulers and body politic. Since in Nigeria's tribalistic society citizens were overly attached to their ethnicities to the detriment of a shared experience and national culture, Saro-Wiwa understood that a certain displacement of the tribal self was necessary for the national self to be realised. If *becoming* Nigerian is the destination, then the prior displacement requires citizens to sojourn first in a no-man's land, shorn of ethnicity's familiar garb. Saro-Wiwa's hopes here of realising an authentic national identity evokes Homi Bhabha's counsel on inhabiting 'inbetween' spaces so we may acculturate to our truer selves: 'It is the inbetween space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture ... and by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves.'²¹²

²¹¹ Laura Seay, 'The Complex Life of Ken Saro Wiwa – Interview with Roy Doron and Toyin Falola', *The Washington Post*, 29 July 2016.

²¹² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) pp38-39.

One deplorable charge that emboldened Western imperialism, as discussed, was the notion that Africa had no history until the white man set foot there. In designating Nigeria an Islamic state with its D-8 membership, Abacha sought to erase the existence of the nation's rich Christian heritage and history with a stroke of his pen. As 'victimless crime' is a misnomer, so anti-historical jaunts have consequences. In co-opting false histories, these narratives distort, fragment a nation's *memory*. Secondly, in the potentially volatile arena of religiosity, a mis-step can prove bloody. When Babangida's OIC jaunt was revealed, a group calling themselves 'Christian Ethics in Nigeria' (COECEN), released a public statement:

The development is capable of engineering a religious war and no nation has survived a religious war and remained the same thereafter. We warned in clear terms that all Nigerian Christians within and outside Nigeria shall be mobilized by COECEN to resist at any cost, Nigeria's membership of OIC in any colouration.²¹³

Given Nigeria's continued membership of both OIC and D-8, that mis-step may yet still occur



Fig. 10: Nigerian President Buhari, *2nd left*, next to Turkish President Erdogan, *front centre*, at 2017 D-8 Summit in Turkey.²¹⁴

Postcolonial theory on the issue of identity, especially as attributed to the writings of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said respectively, goes some way in explaining the Abacha D-8 situation. Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* posits the idea of perennial identity 'crisis' burdened upon the colonised long after the

²¹³ Roy C. Amore – 'Withdraw Nigeria from OIC to avert Religious War: Christian Ethics in Nigeria', Issue: Religion and Politics- New Developments Worldwide, 8 May 1998, *The Vanguard Newspaper*, https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/politics [Accessed 22 July 2018].

²¹⁴ **Source:** ©Islamic Republic News Agency, Nov 4, 2018

colonisers have departed.²¹⁵ David Richards in a memorable paraphrasing of Fanon, affirms this psychic aftershock of colonialism by stating 'liberation is not adequate to remove the impact of colonialism and to recapture the sensation of identity'.²¹⁶ Said focussed on the Foucauldian *processes* of power and its relationships by highlighting the language of power— literal and metaphorical – in the relational forms it took as the colonised was subjected to imperial authority. 'While Fanon's contentions for the most part concern the psychoanalytic zone,' Saman Dizayi stated, 'Said connected with political discourse.'²¹⁷ Different routes, same endpoint. For both Fanon and Said, the colonised individual was left compromised to the extent of 'resulting disarray and loss of identity.'²¹⁸ For both, this schism in the self-identity of the colonised is directly linked to the systemic dehistoricization of the colonised populace. Dehistoricization imposes on a people its own violence; a pernicious, if silent violence that in divorcing the nation from its past, leaves the inhabitants marooned in a funk of questioned and questionable identities. If a nation's inhabitants are actively divorced from their history, then there is a gap in that continuum which craves plugging, in order for new visions to be conceived, assembled and inhabited. It is a gap Nigeria struggled to fill since the British left in 1960, which Abacha cynically attempted to with his D-8 Islamic imposition.

If we look further afield from Nigeria momentarily, regarding issues of 'identity crisis' within citizenry, the United States provides an interesting diversion. The conceptual idea of the American Dream has become memorialized within American identity culture and politics; it historically represents a *bonding* route of how citizens may come to identify with country and each other. The concept and articulation of the American Dream is a historical lever that, even during the divisive age of Trumpism, retained a

²¹⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. By Charles Lam Markmann, (New York: Pluto Press, 1986) p.63.

²¹⁶ Saman Abdulqadir Hussein Dizayi, 'Locating Identity Crisis in Postcolonial Theory: Fanon And Said', December 2019, *Researchgate*, Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences 2(1).

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338429345_Locating_Identity_Crisis_in_Postcolonial_Theory_Fanon_And_Said [Accessed 9 February 2020].

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

powerful cultural pull for most groups with its notion of both an existential and future promise. This idea captures a continuum that inhabits the past, present and future cultural American space as it cuts through to both migrants and groups long resident in the United States. Except for one group: Black Americans. This is not to say the American Dream does not theoretically incorporate Black Americans or even that successful Black Americans do not attribute their success to the concept. Many do. Yet, seen through the lens of postcolonial theory, it is no accident that Black Americans as a collective have not always felt invested in the American Dream. Racism has put paid to that. The systemic persecution of Black Americans in the United States from the slavery era, through Jim Crow to present-day inequality, has pushed Black Americans to the distressed margins of American identity. It is to that well-known *alternative* American dream – Martin Luther King’s – that Black Americans find succor. In their quest for a defined and valued identity, King’s 1963 Lincoln Memorial address unfortunately still has an enduring relevance for Black Americans: ‘One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.’²¹⁹ Sounds like colonialism.

We may recall again J.M. Coetzee’s pronouncement of ‘diasporic exile.’ Of wanderers exiled from their land and themselves. It is therefore unsurprising that in the United States, the leading market for DNA ancestry testing is driven by Black Americans; seeking to at least solve the conundrum of their genetic identity.²²⁰ The irony is that these black Americans are often led to countries like Nigeria where the schisms of identity remain as fractured, fragmented and urgent. In the absence of a credible ‘Nigerian Dream’ from since the British created Nigeria, regimes like Abacha’s suppressed the past and proffered no new imaginings for citizens to hinge any kind of future to. Bad faith actions like the D-8 membership

²¹⁹ Top 100 Speeches: Martin Luther King ‘I Have A Dream’ (n.d), *American Rhetoric*, <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.htm> [Accessed 11 May 2018].

²²⁰ ‘Blacks using DNA testing to trace roots from Africa’ (New York Times), 26 July 2005, *East Bay Times*, <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2005/07/26/blacks-using-dna-testing-to-trace-roots-from-africa/> [Accessed 19 August 2017].

served only, by disorienting the historical narrative of the nation, to disorient the citizens in their understanding of what makes a Nigerian.

To summarize, this chapter addressed and deconstructed the twin issues of *Memory* and *Fragmentation* as titled in my thesis question. Memory was subsumed into historical parameters and 'sites of struggle' identified, with colonialism qualifying both as a site and root of the fragmentary realities of postcolonial states. This chapter cited the overlooked state of Nigeria's museums, referencing the funding freeze during the Abacha regime's entirety. This further consolidated the supposition of the Abacha regime's cultivation of anti-historical spaces nationally. On fragmentation, it was demonstrated that despite Nigeria's delicate multi-ethnic and Islamic-Christian duality, the Abacha regime conspired to enlist Nigeria into an Islamic organization without the consent of the citizenry. This episode exhibited historical revisionism on the regime's part and an anti-historical repudiation that cursorily erased Nigerian Christian culture (as well as animist cultural heritage and secularism) from view. In drawing on postcolonial theories founded on the work of Edward Said and Franz Fanon, this chapter addressed the idea of schisms in the self-identity of the colonized due to the systemic dehistoricization of the colonized populace. This chapter thus concludes that the Abacha regime, in imposing a fictitious narrative of Islamism upon the entire nation, committed a willful 'dehistoricization' in this its anti-historical gesture of false representation.

CHAPTER V

Forgetting Biafra: The 'Memory Lapse' of a Nation

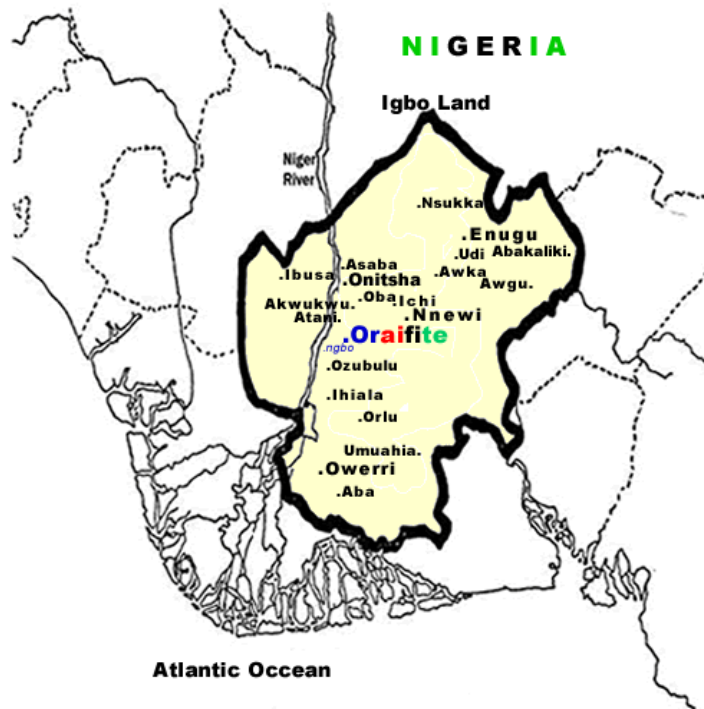
Fig.11. 'Requiem for Biafra' by Ralph Steadman.²²¹



²²¹ Source: Scanlan's Monthly, March 1970.

'History is written by victors.' – **Unknown**

Fig.12: Map of Biafra



Biafra: 'No victor, no vanquished'

The famous quote which states that in the aftermath of war 'History is written by victors' – (attributed to Winston Churchill but of unknown provenance) - is understood to mean a number of things. Firstly, it informs that the victors' account is the one that will most likely prevail as *the* definitive history. Secondly, it suggests the victors and their representatives will be neither slow nor miserly in broadcasting these accounts. Finally, there is an expectation victors will engage in hyperbole in some accounts and revisionism in others.

The Vietnam War and the Nigeria-Biafra War raged simultaneously, with both capturing the public's imagination. That the Nigerian government won the civil war in 1970, prevailing over the secessionist forces of the so-called Biafra Republic, is not in doubt; what came next represented a surprising anomaly to the usual post-war reporting. Rather than the crowing of victors or a deluge of accounts recounting Nigerian Forces' triumph, there was relative silence. It was almost two decades later in the late 1980s, that it became fashionable to account from the victors' perspective. Even so, by then accounts resembled the memoir-type, vanity-style projects of soldiers-turned-politicians - flogging tales of personal heroism with an eye on a political career.

Incorporated in the expectation that victors' accounts will engage in hyperbole and revisionism, is a tacit understanding that historical accounts will possess a vital propagandist value. So: why would a nation vexed by tribal and religious divisions, riven by the worst African civil war to that point, eschew the propagandist vehicle that might also dissuade a repeat of war? Falola highlights not only this odd abdication of reporting but also an odder reversal:

In most wars, it is the victors who write triumphalist accounts of war. In one of the anomalies of Nigeria, it is the Igbo, who lost the Civil War, who have written the most about it, turning the Biafran secession (a failed

political move) into a history of victimization. This narrative of victimization is the leading political discourse in Eastern Nigeria.²²²

An exploration at this juncture of the Nigerian-Biafra civil war helps to advance this thesis in a number of ways. The Nigeria-Biafra civil war constitutes the proverbial ghost in the Frankenstein machine of Nigerian nationhood. Following the experiment of British colonialism and invention of Nigeria, the civil war represented the first major test to the British experiment. That the Nigerian authorities won the war did not constitute resolution since contributing grievances – the tribal discord, resentment at apparent British favoritism for one tribe over another – endures to date. Thus, the Nigeria-Biafra civil war represents the explosive collision of two willful histories: The British colonialist legacy and the pre-colonial autonomies of tribes (as earlier noted Ikime referred to tribes as *nations*); neither of which histories have been reconciled into the fabric of modern Nigeria. These apparently irreconcilable forces have ensured Biafra haunts the national landscape and enshadows all historiography that pertains to the nation. Subsequently, all regimes in Nigeria since that fateful Gowon regime of 1967-1975 have been subject to the Biafran dilemma and to some degree operated within the confines of this outstanding question of Nigerian nationhood. In that respect, the Abacha regime is no different from previous governments. A closer look at the Nigeria-Biafra civil war helps contextualize the motive and trajectory regimes such as Abacha's assumed regarding their interrelation with and interpretation of history - given that these regimes perceived history, to some extent, through the prism of the Biafra failed secession.

The terms of cessation of hostilities in the Nigeria-Biafra civil war goes some way in explaining the relative post-war silence regarding the victors' accounts. General Gowon famously declared at the war's end that there were 'no victors, no vanquished' - Biafra had surrendered; 3 million dead; mostly

²²² Toyin Falola and Ezekwem Ogechukwu, *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*, (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2016) p.72.

civilians.²²³ Conscious of ethnic tensions deemed an existential threat to the Nigerian nation, which had coalesced in the civil war as 'Igbos vs the rest', Gowon wisely sought a conciliatory stance. On paper his was a magnanimous gesture aimed at underplaying tensions of the past and pre-empting future strain. This disingenuous and inspired proclamation from Gowon of a stalemate of sorts, flattered the idea of a matured, postwar national unity devoid of former rancor. The reality was different. The Igbos nationwide were largely vilified for their part in the war and cast as national villains. For despite the 'no victor, no vanquished' stance adopted by the military government, Igbos found their status diminished following the war. American Ethnomusicologist Charles Keil traveling in Nigeria at the time noted that Igbos who ran away during the pogroms and war 'returned to find their positions had been taken over... this reasoning was also extended to Igbo-owned properties and houses. The Nigerian Government justified this by terming such properties abandoned. This, however, led to a feeling of injustice.'²²⁴

Gowon's proclamation in spirit at least, was a forerunner of the South African Truth and Reconciliation archetype, where focus is not on condemnation but resolution. However, Gowon's statement as actioned in the public realm ultimately lacked follow-through conviction, thus offering lip service to the notion of a postwar peace of equals. Gowon cannot be faulted for his efforts to enlist a practical scheme, which theoretically *could* foster a more equitable postwar society. As Adewunmi Falode and Bolarinwa Olusegun reported:

In its bid to transform post-civil war Nigeria into a functional, cohesive and viable polity, the state made use of the conceptual terminology known as the 3Rs. The 3Rs simply means reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction.²²⁵

²²³ According to Laurie Wiseberg in 1975, statistical data quoted for civilian deaths ranged from '500,000 to a high of 6 million.' The 'correct' figure may never be known, though the 3 million figure alighted on is considered the most commonly applied 'guestimate' by historians and observers.

²²⁴ Charles Keil, 'Persecution of Igbo', (n.d)- *The Biafra Book*, <https://thebiafrabook.blogspot.com/2016/04/the-nigerian-biafran-war-6-july-1967-15.html> [Accessed 20 July 2019].

²²⁵ Adewunmi J. Falode, & Bolarinwa J. Olusegun,— 'A Reconstructor and Nation-BUILDER: General Yakubu Gowon and Socio-Political Development in Nigeria, 1966-1975', April 2019, SSRN Electronic Journal 40 (3-4):97-114, *Researchgate*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335004354_A_Reconstructor_and_NationBuilder_General_Yakubu_Gowon_and

Gowon's nine-point programs, adopted from the Conference on National Reconstruction and Development held at University of Ibadan from 24 to 29 March, 1969, included reorganization of the armed forces and the implementation of the National Development Plan and repair of the damage and neglect of war. Thus, to dismiss Gowon's propositions as insincere or a pipedream may be harsh. In fact, many praised Gowon for his efforts. Historian Obaro Ikime stated:

So we fought our civil war and followed it with a period of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction... the ability of the Federal Government to finance the war, as well as such success as was achieved in rehabilitation and reconstruction, was due largely to increased revenue brought in by the oil boom...Yakubu Gowon genuinely endeavored to re-integrate the Igbo into the federation with laudable success.²²⁶

Yet, in retrospect, the reality of how Igbos were treated postwar emphasizes the absence of a timely, critical postwar chronicling of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, highlighting the need to situate Biafra within the cultural history of the nation's historiography. Ikime again reported in 2006 that though 'Gowon's greatest achievements' was the purported 're-integration of the Igbo into the federal services', he conceded that 'as the Igbo returned, however, they were seen by their co-public servants as unwelcome competitors'.²²⁷ This marginalization was not acknowledged or addressed in any formal way in the years following the war. Such a silence in Nigeria's postwar narrative could only be possible if the government was culpable in suppressing the history from being fully told. This would explain largely the dearth also of victors' accounts. Toyin Falola and Ogechukwu Ezekwem disclose that 'in Nigeria, the government controlled the organization of the civil war records, thereby curtailing the kinds of conversations in which the society could engage. Books that confronted issues surrounding the war were discouraged during the country's long military regimes.'²²⁸ Falola and Ezekwem go on to note that most factual books on the civil war were published abroad whilst fictional accounts found publication at home. Ultimately

[Socio-Political Development in Nigeria 1966-1975/link/5d49e4b592851cd046a6b0d3/download](#) [Accessed September 2019].

²²⁶ Obaro Ikime, *History, The Historian and The Nation: The Voice of a Nigerian Historian* (Ibadan: Oluseyi Press, 2006) p.132.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Toyin Falola and Ezekwem Ogechukwu (ed.s), *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2016) p.41.

Falola and Ezekwem conclude that ‘the condition of the archives and the government’s treatment of the civil war affected the nature of publications within Nigeria.’²²⁹

There are points of note in Falola *et al*’s observations. The first is confirmation that the government in its intransigence actively restricted civil war records in order to truncate Nigeria-Biafra civil war discourse; such that Nigeria-Biafra civil war literature sought outlet outside Nigeria’s shores. The second underscores the recurring complicity of silence in suppressing Nigeria-Biafra civil war history which successive regimes engaged in – regimes in which Gen. Abacha held instrumental positions, culminating with Abacha’s own 1993-98 government. The third accentuates the government’s fear of an incisive *factual* civil war history, in highlighting that *fictional* accounts did not elicit the same scrutiny as factual accounts.

Dusty Archives: Governmental obstruction and responsibility

In representing a barrier between the people and access to civil war information, the Gowon government contravened Political Theorist Antonio Gramsci’s declarations on the concept of *hegemony* and government’s responsibilities thereof. Edlyne Anugwom noted on Gramsci’s concept:

The idea of hegemony is captured in his [Gramsci’s] analysis of the relation between the state and civil society, with particular focus on the mechanisms through which the ruling class in control of the state secures the consent of the ruled. This quest for consent is facilitated through two means used by the ruling class namely leadership and education.²³⁰

When Gowon spoke of ‘no victors, no vanquished’, he was invoking the concept of hegemony; he was addressing the Nigerian nation as *one* hegemonic group – neither as Christians or Muslims, southerners or northerners. His pithy peace declaration also comprised an appeal to the nation for consent to rule or at the very least an appeal for the renewal of a social contract between rulers and the ruled. This appeal

²²⁹ Toyin Falola and Ezekwem Ogechukwu (ed.s), *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2016) p.41.

²³⁰ Edlyne Eze Anugwom, *From Biafra to the Niger Delta Conflict – Memory, Ethnicity and the State in Nigeria*, (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2019) p.32.

for consent and/or renewal of social contract between rulers and the ruled takes on greater significance in 1970 Nigeria when we recall that despite being on the winning side, Gowon's government was illegitimate: it was an unconstitutional military regime that assumed power forcibly in 1966 via the gun. The power of the hegemonic appeal for consent to rule cannot be underestimated: in the summer of 2004, a rookie US Senator from Chicago with a decidedly African-sounding name that accentuated the enigma of him, was chosen to give a keynote address at the Democratic National Convention. It was a powerful speech, many agreed. When the rookie senator astounded many by becoming the President of the United States a mere four years later, political theorists returned not just to the 2004 speech as the moment Barack Obama was anointed but to a specific portion that stated 'it's what allows us to pursue our individual dreams, yet still come together as a single American family. "E pluribus unum." Out of many, one.'²³¹

Out of the many, *one*. Obama spoke to the hegemonic interests of an American nation engaged in a divisive cultural-tribal war between liberalism and conservatism. The Nigeria of 1970, just a decade after independence from British rule and following a devastating war, came with heightened challenges. Gowon's post-war legitimacy would be further suspect because he received help in the war effort from the former colonial British power. This complicated Gowon's authority in speaking to the nation's hegemonic interests. For what if Gowon was but a lackey of former colonial powers?

Having extricated themselves from British subjugation and in search of an overarching identity postwar, history and the narratives of national memory should have mattered supremely in 1970 Nigeria. During the war, the appeal to unity was conveyed in the federal slogan '*To keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done*'.²³² Subsequently, despite the practical assignment of the 3Rs, an oversight on the part of

²³¹ 'Barack Obama's Keynote Address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention' (Transcript), 27 July 27 2004, *PBS NEWS Hour*, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/barack-obamas-keynote-address-at-the-2004-democratic-national-convention/> [Accessed June 2019].

²³² Inscription printed on propaganda posters distributed through the country.

Gowon was to consider a perfunctory motif of 'no vanquished, no victors' as sufficient closure to the issue of Nigeria's reconciliation. Gowon failed to appreciate the need for a historic and *historical* undertaking as a catalyst for authentic closure. This undertaking might have facilitated, for example, a postwar openness affording interested agencies access to governmental war archives. Instead, the non-cooperation that Falola *et al* refer to represents a shutting down – which translates as a suppression of the history and consequently a suppression of the *truth* of the Biafra war. Wole Soyinka underlined this obstructive recoil from reality:

There are of course those dissenting biographers and historians, the Establishment record-keepers who insist on writing and speaking of Biafra in inverted commas, in a coy, sanctimonious denial of a reality... to create a lacuna in history that dogs our conscience and collective memory; every day still reminds us that the factors that led to Biafra neither were ephemeral nor can be held to be permanently exorcised.²³³

These suppressions and denials that Falola and Soyinka reference highlight the shortsightedness of successive Nigerian governments. It also symbolizes the governments' inability to deal honestly with the history and its people. It is instructive that 33 years after the civil war ended, the Abacha regime upon assuming power passed a series of decrees that criminalized open dialogue of the civil war.²³⁴ One of these decrees – The *Treason and Treasonable Offences Decree, No.29, 1993* – was passed on the grounds that any discussion and debate on Biafra was tantamount to secessionist declarations and thus a threat to national security. Transgressors of Decree No. 29 were liable to punishment by hanging or firing squad. In such decrees, beyond claims of offsetting potential national security threats, the warning against any historical exploration of Biafra or civil war history is explicit. Decree No. 29 exhibits overtly the Abacha regime's attitude to history and its scholarship – and betrays the regime's conviction that

²³³ Wole Soyinka, *The open sore of a continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.32.

²³⁴ 'Treason and Treasonable Offences Decree, No.29 (1993)', which amongst other things provided for 'a sentence of death to be imposed upon any person who utters any word, displays anything or publishes any material which is capable of breaking up Nigeria.'

anti-historical gestures are necessary, sometimes explicitly, to hijack a historical openness deemed antithetical to governance.

On archives and openness, Falola has oft-noted not just the lack of access to governmental records but also the conditions of the archives. This joint observation makes a subtle distinction between two discrete things, even if overlaps exist. The first point underlines governmental obstruction to the archives as a willful partisan strategy; one which supports my anti-historical standpoint. For example, Falola notes from colonial times in Nigeria, ‘government documents of the era that could teach future generations about their past, were documented and later housed in a facility called the Archives.’²³⁵ Falola observes that though these sites were established ‘for historical preservation and ostensibly to see the emergent state engage this trove of data as part of a conscious nation building process ... less than three decades after independence, the management of this structure became one of the country’s greatest challenges to historical research.’²³⁶ Falola concedes the British cherry-picked how and what they archived, often neglecting the nation’s authentic history in its imperial re-telling – still, he strikingly contrasts the colonial government who set up these archives with successive Nigerian governments:

If historical study and the country’s archives were neglected under colonial rule, one could assume that it was meant to hide the skeletons in their cupboard. However, what explains this neglect in the current context? The poor planning and porous documentation culture of the postindependence state is in sync with the colonial mentality, entrenching a feeling of state ownership by the elites.’²³⁷

Max Siollun goes further stating ‘it is often said that history is written by victors. In many cases in Nigeria, history is not written at all.’²³⁸ Siollun blames ‘a combination of official reluctance to divulge combustible past events ... and the determination of the dramatis personae to avoid having their

²³⁵ Toyin Falola, *Understanding Modern Nigeria – Ethnicity, Democracy, and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) p.67.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics, and Violence: Nigeria’s Military Coup Culture, 1966-1976* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009), p. 2.

misdeeds exposed,' concluding that much 'Nigerian post-independence history is in many places a collection of folk tales and fables.'²³⁹ Thus, the anti-historical bent of the colonialists appears even preferable to that of the indigenous governments whose strategic neglect of the archives is compounded by chaotic mismanagement. At least the colonialists were organized.

The second point referencing the deplorable condition of the archives, is a circuitous issue that references the issue of under-resourcing and mirrors the under-funding and neglect of Nigerian universities as earlier discussed. So neglected and disregarded were the archives years after independence, that in 1984, the Historical Society of Nigeria wrote to the government's Minister of Education: 'The national committees on the Archives has not met for over ten years. As of the time of this Memorandum there still exists no effective policy-making body for our National Archives outside whatever ministry it is located.'²⁴⁰ The consequences of under-resourcing and neglect of the archives consolidated, encouraged and condoned an anti-historical culture more widely, whilst at source, the archives necessarily presented as shabby, inconsequential and inaccessible.

Falola implied he had been privy to some access and the state of the archives he encountered was underwhelming. Falola's words recalled my field trip to Northern Nigeria and visits to university History Departments there. I found much of the physical archives I perused threadbare; reliable sources conveyed that the archives in the south were in a comparable state. In most cases, as digitization of these archives had not occurred, it seemed near impossible for a digital salvage given the advanced deterioration. Where some exonerating reasons existed for the state of archives in Nigerian universities (mostly concerning funding), government archives had no such defense. Carole Steedman, in her seminal work *Dust* speaks of 'a particular kind of archive, instituted by state ... these are the archives

²³⁹ Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, 1966-1976*, (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009) p.2.

²⁴⁰ Historical Society of Nigeria, memorandum presented to the Hon. Minister of Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, September 10, 1984.

used by social and cultural historians like myself.’²⁴¹ Steedman is speaking of particular processes and events peculiar only to the state as principal actor and pre-eminent archivist. *Processes*, for example, such as the decolonizing progression from occupation to self-determination. Of *events*, Steedman is alluding to occurrences and trials that include war. When governments withhold access to such archives not ordinarily deemed of national security concerns – or allow archives which form intrinsic parts of the country’s identity to fall into dusty unusable states, it reflects a disdain for history and a dereliction of governmental duty and responsibility.

In 1992, the year before Abacha took office, the Babangida government promulgated the 1992 *National Archives Decree No. 30*:

There is hereby established a Federal Department to be called the National Archives of Nigeria (in this Decree referred to as "the National Archives") which shall be entrusted with the permanent custody, care and control of all archives of the Federal Government and of such other archives or historical records as may be required, from time to time, pursuant to this Decree.²⁴²

The critical words in the framing of that decree are the words ‘of such other archives or historical records as may be required.’ This proviso paved the way for Abacha’s Decree 29, even if Decree 29 did not manifestly relate to archives. Both decrees were designed to constrict and subjugate history. Babangida’s Decree 30, revealingly once more, survived not just Abacha’s tenure but beyond - through consecutive civilian governments to the present day where current Nigerian law regarding archives remains an identifiable derivative of the 1992 decree. This fact, of a military diktat surviving civilian rule mostly unaltered, highlights the entrenched reality of an anti-historical framework within the governmental apparatus. Of the 1992 decree’s present incarnation, Samaila Suleiman had this to say:

²⁴¹ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2001) p.ix.

²⁴² ‘National Archives Decree No. 30, 1992’ (n.d.) – *Right2Info*, www.right2info.org [Accessed 12 October 2019].

The current National Archives Act, which originated from the 1992 National Archives Decree, retains all the legislation regarding secrecy, which suggests that the records were put at the “absolute discretion” of the archivist who could restrict access to certain documents. In practice, however, it was recognized that strict adherence to principles will hamper the growth of scholarship. Therefore, restriction was compromised with regards to documents with the “traditional archival maturity” of fifty years; records of academic nature such as Intelligence, Assessments, and Annual Reports; Judicial Records; and other records for which the permission of the depositors is obtained.²⁴³

Only in its present incarnation as the National Archives Act was there recognition that previous strictures potentially hampered scholarship. A lack of openness regarding state archives is not, of course, something that only happens in Nigeria. As Stanford observes, ‘all governments, not only dictatorships, are reluctant to make their archives available to the historian. As a result, important happenings are concealed from public knowledge.’²⁴⁴ In Nigeria, this lack of openness was perhaps more notably perpetual, intransigent and far-reaching.

So: without openness, no closure. Anugwom refers to the intransigence of Nigerian governments concerning archives as ‘non-systematic closure’,²⁴⁵ whose failure to deal actively with the civil war’s history he likens to a ‘memory lapse’.²⁴⁶ We understand from the canons of psychology and psychotherapy that traumatic memories and experiences once suppressed often lead to debilitating psychological and other post-traumatic stresses or dissociative disorders. Fanon, a psychiatrist by training, spoke of these as postcolonial psychic disorders. Anugwom elucidates by stating these repressed histories and memories provide ‘gateways to other social conflicts and dissensions in the socio-geographical region of the erstwhile Biafra Republic’.²⁴⁷ These dissensions from the past and evident in new Biafra self-determination campaigns such as those led by Nnamdi Kanu now convulse the

²⁴³ Samaila Suleiman ‘The Nigerian History Machine’, in Michael J. Kelly and Arthur Rose, *Theories of History-History Read across the Humanities* (London: Bloomsbury Academic 2018) p.132.

²⁴⁴ Stanford, p.164.

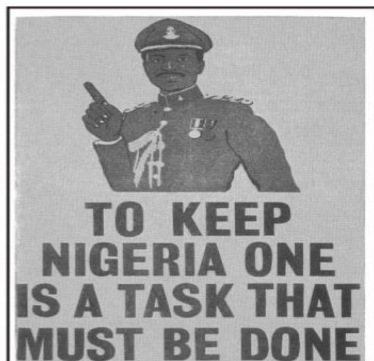
²⁴⁵ Edlyne Eze Anugwom, *From Biafra to the Niger Delta Conflict – Memory, Ethnicity and the State in Nigeria*, (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2019) p.32.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Edlyne Eze Anugwom, *From Biafra to the Niger Delta Conflict*, p.32.

whole Nigerian body - not just at the site of the former Biafra.²⁴⁸ To the extent that they convulse from *without* to where Igbos in the Diaspora have re-globalized the discourse surrounding the Biafra question.

Fig.13. Nigerian Wartime Propaganda Poster²⁴⁹



History as Frameworks of Collective Memory

History, like a cake with layered flavors, can be an assortment of things. History can even, in modernity, be entertainment. But in some instances the perimeters shrink; the indices contract so that history can be unequivocally *one* thing. Regarding Nigeria's Biafra question, history is unequivocally *memory*. Philosopher and Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs developed the ideas of collective and social memory as a central aspect of progressive citizenship and arguably his most important contribution was the idea of collective memory being crucial to conflict analysis and resolution. Halbwachs put forth that memory is an all-pervasive and formative construct, stating 'it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories.'²⁵⁰

If as Halbwachs argues that the engagement of collective memory is crucial to conflict analysis and resolution, then suppression of Biafra memory by Gowon and subsequent governments' serves only to

²⁴⁸ Nnamdi Kanu heads *The Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB)*, one of several groups seeking to revive the republic of Biafra.

²⁴⁹ Source: Omobolanle Akinniyi, 'Advancing while Negotiating: A Study of Nigerian Wartime Diplomacy, 1967-1970' – Jan 2016, *Researchgate*, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/figured-male-portrait-presents-an-idealised-military-pose-with-an-alert-victory-assured_fig1_316915930.

²⁵⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by L. A. Coser. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) p.38.

aggravate and birth future problems. This brings us again to the question of the authorities' persistence in holding the Biafra memory captive. Another reason the Gowon government eschewed any proper engagement of Biafra civil war history may have been rooted in an unwillingness to delve into the social-historical narrative of the Igbo peoples' political foundations. It has remained an inconvenient truth in the annals of Nigerian socio-political thought, that Igbos boast a deep-rooted legacy as convicted progenitors of democratic tradition. Anugwom referred to the Igbos as 'historical resisters of tyranny.'²⁵¹ Anugwom further noted:

The Igbo worldview and sociocultural norms are anchored on the twin pillars of individualism and egalitarianism. A good knowledge of social and religious history of the Igbo would reveal that critical elements of the Igbo worldview do not easily lend themselves to any form of subjugation, unfettered and unquestioned loyalty to any institution or authority.²⁵²

During the transatlantic slave trade, slaves of Igbo descent were known to be the most rebellious. During the colonial period, the British reported their dislike for the Igbos due to their 'argumentativeness'.²⁵³ Writer Langston Hughes once observed 'the Igbo looks proud because he is bred in a free atmosphere where everyone is equal. He hates to depend on anyone for his life's need. He is strong and able to work or fight. He is well formed. He is generally happy in his society where no ruler overrides his conscience.'²⁵⁴

Any historical re-hashing of the Igbos' attitude towards the British colonialists was a development the Gowon regime would have been desperate to stifle. Gowon's government could conclude that explorations of civil war history and Igbo heritage by extension might infuse the Biafran premise with renewed validity. Such explorations would invite deliberation on the fact that of all the tribal blocs

²⁵¹ Edlyne Eze Anugwom, *From Biafra to the Niger Delta Conflict – Memory, Ethnicity and the State in Nigeria* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2019) p.135.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Dr. Leonard Madu, 'The Igbo People Of Nigeria – Jews of Africa?' 30 April 2016, *Black Westchester Magazine* - <http://www.blackwestchester.com/jews-of-africa/> [Accessed 23 August 2017].

²⁵⁴ Emeka Ugwounye, 'Igbo Culture And Tradition – Igbo people should start writing their history' 27 October 2016, *Olivernwokedi*, <https://olivernwokedi.wordpress.com/2016/10/>.

within what became Nigeria, the Igbos resisted colonial conquest most assiduously. Falola *et al* explain, however, that though the Igbos employed violent resistance against the colonialists, other factors determined why Igbos kept the colonizers at bay where others capitulated:

The Igbo adopted violence, as in the Ekumeku Movement, which Don. C. Ohadike has examined. Yet one aspect of the conquest of Nigeria unique to Igboland was the brief time it took to put the entire region under colonial domination. Here, the importance of geography and political organisation needs to be emphasised. Unlike the coastal states, which fell quickly to the superior naval power of the British, the conquest of hinterland peoples like the Igbo required elaborate military campaigns. More important, the fact that the Igbo had not developed a centralized state like the Sokoto Caliphate or the Benin Empire made the conquest of the region a far more difficult task.²⁵⁵

Still, putting aside Igboland's fortuitous geography, the retold fact of the Igbos' colonial-era resistance might have struck a populist note in the Biafran aftermath. Such accounts would illustrate the Igbos' apparent wisdom in their non-centralised socio-political arrangements; arrangements simultaneously integrated and devolved such that British authorities had difficulty penetrating. As A.E. Afigbo noted on both the geographical point and the Igbos' non-centralised politics, 'there was no single authority whose defeat would place all Igboland at the feet of the alien conqueror. Every bit of territory therefore had to be fought for... and was very irritating to the British.'²⁵⁶

Consequently, the last thing Gowon's authoritarian regime desired was re-highlighting the Igbos' long pedigree in anti-authoritarian resistance. Any comprehensive histories of the war could not circumvent the truth of the Igbos' ancient political traditions rooted in identifiably democratic structures – and these histories would risk re-stoking the fire that the Biafra surrender had just extinguished. The Gowon regime was loath to offer the defeated Igbos a revivalist, underdog platform potentially reframed as seeking emancipation from Gowon's despotic rule. It was with similar sentiment that Abacha three

²⁵⁵ Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History*, (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010), p.256.

²⁵⁶ A.E. Afigbo, 'Pattern of Igbo Resistance to British Conquest' (n.d), pt.1, *Tarikh* 15 (1973) 23, *Africabib.org*, <https://www.africabib.org/rec.php?RID=189532939> [Accessed 18 August 2018].

decades later promulgated his anti-Biafra decrees – when in his imagination the embers of Biafra was re-kindled by the Ogoniland agitation, which had stirred concurrently since the injustice of the June 12 Election annulment.

A further reason for the Gowon government stance regarding historical appraisal of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war was acute sensitivity to the ethnic and tribal fault lines that ran through Nigeria. Though the Nigeria-Biafra civil war was the first civil war of the entity called 'Nigeria', precedents of fratricidal conflict existed within tribal groups prior to the British amalgamation. The most noteworthy of these conflicts are the Yoruba Civil Wars (1700 – 1850) and the Holy War of Usman Dan Fodio (1804 -1808). Of the Yoruba civil wars, Michael Crowder writes:

The dynamic collapse of the authority of the Alafin of Oyo over his provincial kings and tributary states at the beginning of the nineteenth century was touched off by the revolt of Afonja, in Ilorin, aided by the Fulani and resulted in civil wars that were to last throughout the century.²⁵⁷

To note: the long drawn out conflict of over 100 years highlights the fractious and inherently factional tribal lines that existed even within the seemingly heterogeneous Yoruba. Of note too is the meddling of the Fulani in the Yoruba civil wars, which foreshadows the inter-tribal contentions of the latter colonial and independent Nigeria. Also, though Dan Fodio's Holy War lasted a considerably shorter time than the Yoruba civil wars, both wars exemplify internecine struggles that challenge each group's apparent homogeneity. Crowder speaks of Usman dan Fodio's Holy war, especially against Yunfa, King of Gobir, as 'not really that between believer and infidel, even though the Fulani liked to depict Yunfa as an unbeliever, but between radical reformer and a conservative'.²⁵⁸ In other words, Islam was already sufficiently established in the region but was employed still as a pretext to push dan Fodio's radicalised agenda. Beyond dan Fodio's clear power play, these wars underpin the fragility of pre-colonial 'Nigerian' blocs prior to amalgamation. Consequently, a seemingly homogeneous Hausaland, like an ostensibly

²⁵⁷ Michael Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1962) p.96.

²⁵⁸ Crowder, p102.

integrated Yorubaland, proved more fragmented than supposed. It could be argued that just as the notion of Nigerian nationalism was lacking prior to the Nigeria experiment, the sense of kinship amongst discrete ethnic groups may have been overstated. Arguably too, the glue of nationalism post-1960, with the zeal of new converts grappling with the imposition of a novel and grander chauvinism, may have kindled in these groups an insular re-imagining of their indigenous bonds. Certainly, this ensued with the larger groups in the new Nigeria, such as the Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. These groups politicised their tribal bloc by refashioning for themselves a new parochialism, which elevated their groupings to idealised versions of homogeneity.

Whilst history does not always repeat, it may always remind. The pre-colonial civil wars served as reminders of the fragility of those discrete tribal blocs that constituted the Nigerian state. Ironically, in reaching for one's place and membership within the newly enlarged national space post-independence, contribution came allotted via reaffirmation first through one's tribal grouping. In other words, those discrete groups are encouraged in their *exceptionalism* and it is through their exceptionalisms that they arrive at their national place. Superficially, this local re-affirmation in the face of a larger national reality helps past intra-tribal dissonances recede into misunderstandings; like splits in a family giving way to petty squabbling.

Separate Lives: Exceptionalism vs Homogeneity

For the Gowon government, any thorough examination of the history of the Nigeria-Biafra War necessitated as mentioned, contemplation of Igbo heritage prior to the 1914 amalgamation of Nigeria. This examination would yield a picture of Igbo exceptionalism. Contemplating Igbo exceptionalism, or any other tribe's exceptionalism in an ethnic conglomeration such as Nigeria is a problematic consideration. *Frames* of exceptionalism abound naturally within all ethno-homogenous groups, as it does within the various tribes indigenous to Nigeria. This is what delineates the *Ijaw* peoples from the

Uhrobo, the *Hausa* from the *Tiv*. On one level, these differences are celebrated across communities where exceptionalisms can be appreciated, at times, in communal jest. An example is the widespread acknowledgement of the Igbo's perceived proficiency in business such that Igbo are deemed nationwide as the 'Jews of Nigeria'. At governmental level where policy shapes the identity narrative and determines national reality, tribal exceptionalisms are enfolded into a more indistinct whole; a whole that speaks to the notion of an *integrated* national character. Thus, any meaningful histories of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war in its dualistic configuration, must invite scrutiny of a Biafra *othered* from the Nigerian condition. This otherness of Biafra would inescapably highlight Igbo exceptionalism vis-à-vis the so-called national character. Even a peripheral exploration of the Igbo that fails to venture pre-1914 and alights instead on the latter colonial period, would yet find evidence of Igbo exceptionalism in their quest for autonomy. And though Igbo may have been susceptible to Christian conversion as colonial Western education spread – their innate pull towards identity, underpinned by an egalitarian structuring within their indigenous political institutions, sparked a sense of confederation which resembled patriotism. As Falola *et al* put it, 'unlike the Yoruba or Hausa-Fulani, the Igbo did not evolve large centralized kingdoms; ideas of pan-Igbo identity spread during the colonial period.'²⁵⁹

Thus, when the Igbo seemed most vulnerable to Western assimilation via religious conversions, a socio-political reaffirming took place which confirmed their inherently embedded autonomous ideals – as well as a tribal reaffirming of the *group* identity as manifested in 'pan-Igbo' activity. If the two outcomes – Igbo social structuring and their pan-Igbo pursuits were not mutually exclusive but actually co-dependent on the other, then this might call into question the workability of the grand integrated objective the authorities wished for project Nigeria.

²⁵⁹ Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History*, (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010), p.256.

This question of nationhood and allegiance to *one Nigeria*, which exercises any question on secession, throws up a post-1914 colonialist legacy that Gowon's government - and the Northern Nigerian elite - preferred not to revisit. This relates to the widely perceived favouritism of 1939 with which the British bequeathed an uneven Nigeria tilted in the north's advantage. Again, such a fundamental south/north grievance accounts partly for why subsequent military regimes led by northerners such as Abacha have pointedly eschewed any historical reckoning in relation to the nation's origins. In light of perceived imbalance of the British construction of Nigeria to advantage the north, when governments consequently beseech the nation to come together for *one Nigeria*, would-be secessionists may retort: whose Nigeria?

As Ikime noted regarding this particular colonialist legacy, 'in 1939 the British broke the Southern Nigeria of 1914 into two – Western Nigeria and Eastern Nigeria, arguing that the heterogeneous nature of the south justified such a division. Yet the North which was not only much larger but also much more heterogeneous in ethnic composition was left intact.'²⁶⁰ Ikime concludes that 'the British action of 1939 killed the idea of the South as a single political entity. The East and West were to become fierce competitors in national politics, a situation which the North exploited to great advantage in the politics of decolonisation and of the years 1960-67.'²⁶¹

This perceived inequity in Nigeria's foundation, which applied to the entire southern bloc and thus to the multiplicity of tribes therein, would further fuel exceptionalism narratives. In the case of Biafra and the Igbos, the exceptionalism narrative took on a more ambitious immediacy following oil discovery in Igboland. Who could say if within jealousies attendant to the competitive tribal space, a spotlight on Igbo exceptionalism may not provoke Yoruba or Hausa voices to proclaim their own feverish

²⁶⁰ Obaro Ikime, *History, The Historian and The Nation: The Voice of a Nigerian Historian* (Ibadan: Oluseyi Press, 2006) p.89.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

declarations of uniqueness? To the degree too, perhaps, where secessionist prattle – that high fever of the exceptionalism syndrome – proves to be an affliction not only Igbo are susceptible to? Falola informs us that outbursts of secessionist demands is something that has occurred often in Nigeria - driven mostly, but not exclusively, by the big three tribes and often in bad faith. As Falola notes:

Although there are several hundred ethnic groups in the country, only three have become politically dominant – the Yoruba, the Igbo, and the Hausa-Fulani. The emergence of these three is tied to the use of history, the manipulation of traditions, the crude use of violence when necessary, and *threats to secede*...multiple histories and multiple identities reveal the absence of unity and harmony in the country. The contest for power is also about ethnic rivalries.²⁶²

In 1993, such rumblings of secessionist murmurs came from the minority tribe of Ogonis. Activist Ken Saro-Wiwa was keen to highlight the injustice of his native oil-rich Ogoniland being one of the poorest communities in Nigeria. That Ogoniland was also greatly polluted by oil spills added environmental insult to the deprivation injury. In light of the genuine environmental concerns, it is perceived that the lukewarm pitching of secessionist threats by the Ogonis was mere leverage for their communities' greater development and a fairer share of the so called 'national pie'. Or as Falola put it, 'resource allocation'.²⁶³ It is not inconceivable then that the subsequent execution of Saro-Wiwa by Abacha, seen as a gross over-reaction to someone not deemed a clear and present threat, had roots in the military authorities' historical fear of the Biafran issue. After all, in 1969 at the height of fighting, Abacha himself was a platoon and battalion commander in the war. There was also an added undercurrent to the Ogoni and Saro-Wiwa issue for Abacha as earlier referenced: namely the cancelled June 12th 1993 election of which Abacha, who launched his takeover in the midst of that impasse, had been a direct beneficiary. The Ogonis were emboldened by the widespread outcry following the June 12 cancellation, feeling this was an opportune time to voice grievances. Historian Yandaki explains the June 12 factor:

²⁶² Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History*, (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010), p.260.

²⁶³ Ibid.

Since the Civil War (1967 – 1970), the boundaries of Nigeria have been put to the test several times; the latest being the June 12 elections. The 'June 12' has become an annual event for some groups to mourn. Secession is practically on many lips and small provocation could normally evoke it.²⁶⁴

Conversely, a small provocation could as in Abacha's case certainly, elicit a gratuitous response to nullify the dreaded 'secession' notion. Saro-Wiwa was executed in 1995, two years after the rumblings of secession started in Ogoniland. Each June 12 for those two years after Abacha's 1993 coup, Abacha's regime faced a rebellious anniversary that questioned his regime's legitimacy. In this emerging national space of June 12 discontent, the Ogonis tethered their murmurings of secession.

Again, though the Ogonis' secessionist threat was relatively low-key, Saro-Wiwa as the *de facto* leader of the Ogoni MOSOP²⁶⁵ movement encapsulated the threat Abacha re-imagined of a new Biafra; a threat which prompted Abacha's anti-Biafra decrees upon assuming office in '93. Abacha's haste to dispatch Saro-Wiwa bears the hallmarks of caprice and cruel impatience certainly. It also symbolised the stance of a generation of Nigerian leaders such as Gowon and Abacha himself who were civil war combatants and viewed national unity as sacrosanct. Shutting down Biafra debate or historical appraisal was the military reflex of Gowon and others, culminating with Abacha who in Saro-Wiwa's case made no distinction in shutting down the person. Curiously, there was a pre-Biafra precedent in secessionist urges in Nigeria - and it did not come from the south. The coup of 29th July 1966, a reprisal counter-coup by northern officers that killed Head of State Maj-Gen Aguiyi Ironsi as well as up to ten other Igbo or Eastern officers, is viewed as one of the main catalysts for the civil war. The codename for this counter

²⁶⁴ A.I. Yandaki, *The State In Africa – A Critical Study in Historiography and Political Philosophy* (Kaduna: Gaskiya Corporation limited, 2015) p.200.

²⁶⁵ Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People. MOSOP mandated the use of non-violent methods to promote democratic principles to assist Ogoni people to pursue rights of self-determination. Environmental issues in their Niger Delta basin was at the forefront of considerations.

coup by the northern officers was disclosed years later to have been 'Operation Araba'.²⁶⁶ 'Araba' translates from Hausa as 'secession'. The revelation led Ikime to reasonably conclude that 'those who planned the operation thought in terms of the north seceding from Nigeria.'²⁶⁷ Recently declassified documents go a step further: In the mind of the coup plotters, they *already* seceded by virtue of the executed coup. It was the British High Commissioner to Nigeria, Sir Francis Cumming-Bruce, who stepped in with a timely intervention, persuading the Gowon junta to have a rethink and stymied any announcement or progression of a northern breakaway.²⁶⁸ Decades later, in an interview with the *The Guardian* at the age of 95 (he died at 101), Sir Cumming-Bruce aka Lord Thurlow declared: 'I sometimes wonder whether I did the right thing in keeping Nigeria together.'²⁶⁹

History Postponed: The Future, *Tensed*

Governments' actions, we appreciate, are based not on singular motives but often on a multiplicity of interconnected considerations. It is likely that in Gowon's case, a combination of the reasons already discussed was at play in relation to the aftermath of war. These interweaving reasons, which all shunned the consideration of history postwar, was exacerbated by another consideration: war weariness. With the 3Rs - *reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction* – the Gowon government sought to shift the focus to economic upliftment as part of a holistic progression for the citizen. Professor Laurie Wiseberg in subscribing also to the war weary view of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, offered this in 1975:

Nigerians, have, understandably been more absorbed in rebuilding their country than in pondering the past. Life is more immediately demanding than history. And though one must learn from the past to safeguard the future, it may nonetheless be wise to avoid inflammation while healing

²⁶⁶ Tony Nnadi – 'UK Govt Stopped Secession of Northern Nigeria after July 1966 Counter Coup', 2 May 2017- *Lower Niger Congress*, <https://www.lnc-usa.org/blog/uk-govt-stopped-secession-of-northern-nigeria-after-july-1966-counter-coup-says-lnc/> [Accessed 18 June 2019].

²⁶⁷ Obaro Ikime, *History, The Historian and The Nation: The Voice of a Nigerian Historian* (Ibadan: Oluseyi Press, 2006) p.306.

²⁶⁸ Tony Nnadi – 'UK Govt Stopped Secession of Northern Nigeria after July 1966 Counter Coup', 2 May 2017- *Lower Niger Congress*, <https://www.lnc-usa.org/blog/uk-govt-stopped-secession-of-northern-nigeria-after-july-1966-counter-coup-says-lnc/> (Accessed 18 June 2019).

²⁶⁹ Kaye Whiteman, 'Lord Thurlow Obituary', 16 April 2013, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/16/lord-thurlow> [12 September 2020].

the wounds of fratricidal struggle. Additionally, many who have a story to tell are political enough to know that this is not the time to tell it.²⁷⁰

In 1982, Lieutenant-Colonel Ojukwu, instigator of the failed Biafran secession echoed aspects of Wiseberg in stating:

At certain times friends have suggested that I should write my autobiography, telling the story of my life in my own words. But I have always felt that the moment was not yet right; that the hour has not yet come when I could tell the whole truth of the tumultuous events in which I have played some small part.²⁷¹

There is an interesting parallel to Ojukwu's words. 1982 marked also the year that history was expunged from Nigerian schools as a standalone subject – an occurrence we explore in a later chapter. One cannot thus help but notice, in Ojukwu's words, a poignant symmetry to Ojukwu's withheld or rather postponed history. Ojukwu's assertion mirrors the subject's withdrawal from the Nigerian Secondary school syllabus; for 'withdrawal', again read *postponed* – (the subject returned to curriculums in 2006). This outstanding question of Biafra then, in the absence of a proper reckoning, appeared suspended in perennial postponement. Anyhow, it was in 1982 that Nigerian secondary school students were first denied the entitlement of directed intellectual stimulation that could clarify and augment their understanding of how the country they inhabit came to be. Instead, due to the wholesale politicization of history, just when students were transitioning from primary school and realistically more ready to assess Nigeria's postcolonial collapse into war amongst other events, government was excising history from view.

²⁷⁰ Laurie S. Wiseberg, 'Journal Article, An Emerging Literature: Studies of the Nigerian Civil War', *African Studies Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Apr., 1975), pp. 117-126 (p121), Published by: Cambridge University Press.

²⁷¹ Said Babura Ahmad, *Resurgent Nigeria - Issues in Nigerain Intellectual History* (A Festschrift in Honour of Dahiru Yahya, Ibadan: University Press Plc, 2011) p.62.

Returning to Wiseberg's comments, it is worth noting how closely they reflect the decades later proclamations of African leaders such as Museveni and Obasanjo concerning the discipline of history.²⁷² In the 2000s, as already noted regarding Museveni, both leaders variously decried the study of history as a 'useless' enterprise for Africans. Better for Africans to focus on subjects that enhanced the pursuit of their livelihoods, they argued. In other words, as Wiseberg stated, *Life is more immediately demanding than history*. This sentiment in part illustrates also that history is more widely purported to be something inconvenient and detrimental to the African experience; it displays an ingrained thinking on the easy disposability of history in the African realm. Such is this disposability that the willful absence (or suppression) of history during the Abacha regime veers more towards a *probability* than it does as mere possibility.

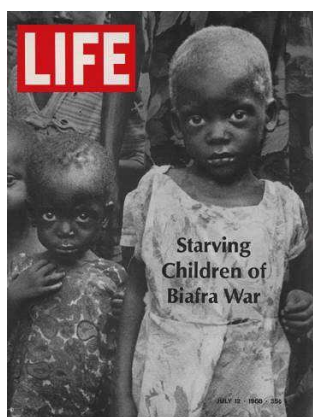
The War Was Televised

Another reason for the Gowon regime's obstructionist attitude to a historical examination of Biafra concerned the genocide question. This genocide question incorporated the issue of war crimes in the form of purported massacres. Both Vietnam and the Nigeria-Biafra civil war became something of an international cause célèbre within the milieu of a 1960s counter-culture driven by activism and television images. For Vietnam, broadcast nightly in American homes, the turning point came with the *My Lai* Massacre. In March 1968 *My Lai* became household news when it was reported that U.S soldiers had killed more than 400 unarmed civilians. For Biafra, that televisual moment was images of starving Biafran children suffering from the malnutrition disease of Kwashiorkor – caused by the Federal Government's deliberate tactic of aid blockade. The high point of this particular exposé came in 1968 with a *Life Magazine* front-page pictorial headlined *Starving Children of Biafra War*.

²⁷² Towards the end of his final term, Obasanjo conceded that history *should* return to the national curriculum and authorized a programme inherited by his successor, Goodluck Jonathan.

As in *My Lai*, there was talk of Nigerian troops massacring non-combatants. Most notable of these was the Asaba Massacre of October 7, 1967. This purported wartime atrocity was predated by a series of anti-Igbo pogroms that left over thirty thousand Easterners, mainly Igbo, murdered. Close to one million Igbo had been forced to flee their ancestral homes in 1966 – revenge from northern citizens for the so-called ‘Igbo coup’ of 1966 that killed mostly northern politicians and senior northern army officers.²⁷³

Fig.14: *Life* Magazine cover. July 12, 1968.²⁷⁴



Charles Keil in 1967 recounted vividly the anti-Igbo pogroms of 1966 he encountered, writing of personally ‘counting the disemboweled bodies along the Makurdi road’ and being ‘escorted back to the city by soldiers who apologized for the stench and explained politely that they were doing me and the world a great favor by eliminating Ibos.’²⁷⁵

Keil later published diary entry conversations from his time in Northern Nigeria, which demonstrated the prevalent anti-Igbo sentiment. Many, Keil reported, had started referring to the Igbos as ‘savages.’ Ironically, a decade before in 1958, Chinua Achebe published *Things Fall Apart* with a chief motivation

²⁷³ The assassinated included the nation’s first Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and Ahmadu Bello the Sardauna of Sokoto. At the time, Northerners constituted the majority in Nigeria’s government.

²⁷⁴ **Source:** Old Life Magazines, <https://oldlifemagazine.com/july-12-1968-life-magazine.html>.

²⁷⁵ Lasse Heerten & A. Dirk Moses, ‘The Nigeria–Biafra War: Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide, published in *Journal of Genocide Research* Volume 16, 2014 - Issue 2-3. Pp 169-203 (p182).

being to rebut the depiction of Africans as savages in European novels. Keil reported that his diarized conversations ‘took place with dozens of soldiers conducted at nightclubs, roadblocks and in their barracks during the ten months between the pogroms and July 1967’:²⁷⁶

They eat dogs, they must die like dogs
They are born with greed in their hearts
They are the only people spoiling Nigeria ever since – One Nigeria without Ibo!
“The Ibo and their ilk ... vermin and snakes to be trod under foot... dogs to be killed.”²⁷⁷

The ‘vermin’ comparison is chillingly reminiscent of Nazi language against Jews. In the pseudo-documentary ‘The Eternal Jew’²⁷⁸, Jews were notoriously compared to rats. Generally known in Nigeria as earlier noted as the ‘Jews of Africa’ on account of their purported entrepreneurial spirit, the soldiers’ scorn for Igbos ‘born with greed in their hearts’ evoked the age-old prejudice against so-called Jewish avarice and materialism. Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, a year before the civil war ended, communicated to President Nixon regarding the Igbos, writing ‘they are the wandering Jews of West Africa - gifted, aggressive, westernized, at best envied and resented, but mostly despised by their neighbors in the federation.’²⁷⁹

Inevitably, some of the Jewish-Igbo comparisons with anti-Semitic tropes helped compel the dialogue of genocide to the forefront of Igbo-Biafran narratives. However, unlike the Jewish experience of Holocaust in the 1940s, there is a lack of consensus on if the Igbos suffered genocide, whether prior to/and during Biafra. A split exists between those who believe Igbos suffered genocide, those who contest this, with a distinction between the two opposing camps throwing up a third intermediate category:

²⁷⁶ Charles Keil, ‘The Price of Nigerian Victory’, January 1970, *Africa Today*. 17 (1): 1–3. [JSTOR 4185054](#), pp32-33.

²⁷⁷ A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten (Ed.) *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970* (New York: Routledge, 2018) p.25.

²⁷⁸ ‘The Eternal Jew’ was released on 28th November 1940 in Germany from the office of Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels. The feature was an antisemitic propaganda film made in the style of a real-life documentary. It was initially titled ‘Der ewige Jude’, which roughly translated as ‘The Wandering Jew’.

²⁷⁹ Kissinger communicated this to President Nixon via a White House memo dated Tuesday January 28, 1969.

The war is relevant for genocide studies ... in the first place, famine was intrinsic to the war's operational unfolding, and accusations of genocide-by-famine were elemental to the Biafran propaganda campaign, prompting an international debate about the application of the term. Second, two of the field's prominent figures—Leo Kuper and Robert Melson—observed the war as scholars of Africa and drew formative conclusions about the nature of genocide that effectively excluded the conflict from the canon of twentieth-century genocides. Third, just as many defeated Igbo claimed that their genocidal experiences were denied during the war, so they have campaigned since then for its recognition and inclusion in the genocide studies field and in popular consciousness.²⁸⁰

That third category includes political observers such as Kuper and Melson, who are wont to pivot between the other opposing categories on seemingly legalistic interpretations. Dirk Moses highlights this class of observers 'who have difficulty in applying the label of genocide' to Biafra.²⁸¹ As Moses explicates:

Leo Kuper, whose milestone 1981 study grappled with Nigeria's 1966 violence by introducing a new classification, the 'genocidal massacre', characterized by 'the annihilation of a section of a group—men, women, and children, as for example in the wiping out of whole villages'. Kuper did not explain why he chose to place 'genocidal massacres' outside the reach of the convention. Likewise, arguments persist about whether genocide occurred during the war. Robert Melson maintained that the mass destruction of Ibos during the Biafran war as 'a genocide-in-part' rather than a 'genocide-in-whole'.²⁸²

Notwithstanding this 'difficulty' in applying to Biafra the genocide label, Biafra prompted new paradigms of thinking on 'genocide'. This shift created openings for how the term may be deconstructed anew. Whether 'genocide-in-part' or 'in-whole', the Gowon authorities postwar would not have appreciated this contentious issue subjected to and kept topical by historical output and analysis. At best, accounts could have tarnished Gowon's government before the international community, resulting in his regime gaining pariah status. At worst, damning accounts might de-legitimize the government's victory to the extent it might re-embolden Igbo rebellion. For though some accounts may deny genocide transpired, whilst others entangled their convictions in ambiguous semantics, there would be those convinced that

²⁸⁰ A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten (Ed.) *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970* (New York: Routledge, 2018) p.3.

²⁸¹ *Ibid* p.48.

²⁸² *Ibid*.

genocide took place. As Moses *et al* note, 'Wole Soliyinka, whose imprisonment during the war by the FMG is recorded in *The Man Died*, concurred that Biafrans had indeed been victims of genocide even though he did not support Biafran secession.'²⁸³

Of the Asaba Massacre, Achebe in his memoir *There Was a Country* reports, 'the Asaba Massacre, as it would be known, was only one of many such post pogrom atrocities committed by Nigerian soldiers... It became a particular abomination for Asaba residents, as many of those killed were titled Igbo chiefs and common folk alike, and their bodies were disposed of with reckless abandon in mass graves.'²⁸⁴

Even Pope Paul VI, conscious that Igbos represented the largest demographic in Nigeria of converts to Roman Catholicism, sent his emissary Monsignor Georges Rocheau to Nigeria on a fact-finding mission.

Monsignor Georges Rocheau recounted his findings to French Newspaper *Le Monde*:

There has been genocide, for example on the occasion of the 1966 massacres. . . Two areas have suffered badly [from the fighting]. Firstly the region between the towns of Benin and Asaba where only widows and orphans remain, Federal troops having for unknown reasons massacred all the men.²⁸⁵

Years later – thirty-five to be precise – Gowon broke his silence on Asaba with this apology:

It came to me as a shock when I came to know about the unfortunate happenings that happened to the sons and daughters . . . of [Asaba] domain. I felt very touched and honestly I referred to [the killings] and ask for forgiveness being the one who was in charge at that time. Certainly, it is not something that I would have approved of in whatsoever. I was made ignorant of it; I think until it appeared in the papers. A young man wrote a book at that time.²⁸⁶

After Asaba, came the 1968 Calabar massacre. As Achebe also reported in his memoir:

²⁸³ A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten (Editors.) *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970* (New York: Routledge, 2018) p4.

²⁸⁴ Chinua Achebe, *There Was A Country – A Personal History of Biafra*. (New York: Penguin, 2012), p 132.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Calabar is in the southeastern part of Biafra, on the banks of the majestic Calabar River. It had for decades been a melting pot of Easterners—Efik, Ibibio, Igbo, and others—that had produced a beautiful cultural mosaic of traditions and dialects. In actions reminiscent of the Nazi policy of eradicating Jews throughout Europe just twenty years earlier, the Nigerian forces decided to purge the city of its Igbo inhabitants. By the time the Nigerians were done they had shot at least 1,000 and perhaps 2,000 Ibos, most of them civilians.²⁸⁷

On genocide – on whether it took place or not – what is undeniable is that it is a subject that at the least required a formal, national debate. The purposes would be two-fold: firstly, there would be the requisite cathartic effect of such a process. Secondly, a debate would also serve as a unifying point from which the nation could be re-defined, re-imagined within a post-war prism of duty and impartiality. The latter would constitute a more consequential step to national unity than the ‘One Nigeria’ refrain invoked relentlessly during wartime.

Instead, the dearth of such a debate had a detrimental effect socially and politically. Samuel Fury Childs Daly spoke of problems ‘present before the war, but its outcome created new and deeper cleavages between the units of Nigeria’s complicated federal structure.’²⁸⁸ The unresolved genocide question exacerbated ethnic cleavages: enmity that existed between southerners and the Nigerian state became more fraught - with the military leadership that dominated Nigeria post-Biafra (more often than not headed by northern soldiers), representing the ultimate *bête noir*. Thus, though Biafra is synonymous with Igbo resistance, Anugwom makes an important distinction that explains how the conflict, politically, necessarily morphed beyond Igbo singularity to encompass the southeast as a political bloc: ‘My conception of Biafra is not as an Igbo affair as one would often glimpse from recent writings on the subject but rather as a bid by the peoples of the Southeastern Region even though the Igbo was the

²⁸⁷ Chinua Achebe, *There Was A Country*, p.132.

²⁸⁸ Samuel Fury Childs Daly, “Archival research in Africa”, *African Affairs*, Volume 116, Issue 463, April 2017, Pages 311–320, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adw082>

majority group and the attempted secession was led until towards the very end by an Igbo.²⁸⁹ As Anugwom notes, 'most of the ethnic minorities of the Southeastern Region (Efik, Ibibio, Annang, Ogoni, Ekoi, Ikwerre, even Ijaw) were almost as involved on the Biafra side as the Igbo.'²⁹⁰ Thus, Biafra embodies and aggravates the narrative of a downtrodden, alienated southeast, in the grand narrative of a hostile, militarised Nigerian state and domineering North. The non-resolution of the genocide question has had real implications on national unity by reinforcing the feeling of victimhood amongst the Igbos and other southeasterners, further reinforcing ethnic divisions present in Nigerian society. The alienation and othering of these constituents have come in their belief that they have been sidelined – for as Anugwom explains, 'the war has become established in dominant socio-political narratives in the southeast as the explanation of the perceived marginalization of the area.'²⁹¹

Gloria Chuku refers to the non-resolution of the Biafra question as conspiratorial, as an 'archive of silence',²⁹² further decrying 'the perpetuation of silence, no national conversation on the war, lack of any truth and reconciliation efforts.'²⁹³ On the question of genocide and the memory of the Asaba massacres, Heerten and Moses concur stating that 'the Nigerian state has repressed publication of the terrible events and its commemoration; for many in Asaba, the memory of the massacre remains painful and stands in the way of inter-ethnic reconciliation.'²⁹⁴ Bird and Ottonelli follow this line by stating the Asaba killings feeds into 'the legacy of ethnic suspicion that continues to reverberate in Nigeria

²⁸⁹ Edlyne Anugwom, 'Memory as Social Burden: Collective Remembrance of the Biafran War and Imaginations of Socio-Political Marginalization in Contemporary Nigeria', in A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten (Ed.) *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970* (New York: Routledge, 2018) p388.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Gloria Chuku, Women and the Nigeria-Biafra War, in A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten (Ed.) *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970* (New York: Routledge, 2018) p330.

²⁹³ Ibid. p.329.

²⁹⁴ A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten (Ed.) *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide*, p.9.

today.’²⁹⁵

Childs Daly similarly noted, ‘many former Biafrans wanted a legal reckoning with the war, but the closest they would get was Ali Mazrui’s allegorical one in “The Trial of Christopher Okigbo”. They would have no Nuremberg-style day in court.’²⁹⁶ Although there was a judicial inquiry in 1999 into the events of the war and military rule – (The Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission, known informally as the Oputa Panel after the jurist who convened it) – the commission achieved little. After hearing hundreds of testimonies, from veterans, political dissidents, relatives of the disappeared, the commission ‘made many recommendations, from symbolic apologies to the payment of reparations.’²⁹⁷ Yet as Childs Daly reports, ‘none were acted on, and President Olusegun Obasanjo and his successors studiously ignored the panel’s report. The case for Igbo injury takes evidence from many places, ranging from the war’s death toll to the fact that Nigeria has not had an Igbo head of state since its end. Biafra remains an open wound.’²⁹⁸

This non-resolution - this ‘archive of silence’ that Chuku and others referred to, was directly responsible for the creation of groups like MASSOB (Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra of Sovereignty),²⁹⁹ – an ethnic militia advocating secession, as well as latterly more hardline groups such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which stokes the bitterness of the southeasterners, further chafing at Nigeria’s political unity and threatening its continued existence and legitimacy as a multiethnic state.

Suppression & Scarcity: Nigeria-Biafra War Literature

²⁹⁵ S. Elizabeth Bird and Fraser Ottanelli, “The Asaba Massacre and the Nigerian Civil War: Reclaiming Hidden History” in A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten (Ed.) *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970* (New York: Routledge, 2018) p.412.

²⁹⁶ Samuel Fury Childs Daly, “Archival research in Africa”, *African Affairs*, Volume 116, Issue 463, April 2017, Pages 311–320, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adw082>

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ MASSOB emerged in 1999, four months into Nigeria’s first civilian democratic government after the demise of Abacha.

Exploring Biafra and its unwieldy historical shadow which successive military (and civilian) regimes must inhabit, helps elucidate the question at the heart of this thesis. Abacha's extreme reaction to Saro-Wiwa does not just underline the strongman proclivities of Abacha's dictatorial style, but betrays the sensitivities in Abacha's mind regarding what Saro-Wiwa represented. Consequently, Abacha's anathema to the secession debate is consistent with his predecessors and confirms a will to suppress not just the issues concerning secession but also its associate histories.

Another reason successive leaders suppressed the Biafra question, which applies specifically to northern leaders such as Abacha, was the claim that Biafra amounted to a referendum on the 1914 amalgamation of Nigeria. Southern resentment of the 1914 amalgamation was rooted in the view that the British in establishing Nigeria had counterintuitively favored the less educated (at the time) Muslim north; such that the power structure of Nigeria appeared skewed towards the northern elites from the outset. Of the coup plotters and leaders of Nigeria since independence, the majority originates from the north.³⁰⁰ This fact is cited as confirmation by southerners of the oft-stated grievance that the British mischievously imbued the north with a sense of entitlement regarding Nigeria's leadership.

Thus, the question of Biafra revolves also around those that deem the 1914 amalgamation as tantamount to disenfranchisement at birth. In this way, Biafra –and other episodic appeals for secession – represents for some of the northern elite the accusing finger of 1914 British shenanigans. On the issue of 1914 in relation to the Nigeria-Biafra civil war in relation to 1914, Tekena Tamuno is clear regarding the issue but wary regarding reverting to pre-1914 autonomies:

In at least two ways Nigeria's experience between January 1966 and January 1970 was relevant to the 1914 amalgamation. The secessionist threats then, though not for the first time in Nigerian history since

³⁰⁰ Nigeria has had 14 leaders since Independence (Buhari and Obasanjo both led the nation twice; Sonekan's brief interim government is not included in the tally). Of these 14 instances of a comprehensive federal government formed, 10 of the leaders at the head of government have been northerners.

1914, raised the question of whether any breakaway movement was the answer to Nigeria's longstanding problem of unity in diversity. If secession were allowed in the Nigeria of more than 250 ethnic groups, the degree of provocation notwithstanding, that would be the basis of new political entities, a return to the pre-colonial caliphate, empires, kingdoms, city-states, republics, village groups and such compound loving communities as those of the Tiv.³⁰¹

Following Tamuno's logic, suppression of secessionist discourse appeared vital in thwarting a Pandora box that might unleash further catastrophic ruptures, splintering or fragmentation in the nation. Of course that did not prevent the cyclical ruptures that came in the form of future coup d'états.

Undoubtedly also, the dearth of historical output on Nigeria-Biafra war literature, and other histories subsequently, points to a successful deterrence by the implicit threat these military governments carried (explicit, in Abacha's case, enforceable by decree). Yandaki outlines successive governments' methods in first willfully marginalizing the historian, before subsequent flinging history from sight.

Their roles [historians] as the vanguard of both the independence struggle and nation-building were thrown overboard. Historians had somewhat been chased away from the public limelight. Junior historians taught in the secondary schools and colleges, but once in a while one historian or the other was handpicked from the university to occupy a commissioner's chair, a ministerial post, a Vice-Chancellor's seat, a mission abroad, or be an adviser to government on something. History under the military continued to do its job – serve as a tool. Many books were produced discussing either the origins of the military, or the importance of the military in stabilizing polities. Functional historical knowledge, on the other hand, was deceptively exploited to justify coups, counter-coups and so on. Gradually, the tables were being turned against history as a discipline.³⁰²

Gradually, the tables were being turned against history as a discipline. Thus was the evolution of History in Nigeria, from the post civil war era to its premature demise in the 1980s.

³⁰¹ Tekena Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigerian State: The Southern Phase, 1898 – 1914* (London: Longman, 1972) p.39.

³⁰² Said Babura Ahmad, *Resurgent Nigeria - Issues in Nigerian Intellectual History: A Festschrift in Honour of Dahiru Yahya* (Ibadan: University Press Plc, 2011) p.47.

Historical Fact: Or Fiction?

As regards why the fictional outpourings of Biafra was permissible in Gowon's time, a quote from Achebe helps illuminate:

Fancy, sometimes called Imagination, is not inimical to Fiction. On the contrary, they are bosom friends. But they also observe careful protocol around each other's property and around the homestead of their droll and difficult neighbor, Fact.³⁰³

Even today, with the fashion of historical fiction superseding Historical fact on television and in print, a clear distinction is made between the two. This is the main deduction from Achebe's quote: conventions have to be followed; observers of historical fiction understand they sign up to *imprecision*. This gives everyone wriggle room. For any account that carries with it a 'based on a true story' tag, will remain inadmissible to the hard canon of truth. Historical fact conversely carries with it the *burden* of truth – it is this burden precisely that can make fact 'droll' and 'difficult' as Achebe notes. The liberties the fictional counterpart takes may intensify the entertainment index – but we know to believe the work at our own risk. This inherent laxity in fictional works, which invites us to approach with a dose of unbelief, ensured Gowon's government was comfortable with fictional Biafra outpourings. Thus, fictional accounts of Biafra has itself a long history:

The recent high-profile fictional account of Biafra by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Half of a Yellow Sun* was preceded by works by Ken Saro-Wiwa, Elechi Amadi, Kole Omotoso, Wole Soyinka, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Chukwuemeka Ike and Chris Abani, all of which strongly convey the horrific human cost of the war on individuals and their communities.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ Chinua Achebe, *Africa's Tarnished Name* (Milton Keynes: Penguin, 2018) p.23.

³⁰⁴ Toyin Falola and Ezekwem Ogechukwu, *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*, (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2016) p.494.

The Gowon government in particular was keen to avoid a direct indictment of a meticulous, precise historical account of Biafra. Fictional works – (even if ‘based on a true story’) – where characters and places re-translate as aliases and pseudonyms, lack directness and thus have a diluted power to indict. Of course, historical accounts do not monopolize truth. We need look no further than the array of propagandist texts masquerading as history or the dangerous alternative histories, such as those Holocaust denials or revised histories of Tiananmen Square. These examples, ironically, illustrate the power of history and why certain governments in their fear of it, sweep it under the proverbial carpet.

Fiction – and historical fiction – has its uses. Historical fiction seeks ideally to historicize accounts so that our appreciation of the period, its peculiarities, the events and consequence is chronicled faithfully before us - in spirit at least. Still, Mary Fulbrook noted that ‘history has begun to collapse towards literature, as theorists have adopted some of the tenets and concepts of literary criticism to analyse the writing of history, and been struck more by similarities than by differences.’³⁰⁵

Thus, the ‘fictional’ aspect of historical fiction, in employing the literary microscopic gaze, furnishes us with minutiae that humanize the story for us. Historical fiction can render the ‘history’ more relatable and instructive. In relation to Biafra historical fiction, there was an added incentive. There was a palpable need given the existence of lacunae on historical scholarship on the war. This absence summoned certain literary authors to shapeshift into historians. This brings us back to the notion of identity. Unresolved national crises heightens the identity deficit that citizens feel - thus compelled, in aid of resolving this identity dilemma, some authors elected to plug those gaps that conventional histories failed to fill. Subsequently, the Biafra-Nigeria War literature offerings became a substitute for History. It is unsurprising that initial historical fiction regarding Biafra was authored by those with a personally invested story in Biafra – or in war. Buchi Emecheta’s *Destination Biafra* had a number of

³⁰⁵ Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002) p.3.

personal war connections.³⁰⁶ Emecheta's father died from complications sustained fighting for the British Empire in Burma; Emecheta was also Igbo and had relatives who died in Biafra. Wole Soyinka - *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka*³⁰⁷ - was disturbed by the imminent civil war and journeyed in 1967 to the Biafran camp to appeal for peace; Gowon consequently jailed Soyinka without trial, keeping him in solitary confinement for close to two years during the war. Ken Saro Wiwa, who wrote *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*,³⁰⁸ was from the Ogoni minority tribe that was separate yet absorbed into a large chunk of Igboland. Saro Wiwa highlighted what many Nigerians would have been ignorant of: smaller tribes being coerced to take sides due to proximity to the dominant Igbo tribe. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, born seven years after the war, spoke about how she lost her maternal and paternal grandfathers in the Biafra war, declaring that 'my family lost almost everything including our house'.³⁰⁹ And Chinua Achebe, who later penned *Here Was A Country – A Personal History of Biafra*, had moved his young family to the Biafran capital of Aba after his house in Enugu was bombed, and was subsequently forced to flee the country as the war progressed.

When Adichie won the Orange Broadband Prize for fiction for *Half of a Yellow Sun*, she stated: 'This book is my refusal to forget.'³¹⁰ Adichie's language is purposely reminiscent of the Jewish refrain 'never forget' which serves to keep alive the memory – the history – of the Holocaust. Adichie understood the importance of history telling; of how central it is to a nation and one's self-identity. In a notable scene in her book, the character Odenigbo is seen warning Ugwu the houseboy about the certainty of western miseducation once Ugwu attends school:

³⁰⁶ Buchi Emecheta, *Destination Biafra*, (London: Allison & Busby, 1981).

³⁰⁷ Wole Soyinka, *The Man Died: The Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* (London: Vintage, 1994).

³⁰⁸ Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Sozaboy: A novel in Rotten English* (Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1985).

³⁰⁹ Charles McGrath, 'Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explores history in "Half of a Yellow Sun"', *The New York Times*, Sept. 23, 2006- <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/23/books/23adic.html> [Accessed 20 June 2019].

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

They will teach you that a white man called Mungo Park discovered River Niger, which is rubbish, our people fished in the Niger long before Mungo Park's grandfather was born, Odenigbo.³¹¹

Adichie with that brief exchange addresses the multi-layered legacies of white supremacy, history suppression, identity crises and the continuation of Empire. Another notable scene occurs at a Biafran refugee camp with two visiting American journalists both named Charles but distinguishable as 'the plump one' and 'the redhead':

A group of children were roasting two rats around a fire. "Oh my God." The plump one removed his hat and stared. "Niggers are never choosy about what they eat," the redhead muttered. "What did you say?" Richard asked. But the redhead ... hurried ahead.³¹²

In the above exchange, with the imagery of rodents and the casual racism of 'the redhead', Adichie introduces the suggestion of starvation-induced genocide, the West's indifference to the African plight and the general inhumanity of war. Adichie's use of the prejudiced journalist is a judgment also on investigative responsibility and integrity. Celebrated journalist John Pilger who attained international acclaim through exposing the Cambodia genocide wrought by Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge observed of the journalistic imperative that 'secretive power loathes journalists who do their job: who push back screens, peer behind façades, lift rocks. Opprobrium from on high is their badge of honour.'³¹³ It stands to reason that historians with an investigative and 'rock-lifting' approach will similarly irk and inspire loathing from nefarious powers-that-be. In the absence of these historians, Nigerian fiction authors deigned to step into the breach.

Achebe, Soyinka and other African writers argued for years that the African writer is different from others in his/her burden of responsibility. This is not a mantle that has emerged in a vacuum – it is

³¹¹ Chimamandi Ngozi Adichie, *Half of A Yellow Sun* (London: Harper Collins, 2007) p.11.

³¹² Ibid p.370.

³¹³ John Pilger, *Tell Me No Lies: Investigative Journalism and its Triumphs* (London: Random House, 2011) p.21.

caused by the persistent breakdowns and cleavages in African society whereby proper historical analysis has been lacking – and the writer becomes judge and historical conscience of that society. The brilliance of Adichie, Achebe, Soyinka and others, is to rise to this socially conscious challenge whilst delivering entertaining, thought-provoking books. In vowing never to forget, Adichie explicitly assumes the role of chronicler and historian of Biafra. In this guise of *Author as Historian*, Adichie herself referenced the fact that Biafra was not being taught in Nigerian schools, that History had been removed from the curriculum and that a Biafra discourse hardly existed in the country: ‘Both my grandfathers were killed in the Nigeria-Biafra war, and I wanted to engage with that history in order to start a conversation about the war - which is still hardly discussed in Nigeria.’³¹⁴

Several authors write historical fictions. But it is Adichie’s acknowledgement of a *functional* motive that arrests one – Hilary Mantel, for example, unlikely felt with her Tudor saga *Wolf Hall* the same responsibility Adichie speaks of. The authors of Biafra War literature have taken on an existential responsibility; they have opted to be a generational voice of Nigeria’s yesteryear because they found that voice silenced. That these authors felt compelled over the years to assume proxy historian roles, confirms the extent of suppression of historical discourse in Nigeria. Still, these authors are not historians and so their offerings – artistic offerings, fundamentally – are shaped by the creative arcs of their personal visions. Consequently, their works differ from ‘histories’ and a conventional history’s cool neutrality. Through their creative capacities, these authors hyphenate the histories they proffer with a larger truth they seek to present. Thus, though Ken Saro-Wiwa’s *Sozaboy* is ostensibly about Biafra, in the opening paragraphs of the book we see other underlying issues of Nigerian dysfunction being addressed:

...the old, bad government have dead and the new government of soza and police have come. Everybody was saying that everything will be

³¹⁴ Charlie Kimber, ‘Interview: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’, October 2006, *Socialist Review* – <http://socialistreview.org.uk/310/interview-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie> - [Accessed 14 November 2019].

good in Dukana because of new government. They were saying that *kotuma ashbottom* from Bori cannot take bribe from people in Dukana again.³¹⁵

In those opening lines, Saro-Wiwa was addressing the issue of recurrent coups – ‘the new government of soza and police have come’ – as well as bribery and corruption in Nigeria. In addressing these issues from the outset, the insinuation is that these fundamental requirements of good governance, unless mastered by the Nigerian state, will be as much a thorn in the nation’s side as the ethnic rivalries that contribute to the imminent civil war. Similarly, Adichie may have sought Biafra remembrance with her offering, but a quest for the nation’s elusive *identity* is the larger thematic undertaking that underpins much of her book’s dialogue. For Achebe, his Biafra works came hyphenated with a quest for *justice*; a justice inextricable from the issue of genocide and accountability. Thus, in his 1971 poem *Vultures*, with a blatant reference to the Nazis’ concentration camp, Achebe invokes ‘the Commandant at Belsen Camp going home for the day with fumes’ in his Biafra anthology *Christmas in Biafra and other Poems*.³¹⁶

Achebe’s Holocaust reference to Biafra genocide is hardly subtle and Wole Soyinka in his Biafran war prison memoir *The Man Died* also evoked the Jewish labour camps:

"They were flogged in the open, you said."
"Yes."
"And they screamed?... But Gowon lives in those barracks. He must have heard the screams."
Agu said, "Frankly, I don't think he knew. He lived far away from the guardroom."
"Those screams must have penetrated concrete."³¹⁷

The unhearing Gowon is deft symbolism of the unfeeling leaders of Nigeria; leaders in their fortresses, who ignore the primal screams of the people.

³¹⁵ Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Sozaboy: A novel in Rotten English* (Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1985) p.1.

³¹⁶ Chinua Achebe, *Collected Poems* (New York: Random House) p.51.

³¹⁷ Wole Soyinka, *The Man Died: The Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* (London: Vintage, 1994) p.62.

Postcolonial literature evolved to address misconceptions and distorted representations of the colonised. As John McLeod said of Achebe:

Achebe's work is motivated on the one hand by a desire to contest literary representations of African peoples which he had read with great indignation in the work of writers such as Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary; on the other hand it pursues the cultural rehabilitation of his fellow Nigerians, Igbo or otherwise.³¹⁸

It was such rehabilitative works that inspired the 'Empire Writes Back' theoretical framework, instituted by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin to denote indigenous authors rebutting the underhand narratives of colonisers disparaging their former colonies.³¹⁹ For those who assumed the 'author as historian' mantle, even as they sought to fill the void untroubled by professional historians, rehabilitation was paramount. The 'histories' these authors wrote – from Achebe, Soyinka, Adichie, Saro-Wiwa, Emecheta and others – were written to *reinstate* the historical event to the consciousness of the nation's Historical Memory. Like the reinstatement of a disowned son to his household, Biafra could be reacquainted to the diverse family congress that is the Nigerian nation. Stanford observes that 'history has two meanings – the deeds of that family and the record of those deeds. But the nature of that record helps to shape future deeds.'³²⁰ So these restorative Biafra writings were deeds and record, and an entreaty to healing for a future Nigeria, with the spectre of Biafra peaceably reconciled into the national narrative.

It was not just Nigerian authors that stepped in to fill the Biafra historical breach. British journalist-cum-author, John St Jorre, based in Nigeria during the war whilst reporting for the *The Observer* published a history on the war. St. Jorre produced an interestingly hyphenated history entitled *The Brother's War* –

³¹⁸ John McLeod – *Nations and Nationalities - A Concise Companion to Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Shirley Chew and David Richards, (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2010) p.112.

³¹⁹ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin had themselves penned the phrase in reference to Salman Rushdie's 1982 essay *The Empire Strikes back with a vengeance*.

³²⁰ Stanford, p.21.

Biafra and Nigeria. St. Jorre opened his book stating his account of the war ‘is neither intended to be pure history or pure journalism: it falls somewhere between the two and is thus susceptible to the strengths and weaknesses of all hybrids.’³²¹ Tellingly, John Mackintosh of *The Spectator* in reviewing St. Jorre’s book noted it was ‘marvellously written... some passages read like a novel.’³²² St. Jorre, a non-historian, had demonstrated faith in the power of a hyphenated historical-fiction to deliver verisimilitude on an event lacking conventional coverage. In a telephone conversation between St. Jorre and myself, St. Jorre commended Adichie’s *Half of A Yellow Sun*, remarking that ‘she captured what it was like in Biafra’ and that he was particularly impressed by the book’s neutrality in that Adichie, an Igbo, ‘did not glorify Ojukwu.’ Further in that conversation, I asked St. Jorre also about the genocide issue. He stated the following:

I did not see any examples of it, except the loss of so many starving children due to the actions of both the Nigerian government and Ojukwu and the Biafran leadership. Ojukwu could have sued for peace much earlier than the final collapse of Biafra. There are many who suspect that he used starvation as a lever to get help from outside Biafra.³²³

Frederick Forsythe, a confidante of Ojukwu also published a historical fiction in 1969 based on Biafra called *The Dogs of War*, which he prefaced with a ‘based on a true story’ tag. Forsythe depicted a mercenary account of Biafra, which he followed in the same year with *The Biafra Story*, a non-fiction history of the Nigeria-Biafra war. Forsythe admitted by virtue of his friendship with Ojukwu, that *The Biafra Story* was ‘not a detached account’.³²⁴ However, Forsythe swore objectivity regarding the issue of genocide, which he claimed to witness: ‘A million children starved to death. I’m haunted by the images I

³²¹ John St. Jorre, *The Brother’s War: Biafra and Nigeria* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972,) p.3.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ John St. Jorre and I conversed by telephone on Friday 16th October 2020 from 6pm (BST). The conversation was recorded with permission from John St. Jorre who spoke with me from his U.S residence.

³²⁴ Frederick Forsythe – ‘Buried for 50 years: Britain’s shameful role in the Biafran war’, 21 Jan 2020, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/21/buried-50-years-britain-shamesful-role-biafran-war-frederick-forsyth> [Accessed 12 July 2020].

saw there – and by the complicity of the Wilson government.³²⁵ Accusing the British government of ‘covert interference’³²⁶ in the war with its secret weapons and ammunition sales to the Nigerians, Forsythe highlighted that until it became common knowledge ‘the Harold Wilson government lied and denied it all’.³²⁷ He went on to state:

Biafra is little discussed in the UK these days – a conflict overshadowed geopolitically by the Vietnam war, which raged at the same time. Yet the sheer nastiness of the British establishment during those three years remains a source of deep shame that we should never forget.³²⁸

Forsythe’s comments raise an important question about disengagement from Biafra scholarship, in particular Anglo-Saxon scholarship in Biafra until after the 2000s.

Paucity of research on Biafra outside Nigeria pre-2000s

Heerten and Moses note that even though the Nigeria-Biafra War ‘was a genuinely global event’, there was little research on Biafra outside Nigeria until relatively recently. Writing in 2014 of the war, they reported ‘by the late 1970s, it was seldom talked about outside Nigeria. Since then, it barely features in scholarly and popular accounts of the period.’³²⁹ They further observed that ‘the conflict is also virtually entirely absent from the field of genocide studies.’³³⁰ Genocide studies did not exist as a field during the Nigeria-Biafra war and ‘started to crystallize only in the early 1980s and consolidated and developed in the 2000s, spurred by the wars of Yugoslav secession and the Rwandan genocide in 1994’.³³¹ As in the field of Genocide studies, the field of trauma and memory took proper root post 2000s and Heerten and

³²⁵ Frederick Forsythe – ‘Buried for 50 years: Britain’s shameful role in the Biafran war’, 21 Jan 2020, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/21/buried-50-years-britain-shamesful-role-biafran-war-frederick-forsyth> [Accessed 12 July 2020].

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Lasse Heerten & A. Dirk Moses (2014) The Nigeria–Biafra war: postcolonial conflict and the question of genocide, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 16:2-3, 169-203, DOI: 10.1080/14623528.2014.936700.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

Moses note that ‘this resurgence of memorizations’ of the Nigeria-Biafra war ‘in the literary and cultural sphere dovetails with the currently growing interest in issues of trauma and memory raised by the conflict.’³³²

A key reason of Biafra’s historical relegation to the margins in global scholarship relate to events elsewhere: ‘At least internationally, it was largely forgotten by the end of the decade, overtaken by the grotesque events in Cambodia and elsewhere.’³³³ Another factor concerning the prior dearth of Biafra scholarship, especially regarding Anglo-Saxon engagement, feasibly relates to the proximal issue of Britain’s relationship with Nigeria as its former colonial overseer. It is generally accepted, as Heerten and Moses assert, that ‘the war was widely regarded as a watershed in the postcolonial global order’³³⁴ – further commenting that post-2000 researchers revisiting the ‘global moment called Biafra’ as an ‘important object of inquiry’, were particularly ‘interested in the norms that guide the foreign policies of states in debates about humanitarian intervention in which Biafra figures as a divisive case study.’³³⁵ This deduction helps retrospectively situate the British position and explains the potentially dampening effect on Biafra research in Britain following the war. For Britain, as Nigeria’s previous colonizers, Biafra presented a sensitive and exponentially divisive case, with British foreign policy choosing to alight on a resolute, self-interested position. David Birmingham expounds stating that the Nigerian civil war ‘showed not only how difficult the reconciling of political differences was in countries where the colonizers had introduced no democratic tradition... but also how determined the former colonial powers were to retain or expand their spheres of influence.’³³⁶ Thus, Britain backed and supplied arms to the Nigerian forces against Biafra ‘in the hope of winning long-term strategic benefits.’³³⁷

³³² Lasse Heerten & A. Dirk Moses (2014) The Nigeria–Biafra war: postcolonial conflict and the question of genocide, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 16:2-3, 169-203, DOI: 10.1080/14623528.2014.936700

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ David Birmingham, *The Decolonization of Africa* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996) p.25.

³³⁷ Ibid.

It is feasible that Britain's foreign policy partiality at Biafra's expense, which ultimately informed the lack of humanitarian response regarding the Nigerian government blockade on the Biafrans, helped provoke the dearth of Anglo-Saxon research pre-2000s. For in the war's immediate aftermath, Britain's actions were severely criticized regarding the supply of arms and the humanitarian question. Some went as far as implicating Britain in the purported genocide of the Ibos. Waugh and Cronjé, writing contemporaneously as the war drew to a close, wrote that 'Mr. Wilson is undoubtedly responsible for Britain's complicity in the mass murder of an African people.'³³⁸

Thus, it is not inconceivable that this public chastening and rebuke of Britain as a meddling, and amoral erstwhile colonial power engendered a less than conducive atmosphere in which British research of Biafra could flourish. Chibuike Uche adds credence to this view of an unfavorable/apathetic British research climate/culture. Uche remarks that although the British government may have believed Biafra had solid grounds for secession, 'it was not in a position to guarantee its success even if it supported the rebels', adding pointedly that the British position was influenced by the stance 'of most British academics which strongly favoured adherence to the existing colonial boundaries.'³³⁹

To conclude as we started: governmental silence regarding Biafra. Post-Gowon, as successive governments sought to hide Biafra away like a dirty secret, commentators increasingly commented on the counter-productiveness of suppression. Ikime stated:

The need for national dialogue: the civil war was precipitated when Eastern Nigeria declared itself the independent Republic of Biafra. That was secession. Gowon called it rebellion which had to be crushed. As I said earlier, there is talk again of secession. To continue to refuse the calling of a conference at which Nigerians can sit down together to discuss, among other things, the minimum conditions that must be met for all of us to

³³⁸ Auberon Waugh and Suzanne Cronjé, *Biafra: Britain's shame* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1969) p.61.

³³⁹ Uche, Chibuike. "Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War." *The Journal of African History* 49, no. 1 (2008): 111–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40206616>.

continue to remain in one country is to invite a possible replay of the events of 1966/67.³⁴⁰

Orality?

In undertaking this thesis, I imagined that I would have something substantial to say regarding Africa and oral history. However, whilst orality of history in Africa has an ancient legacy, I have found little of relevance in relation specifically to enlightening my thesis question. Still, one area where orality in history persisted and had relevance was in the area of Biafra. Many Nigerians testified that they learnt about the war through word of mouth. Growing up, I too learned of Biafra from my parents' stories – my father had been deployed on the Nigerian side before I was born. Over the years I heard many anecdotes of Biafra stories passed down from parents and grandparents. Adichie herself confirmed that much of the detail she got for *Half of A Yellow Sun* came from stories her family had told her. Journalist Eromo Egbejule disclosed how oral histories of Biafra had taken the place of conventional written history:

I knew nothing about Biafra until I was 10 years old. What I learned was thanks to my family's personal library and stories my mother told me of my maternal grandfather's participation on the Nigerian side of the war. Millions of Nigerian citizens born years after the war know nothing about it or of the two coups preceding it. In our schools, there was no education about the civil war in the history curriculum; this is even more stunning considering the fact that the Biafran war captured international attention at the time.³⁴¹

It is fitting and ironic that Biafra history was defiantly imparted through *oral tradition*: this age-old canon of historiography, which occasionally leaves no discernible trace - and formed the basis of European accusations that Africans lacked history. Eromo Egbejule may have learned nothing about Biafra at school but that institutional silence has recently been addressed. In 2016, for the

³⁴⁰ Obaro Ikime, *History, The Historian and The Nation: The Voice of a Nigerian Historian* (Ibadan: Oluseyi Press, 2006) p.321.

³⁴¹ Eromo Egbejule – 'Fifty years later, Nigeria has failed to learn from its horrific civil war' - July 7, 2017, *The Washington Post* <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/07/07/fifty-years-later-nigeria-has-failed-to-learn-from-its-horrific-civil-war/> [Accessed 19 October 2018].

first time in the nation's history, an elementary history of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war appeared in a Primary school textbook: *We Are Nigerians*. Of history's place in education, Stanford asked *what sort of return should the community look for from its investment in the historical education of its future citizens?*³⁴²

Stanford's view was that through history, children 'learn something about the world – about power, wealth, status, tradition and the functioning of institutions. Thus, history may be described as education through vicarious experience.'³⁴³ He concludes: 'But the function of a child's education is not to make her a historian; it is (from the public perspective) to make her a useful and responsible citizen.'³⁴⁴ So: via the vicarious routes of our history instruction, responsible usefulness and a strong civic appreciation appears the ultimate goal. Of course, the first step of that journey requires us to consider always the dependability of all the history presented along the way.

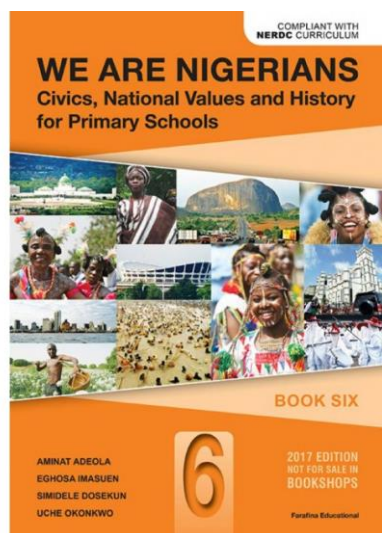


Fig.15: 'We Are Nigerians' Primary School Textbook

³⁴² Stanford, p.60.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, p.61.

Our *other* brother's keeper : The War Next Door

There is a street in Freetown, Sierra Leone – a bustling market street prone to overcrowding – that goes by a curious name: Sani Abacha Street. The strangeness of this naming, when juxtaposed with other named streets such as Mandela Way, Patrice Lumumba Avenue and Martin Luther King Boulevard is stark. As we consider the persons of Mandela, Lumumba and MLK and the designation in honour of unimpeachable democratic ideals, we imagine Abacha should not be in such company. Yet in Sierra Leone, Abacha was deserving. How did this come to be?

In May 1997, a group of Sierra Leone Army (SLA) officers staged a coup and dislodged the democratically elected government of Tejjan Kabbah. The coup plotters set up the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) as Sierra Leone's new government, headed by Major Johnny Paul Koroma. Sierra Leone had been gripped by civil war since 1991 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a rebel army with support from Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) attempted to overthrow Sierra Leone's Joseph Momoh government. After the 1997 coup, the RUF joined forces with the AFRC and Koroma declared the civil war over. Following international outcry regarding the coup, the ousted Kabbah appealed to the then chairman of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) who was also Nigerian Head of State, Gen. Sani Abacha. Enter Abacha with the West African multilateral armed force ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group) to save Sierra Leone from dictatorial abyss.

Ten months later on March 11th 1998, Kabbah, a Muslim married to a Christian and seen as a conciliator, was restored to power and returned to the capital, Freetown. By Kabbah's side that day, before jubilating crowds in the city's stadium was Gen. Sani Abacha, unlikely restorer of Sierra Leone's democratic mandate and freedoms. Within three months, Abacha would be dead. And the civil war would rumble on for a further four years until 2002. No matter - Abacha and the mostly Nigerian-led

intervention was acclaimed and the international community commended Nigerian leadership in the matter. As Chukwuma Osakwe and Bulus Audu report:

It can be said that in Sierra Leone, Nigerian troops discharged their duties credibly despite operational constraints. The United Nations Security Council had adjudged the mission a success. When the U.S. Secretary of State, Madeline Albright visited Sierra Leone towards the end of 1999, she commended ECOMOG forces by rightly saying that they had paid a heavy price to end the fighting, adding that the world owed them thanks³⁴⁵

Thus, the bustling market thoroughfare of Sani Abacha Street served as recognition and tribute to the restorer of Sierra Leone's democracy and to the power of the ballot - the people's voice - over the power of the gun. Of course, the ironies are startling. Behind the obvious incongruity of the formerly coup-plotting Abacha restoring a nation to democracy, having denied that privilege to his own nation, lay political calculations and a consciousness of history. Chukwuma Osakwe and Bulus Audu note:

Thus, with the U.N. also having joined the global community in condemning Nigeria for her human rights abuses, and failure to restore democracy at home, Nigeria under Abacha apparently in a bid to seek legitimacy for his government (which in contradiction was undemocratic itself) concentrated her global participation efforts to ensuring peace in Sierra-Leone through its leadership role.³⁴⁶

Due to foreign reluctance to assist the Abacha regime, Nigeria was forced to take on a more unilateral approach in Sierra Leone than Babangida previously did with the Liberian Civil War:

The view that the Force [ECOMOG] was being used by the Abacha regime to pursue its own economic and political interest dampened the enthusiasm of regional and international organizations to provide financial and logistic support.³⁴⁷

This unilateral approach meant Nigeria bore the major responsibility for provision of military forces and the operational expenditure. Thus, Abacha's Nigeria executed the Sierra Leone intervention at great

³⁴⁵ Chukwuma C.C.Osakwe and Bulus Nom Audu, *The Nigeria Led ECOMOG Military Intervention and Interest in the Sierra Leone Crisis: An Overview*, Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences Vol 8 No 4 S1 July 2017.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

financial cost – approximately some 8 billion dollars³⁴⁸. Abacha must have been optimistic, waving at crowds with Kabbah on that balcony, that his regime's rehabilitation in the eyes of the international community was underway.

In Abacha's action, there is a consideration and awareness of the intersectional indices of history.

We covered earlier that the Nigerian civil war serves as a focal site of historical memory for the nation.

We discussed that the combatant Abacha, who fought in Biafra, was like Gowon before him, and others subsequently, violently opposed to any notion of the break up of the Federal Republic. Abacha the more so, to the point of establishing decrees to proscribe even *discussion* of Biafra. Consequently, Abacha's intervention in Sierra Leone following the SLA coup served not just to restore a fallen democratically elected president but was a calculated action to successfully bring the civil war to a close. Abacha appreciated the historical legacy in that action; just how much is demonstrated in the reclusive, non-travelling Abacha journeying to stand beside Kabbah in Freetown. Thus, Abacha was by extension, for his own home onlookers, unavoidably keying in to civil war discourse and memory but re-contextualising it from abroad; his action in nearby Sierra Leone serving as a gestural prod of deterrence too for would-be agitators at home. Here was a reminder to the intermittent secession dreamers in Nigeria that Abacha had the means – and will – to thwart any potentially serious and large-scale dissent. Finally, at the time of Abacha's intervention in Sierra Leone, it was public knowledge that Abacha was preparing to succeed himself as the civilian president of Nigeria. Not long before the Sierra Leone intervention, US President Bill Clinton had been on tour in Africa (Clinton declined to visit Nigeria in a show of U.S. disapproval of Abacha's military regime) and gave a speech signaling that were Abacha to run for the presidency, the United States would not object. So: what better way for Abacha to display his newfound democratic credentials and conversion from previous state gangsterism than reinstating a democratically elected president toppled by coup d'état? Thus, Abacha's action in Sierra Leone

³⁴⁸ In 2008, a BBC news report put the cost of Nigeria's Sierra Leone intervention at approximately \$8 bn.

amounted also to a case of political laundering; he was washing himself anew for a second coming in mufti.

This chapter was predicated on the premise that it was impossible to appreciate history in Nigeria – and those who may seek to exploit it – without exploring the ‘memory lapse’ that constituted the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. By highlighting the oddity of a Nigerian government eschewing the tradition of triumphant combatants historicizing their victories, we established the Gowon regime’s proclivity to operate outside usual post-war historical narratives; a precedence identified as the origin of an anti-historical bent in Nigerian - specifically *military* - governance. In presenting the Gowon administration’s restriction of archival access and suppression of Biafra War literature, the idea of the wider military complex being invested with the suppression of history in its governance was explicitly suggested. The Gowon precedent was thus viewed as the initiator for successive regimes to perpetuate similar anti-historical gestures in their rule. This chapter established, via Nigerian historian Yandaki’s testimony, that following the civil war the military authorities sought to use history as a tool of the state. This further substantiated the charge that military regimes were history-conscious and attentive to the uses - and misuses - of the discipline.

On the Abacha regime, the example of a series of decrees Abacha promulgated which effected censoring specifically of any public Biafra discourse, further underlined the regime’s anti-historical proclivities. Also explored in this chapter was the notion, as expounded by various African leaders that the history discipline was redundant in a forward-looking Africa - thus confirming the existence of an anti-historical mentality within African leadership. This chapter, in further investigating historical-fiction works produced by Nigerian authors – and others, confirmed the existing breach caused by anti-historical governance, which provoked these often literary, non-historians to utilize their craft in compensation for the absence of history regarding Nigerian affairs. Also explored was why there was

little research on Biafra outside of Nigeria, particularly Anglo-Saxon scholarship before the 2000s, which highlighted the sensitivities and entanglements between Nigeria and its so-called former colonial master in Great Britain.

This Chapter lastly considered Nigeria's intervention in Sierra Leone as a point of interest given the irony of the Abacha regime helping re-instate a democratically elected government deposed by coup d'état. Abacha's actions in the intervention display an awareness of politicking in regards particularly to Abacha's intentions to succeed himself as civilian President, whereby the intervention served as a vehicle of rehabilitation for the benefit especially of the international community. Yet also, from a history consciousness standpoint, the reclusive Abacha who it was said only travelled abroad twice in his five years in power – to Mecca for Hajj – displayed a deliberate commitment to keeping a nation intact, which mirrored his anathema to fragmentation via civil war (as covered regarding Biafra in the preceding main segment of the chapter). Thus, with military might and financial means at his disposal, Abacha symbolically also utilizes the intervention in Sierra Leone as a signal of deterrence to potential home agitators, whilst simultaneously projecting his person and government as that of a legitimate and responsible regional power.

SECTION THREE: ARCHIVES

CHAPTER VI

Excavating the Past

Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none; only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness.³⁴⁹ – **Hugh Trevor-Roper**, Historian, 1963

A statement on the political responsibility of the critic: the critic must attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present.³⁵⁰ – **Homi K. Bhabha**, *The Location of Culture*

The Historical Society of Nigeria

In 1955, 12 years before the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, the *Historical Society of Nigeria* was born in Nigeria's premier higher institution – University College Ibadan. The society's chief aims was 'to promote an enduring sense of history and historical consciousness amongst the citizenry.'³⁵¹ Other key listed objectives included to 'support, strengthen and uphold the study of Nigerian history and historical scholarship'³⁵² and provide 'support to individuals, institutions, government and non-governmental organizations that will enhance the study of the country's history.'³⁵³

³⁴⁹ Ali A. Mazrui, *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa*, (London: Heinemann, 1978) p.94.

³⁵⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) p.12.

³⁵¹ 'Historical Society Aims & Objectives' (n.d.), *Historical Society of Nigeria*, <https://historicalsocietynigeria.org/> [Accessed 22 May 2018].

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid.

A year after its inception, the Society began to publish its eponymous historical journal. Initially it published annually in its first operative year of 1956 – and then bi-annually in subsequent years. In perusing and analyzing the records of publication, as well as the content matter, we can reach some insightful deductions in relation to this thesis' premise. I have reproduced below a representative selection of publications from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Fig.16: *Inaugural Journal of the Historical Society, 1956*

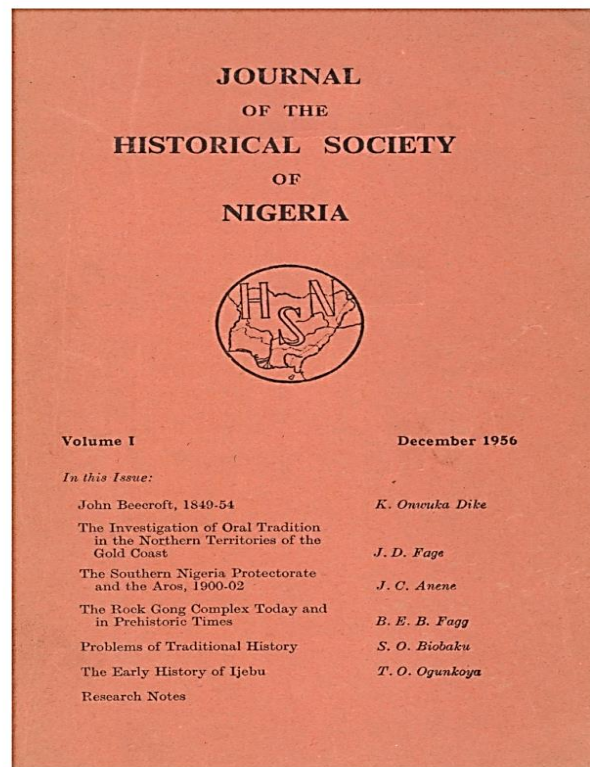


Table II: Historical Society of Nigeria: Record of Journal Publications 1950s – 1970s

Years	Volumes	Journal Content (Selection*) *Not in chronological order
1950s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1959 (Vol. 1) - No. 4 Dec 1959 • 1958 (Vol. 1) -No. 3 Dec 1958 • 1957 (Vol. 1)- No. 2 Dec 1957 • 1956 (Vol. 1)- No. 1 Dec 1956 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. JOHN BEECROFT, 1790—1854: Her Britannic Majesty's Consul to the Bights of Benin and Biafra 1849—1854 - K. O. Dike 2. SOME NOTES ON A SCHEME FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF ORAL TRADITION IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORIES OF THE GOLD COAST - J. D. Fage 3. THE PROTECTORATE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTHERN NIGERIA AND THE AROS 1900—1902 –J. C. Anene 4. THE ROCK GONG COMPLEX TODAY AND IN PREHISTORIC TIMES - B. E. B. Fagg 5. THE PROBLEM OF TRADITIONAL HISTORY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO YORUBA TRADITIONS - S. O. Biobaku 6. THE EARLY HISTORY OF IJEBU - T. O. Ogunkoya
1960s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1969 (Vol. 5) -No. 1 Dec 1969 • 1969 (Vol. 4)- No. 4 June 1969 • 1968 (Vol. 4) -No. 3 Dec1968 • No. 2 June 1968 • 1967 (Vol. 4) - No. 1 Dec 1967 • 1967 (Vol. 3) - No. 4 June 1967 • 1966 (Vol. 3) - No. 3 Dec 1966 • 1965 (Vol. 3)- No. 2 Dec 1965 • 1964 (Vol. 3)-No. 1 Dec 1964 • 1963 (Vol. 2)-No. 4 Dec 1963 • 1962 (Vol. 2)- No. 3 Dec 1962 • 1961 (Vol. 2) -No. 2 Dec 1961 • 1960 (Vol. 2)- No. 1 Dec 1960 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF KINGDOMS IN NEGRO AFRICA- Robert G. Armstrong 2. "SCIENTIFIC" RACISM AND THE BRITISH THEORY OF EMPIRE- P. D. Curtin 3. NOTES ON CONTACT BETWEEN THE IGALA AND THE IBO -J. S. Boston 4. INVESTIGATIONS AT OLD OYO, 1956—57: AN INTERIM REPORT -Frank Willett 5. MISSIONARY ACTIVITY IN THE KINGDOM OF WARRI TO THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY - A. F. C. Ryder 6. THE ECLIPSE OF THE BORGAWA-J. C. Anene 7. THE END OF AN EXPERIMENT: THE COLLAPSE OF THE IBADAN EMPIRE 1877-1893-B. Awe 8. ATTEMPTS AT DEFINING A MUSLIM IN 19TH CENTURY HAUSALAND AND BORNU-D. M. Last and M. A. Al-Hajj 9. THE LAGOS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 1888-1903- A. G. Hopkins 10. THE ATTITUDE OF EDWARD W. BLYDEN TO EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM IN AFRICA-Hollis R. Lynch 11. NEW LIGHT ON BENIN CITY WALLS - Graham Connah 12. THE CARAVAN TRADE FROM KANO TO SALAGA-Jack Goody and T. M. Mustapha 13. THE BARRA-BRITISH WAR OF 1831: A RECONSIDERATION OF ITS ORIGINS AND IMPORTANCE-P. M. Mbaeyi 14. OMU OKWEL, THE MERCHANT QUEEN OF OSSOMARI A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH-Felicia Ekejiuba 15. THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE AND MARKETING IN IBOLAND-Ukwu I. Ukwu 16. NATIVE ADMINISTRATION IN KWALE-ABOH 1928-1950: A CASE STUDY-Obaro Ikime 17. THE WARRANT CHIEF SYSTEM IN EASTERN NIGERIA: DIRECT OR INDIRECT RULE? - A. E. Afigbo

Inaugural Publication: 1956 – A trend?

In that first year of the journal's publication, the focus of the historians' contributions ranged in date from antiquity to the precolonial to the early colonial era:

'The Rock Gong Complex Today and in Prehistoric Times'

'The Early History of Ijebu'

'John Beecroft: Her Britannic Majesty's Consul to the Bights of Benin and Biafra 1849—1854'

'The Protectorate Government of Southern Nigeria and the Aros, 1900-1902.'

In that first publication, one cannot critique the submissions or comment persuasively on a particular trend in the absence of a comparative. Furthermore, these initial submissions in themselves represented authentic research topics of historical interest. However, what is never far from the surface in many of these diverse contributions, in addition to the commendable commitment to constructing untold histories to give flesh to the African narrative, is the purposeful message of some focus of history as a discipline – for example, a sub-narrative of conflict may be presented, which underlines the author's over-arching exploration of the nature of politics on the continent, its outcomes and the new geographies that was shaping the region until the pre-colonial disruption of the European invasion.

Thus, *The Early History of Ijebu* in chronicling the origins of the Yoruba and the source of the title *Awujale*³⁵⁴, reports of an 'an incident in which two towns called Owulpole and Iseyin Ondo were involved - a boundary dispute between these neighbouring clans. The Olowu of Owu and the Oni of Ife were unable to settle the dispute. An appeal was lodged with the Alafin of Oyo, who dispatched a notable Ilari and a large number of followers to adjudicate in the matter.'³⁵⁵

³⁵⁴ Awujale is the royal title of the king of the Ijebu Kingdom.

³⁵⁵ T. O. Ogunkoya, "The Early History of Ijebu." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 1, no. 1 (1956): 48–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41856613>. Accessed 10 November 2022.

It is a focus that both re-affirms the pre-Nigeria space, whilst also explaining the intricate dynamics and struggles that both shape all principalities and may help inform navigation of the post-independence space also.

Or the sub-narrative may focus strategically on highlighting the biases in the ways history may be constructed and presented, to make a wider, topical point about the predicament and erasure of African history as rendered via a European lens. For example, with *'John Beecroft: Her Britannic Majesty's Consul to the Bights of Benin and Biafra 1849—1854'*, the sensitive issue of biased history is touched on by Dike, with a surprising subject. The central character is John Beecroft, Consul to the Bights of Benin and Biafra. Dike opens his feature by stating, 'it is a commentary on the ignorance that had for so long pervaded Nigerian history that the pioneer of British power in Nigeria is unknown in the annals of European enterprise in tropical Africa. There is no mention of John Beecroft in the Dictionary of National Biography and no account of his life and John Beecroft.'³⁵⁶ This is an interesting take by Dike and in the focus being a colonial officer who himself has been erased from history, the point is being made about erased histories, as well as the 'biases' and manipulations of history. The point of Beecroft's erasure is underpinned and made more significant by the fact Dike considers him a more decent face of colonialism, stating 'the records demonstrate that even in the days of his "illegal rule" Beecroft enjoyed the confidence and affection of a community that numbered between 35,000 to 40,000 Africans.'³⁵⁷

In examining subsequent publications, we discern emergent patterns and inclinations.

Early 1960s publications: The House our History Built

³⁵⁶ K. O. Dike, "John Beecroft, 1790—1854: Her Britannic Majesty's Consul to the Bights of Benin and Biafra 1849—1854." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 1, no. 1 (1956): 5–14. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41856608>.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

In analyzing a representative snapshot of 1960s submissions against the background of contemporaneous current affairs, we can make educated guesses about the journals' inclinations. Though history is indeed about past reflection – sometimes the conjunctions between the past and the present meet memorably to make the present in itself a historical moment – a commemorative moment of *living history* that we consider a significant component or cumulative contribution to the times. Michael Stanford denotes these moments as 'history-as-event'³⁵⁸, which he distinguishes from 'history-as-account.'³⁵⁹ Such a moment might have appeared to exist in 1960 in the newly independent nation of Nigeria, in which history-as-event might have overlapped neatly with history-as account. However, the 1960 journal took a different route, for compelling reasons, as we shall come to see. In the HSN 1960 journal publication, the event of Independence was neither fully addressed nor celebrated. The Society President Onwuka Dike referenced Independence in the *Foreward* of the Journal, stating 'it is appropriate that this first year of our new history should be marked by the commencement of a new volume of the Historical Society's Journal' - but tempered this by declaring 'now more than ever, when the pace of change is so rapid it is essential to look back and understand our cultural heritage.'³⁶⁰ This is a statement of intent from Dike and explains why in the main body of the 1960 journal, the issue of independence does not feature.

Dike cannot be faulted for choosing to detour from the independence story and seeking to pursue also a purist tradition of history with a discernible Africanist note of defiance. In that foreword, Dike spoke also of exploring 'not only the colonial past but the immemorial tradition of our own societies'.³⁶¹ This speaks of a refutation; a desire and impatience to champion indigenous histories as an antidote to a colonialism partly fueled by European colonisers own repudiation of African History. Thus, the initial preoccupation

³⁵⁸ Stanford, p.11.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Foreword by the President of the Society – K. Onwuka Dike, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 2, No. 1, December 1960 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40092309> [Accessed 20 June 2017].

³⁶¹ Ibid.

of the earlier JHSN publications in presenting studies of the precolonial African past served a very critical, redemptive function: it served to address the pernicious mid-century debate in which Western scholars had asserted there was no African history before the European conquest. This assertion, most notably voiced by distinguished University of Oxford Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper, came from a litany of other highly respected Western scholars and prominent voices; Trevor-Roper's was by no means the sole voice espousing loudly an entrenched European view. Trevor-Roper is of note not least because in addition to his status as a most esteemed historian, contextually in relation to his timing, his assertions vocalized in the 1960s – in 1969 he repeated his contention, labeling the entire African continent 'unhistoric',³⁶² – reinforced long-held views at this critical juncture when several African nations had become newly independent. Views traceable to the Hegelian position and dialectic which purposed to exclude Africa from universal history. In language not dissimilar to Trevor-Roper's assertion of 'darkness' in Africa regarding history, Hegel declared that 'Africa Proper' lay 'beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night.'³⁶³ Hegel subsequently affirms, in a preceding charge to Trevor-Roper's 'unhistorical' indictment of Africa, that Africa 'is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit.'³⁶⁴

So Dike's motive and task with the historical society and journal is three-fold: the denigration and Eurocentric narrative of a history-less Africa is to be addressed and de-bunked; histories of Africa must be assembled and presented to hasten this de-bunking and construct new narratives; finally, these newly presented narratives and histories will establish Africa as a viable self-determining, historical entity - thus aiding the severance of the prejudicial umbilical cord between the continent and the European colonial mindset.

³⁶² Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Past and Present: History and Sociology," *Past and Present* 42 (1969): 3-1.

³⁶³ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. H. Clarke (New York: Dover, 1956). P.91.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Consequently, in light of the overarching Eurocentric narrative of African 'non-history' in the absence of indigenous African histories, a key approach of Dike's is to reconstruct the European-formulated edifice of Nigeria with made-in-Nigeria bricks: this European invention called Nigeria must be deconstructed and rebuilt to become the house that 'Nigerian' history built. In this way, Dike and his fellow historians see themselves as pioneering figures – the *builder-historians* settling Nigeria's new historical frontier. The builder-historians who with their critical eye may dismantle the old scaffolding, and like Homi Bhabha's critic cited, 'take responsibility' and bring to life 'the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present.'³⁶⁵ The challenge of Dike's task in 1960 may be glimpsed when one considers, for example, historian Finn Fuglestad writing in 1991 and addressing Trevor-Roper's view on Africa regarding history by stating 'it is to be sure no longer deemed respectable to put the label "unhistoric" on the African continent. But the contention that Black Africa has indeed a history worthy of interest and consideration is still not self-evident to everyone.'³⁶⁶

Dike's pivot away from over-celebrating Independence is a deliberate ploy to avoid presenting Independence as the ground zero of Nigerian history. The inaugural 1960 journal, consequently, focused instead on submissions such as: '*Investigations at Old Oyo, 1956-57*'; '*Notes on Contact between the Igala and the Ibo*'; '*Peter Nicholls: Old Calabar and Freetown*'; '*The Origins of Sapaele Township*'; '*Preliminary inventory of the records of the United States Diplomatic and Consular Posts in West Africa, 1856-1935*'.

It is critical to make an important point at this juncture that contextualizes and further situates the sagacity of Dike's strategy and approach. Though the absented history narrative of a Trevor-Roper on Africa - or a Hegel before him – is underpinned by various elements, a key factor derives from the conceit of the conqueror. This conceit is a self-referential posture with components of a messianic

³⁶⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) p.12.

³⁶⁶ Finn Fuglestad, "The Trevor-Roper Trap or the Imperialism of History. An Essay." *History in Africa* 19 (1992): 309–26. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3172003>.

complex – hence, the conqueror’s appearance ostensibly births and validates the conquered; ushers the subjects into being and thus commences the redemptive ticking clock of history on account of this encounter. Dike’s insight is grasping that this encounter between conqueror and conquered is essentially – and transformatively – a *political* moment. Many political scientists have explored the links between political theory and empire, particularly as rationale and grounding for the empire venture. Uday Mehta terms these links the ‘underpinnings of the project of empire’³⁶⁷, further identifying these as ‘abusive distortions of civilizational hierarchies, racial superiority, and assumptions of cultural impoverishment by which British power justified its territorial expansionism and commercial avarice.’³⁶⁸

Ultimately, from this encounter between conquered and conqueror ensues configurations of power; a domination by the imperialists forged by a erasing of clearly defined political status for the indigenes beyond being subalterns/subjects. Necessarily, the dominant power controls the prevailing discourses. In paraphrasing Foucault, Hartman notes, ‘discourses of people in power tend to become privileged and accepted as truth or knowledge, whereas the discourses of disempowered people tend to become marginalized. The voices of disempowered people become subjugated and silenced and their stories are untold.’³⁶⁹ Of course, these silenced ‘stories’ translate too as *histories*. Thus, oppressive, institutional power always wields in its domination of cultural narratives, a political dimension that’s self-serving. Thus, the HSN and JHSN were set up to provide a counter-narrative: to hasten the breaking through of subjugated perspectives to dislodge dominant, alien narratives.

Consequently, as a counter, Dike elected with the JHSN to present also what may be deemed past *political* moments that preceded the white man’s presence; these encounters, skirmishes, between tribes and indigenous peoples that begat rebellions, hostilities, peasant struggles, which also reflected

³⁶⁷ Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) p.22.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p.155.

³⁶⁹ Ann Hartman, "Many ways of knowing." *Social Work* 35, no. 1 (1990): 3-4.

concerns with the nature of political power on the continent; struggles which displaced, re-settled indigenes, reshaped new political geographies and confirmed histories in the making.

And sometimes these counter-narratives served to refute damaging stereotypes that had become dangerously embroidered into the national self-image of the peoples and Nigerians. For example, much had been made of the ethnic strife and discord of the peoples of the Nigerian region first by the colonisers and then dangerously by Nigerians themselves, particularly in the run-up to independence where for example prominent voices – such as those of Ahmadu Bello – entreated the British to delay or even scrap the independence project altogether on fear of domination by a non-northern tribe. Contributions such as *Notes on Contact between the Igala and the Ibo*, in speaking of a ‘flourishing trade, in the 19th Century, between the riverain settlements of both peoples’ and noting that despite ethnic differences, ‘inter-marriage’ and ‘common religious ideas’ developed between the two such that ‘they regard their relationship as one of equal interaction,’³⁷⁰ serves to disabuse one of the commonplace platitude that the Nigerian space is and was always enmeshed in ethnic rivalry devoid of any co-operation or goodwill. Other times, the counter narrative fixed on a history that personalized and humanized the individual, as well as being critically informative - as did the social history, *Peter Nicholls: Old Calabar and Freetown*. Focusing on the enigmatic ‘Peter Nicholls’, the slave name bestowed on a Nigerian-born individual, sold as a slave after the murder of his mother and who rose to business prominence as a resident African member of the bourgeoisie in Sierra Leone. The Nicholls history chronicles and brings to life varied aspects of African existence typically undisturbed by history chronicling. As the writer states, ‘Peter Nicholls’s life seems to span unrelated worlds. Glimpse him at any one moment - and who would imagine the preceding or subsequent stages? The Kalabari slave-boy

³⁷⁰ Boston, J. S. “Notes on contact between the Igala and the Ibo.” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no. 1 (1960): 52–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41970820>.

... the pious sergeant... the taciturn businessman travelling regularly to England first-class on the mailboat.³⁷¹ Then the writer makes the main point:

His life-story is only indirectly a contribution to the history of Nigeria. Save for his early years and his short-lived venture into the oil trade of Old Calabar he spent his life elsewhere. But he exemplifies the many Sierra Leone recaptives of Nigerian origin whose initiative and self-reliance in their new home turned them into an African bourgeoisie, without which the subsequent political development of West Africa would have been impossible.³⁷²

This is the builder-historian at work.

It was undoubtedly a herculean task to reconcile these divergent and ancient multiple histories in the shadow of the colonial conquest. For one, in pursuit of the builder-historian vision, the society would be playing a monumental catch-up: a brand new body of work needed to be sourced, investigated, built up.

A further challenge for the Society, in the shadow of imperialism and Nigeria's subsequent independence, was in working retrospectively to a point where the re-presented histories of old Nigeria, could be rationally assembled and integrated to reconcile with the reality of the 'new' Nigeria. It should be noted that in the old order of things, in the arrangement both of the newly created Nigeria of 1900 – and the subsequently Independent Nigeria of 1960, it is the core narrative of British imperialism that sits at the centre of these happenings. Thus, in light of this, the turning away from independence from the outset of the JHSN's inaugural 1956 edition further makes sense; a willful turning away from a centre deemed inauthentic and artificially bound. Colonialism constitutes an alien invasion – an international story; local histories must therefore assume supremacy. Thus, Dike understood his task was to present a body with a fuller complement of the human histories of the region whether it be *'Investigations at Old Oyo'* or *'The Origins of Sapele Township'*.

³⁷¹ Christopher Fyfe. "Peter Nicholls—Old Calabar and Freetown." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no. 1 (1960): 105–14. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41970823>.

³⁷² Ibid.

It could be argued that history of course is about excavating the past and that meaning is diminished if the present is not configured in the excavation. Consequently, it could be further argued that coming at the juncture of Nigeria's independence, this *builder-historian* process, this willful 'turning away' from the 'centre' somehow constitutes a narrowed engagement; a parochial assignation that may somewhere down the line ultimately encourage also, as a practice, niche pursuits in historical investigations. Interestingly, I examine the issue of niche pursuits in **Chapter VIII** when reflecting on and detailing my findings on the content of the history theses submissions I examined at the universities I visited whilst on field trip in Nigeria in 2018. However, the reasons and foundation for these proved unrelated and motivated by a distinct combination of unique factors. Thus, the niche or parochial charge would be erroneous against the JHSN and would fail to appreciate both the task and strategy of the HSN, as exemplified in in the historic 1956 and 1960 editions, which respectively with the nation on the brink of a hard-fought sovereignty and the tremors of independence set loose, expounded on '*Rock Gong Complex Today and in Prehistoric Times*' and '*The Early History of Ijebu*' with zero context or reference to the imminent or just happened Independence.

On a fundamental level, a *builder-historian* preliminary pivot away from an imperialist-conceived centre serves the purpose of a repudiation of colonial power; it is an insurgent snub which in not giddily acknowledging independence and thus its preceding fact of servitude, asserts the indigene's *true* free status – a status that pre-dated the arrival of the colonialists. It is a snub, in its rebellious silence, which further signifies that whilst subjugation might have occurred, no admission of inferiority shall be countenanced/forthcoming.

1960s-1970: Civil War Years

The JHSN selection during the Nigerian civil war period is also instructive: the pivot away from *history-as-event* as evident from that first 1956 journal seemingly coalesced into a habitual methodology. In the civil war years, the JHSN output from 1967–1970 offers an unambiguous reading.

Table III: Historical Society of Nigeria: 1967 – 1968
Record of Journal Publications during the Biafra years

Volumes: (Years)	Journal Content
1967 (Vol. 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEW LIGHT ON THE BENIN CITY WALLS (Graham Connah • THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE AND MARKETING IN IBOLAND-Ukwu I. Ukwu • THE WARRANT CHIEF SYSTEM IN EASTERN NIGERIA: DIRECT OR INDIRECT RULE? - A. E. Afigbo • BRITISH RULE IN BENIN 1897-1920: DIRECT OR INDIRECT? - Philip Igbafe • NOTES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PAN-AFRICANISM - Imanuel Geiss
1967 (Vol. 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A NOTE ON ATTITUDES TO THE SUPERNATURAL IN THE SOKOTO JIHAD - Murray Last • THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WESTERN EDUCATION AMONG MUSLIMS IN NIGERIA 1896-1926 - G. O. Gbadamosi • POLITICAL AWAKENING IN THE NORTH: A RE-INTERPRETATION - G. O. Olusanya • SOME ORAL TRADITIONS FROM SABON BIRNIN GWARI-- Norman K. Grant • A LIST OF SITES, BUILDINGS AND OTHER ANTIQUITIES DECLARED TO BE MONUMENTS UNDER THE ANTIQUITIES ACT FROM FEBRUARY 1956 TO DECEMBER 1964 - K. C. Murray
1968 (Vol. 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THE BACKGROUND TO THE SOUTHERN NIGERIAN EDUCATION CODE OF 1903 - A. E. Afigbo • NATIONALITY AND NATIONALISM: THE CASE OF BAROTSELAND - Terence Ranger and T. O. Ranger • JIHAD AND SOCIAL REVOLUTION IN FUTA DJALON IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY - Walter Rodney • THE DILEMMA OF THE WAZIR: THE PLACE OF THE RISĀLAT AL-WAZĪR 'ILA AHL AL- ʿILM WA'L-TADABBUR IN THE HISTORY OF THE CONQUEST OF THE SOKOTO CALIPHATE -R. A. Adeleḡe

Table IV: Historical Society of Nigeria: 1968 – 1970
Record of Journal Publications during the Biafra years

Volumes: (Years)	Journal Content
1968 (Vol. 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THE BENIN WATER RATE AGITATION 1937-1939: AN EXAMPLE OF SOCIAL CONFLICT- Philip A. Igbafe • MUHAMMAD LAMINE IN FRANCO-TUKULOR RELATIONS 1885-1887 - B. Olatunji Oloruntimehin • THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY AND THE ROYAL NIGER COMPANY, 1886-1900 - E. A. Ayandel • CHRISTIANITY AND THE RISE OF COCOA-GROWING IN IBADAN AND ONDO (pp. 439-451) S. S. Berry
1969 (Vol. 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THE ÌSÉYÌN-ÒKÈIHÒ RISING OF 1916: AN EXAMPLE OF SOCIO-POLITICAL CONFLICT IN COLONIAL NIGERIA -J. A. Atanda • THE NORTH-EASTERN YORUBA DISTRICTS AND THE BENIN KINGDOM - S. A. Akintoye • THE ROLE OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF LAGOS, 1886-1913 (pp. 555-570) - Tekena N. Tamuno
1969 (Vol. 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THE CAREER OF THOMAS TICKEL IN THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF LAGOS, 1854-1886 - Kọla Fọlayan • SELF-TAUGHT ATTORNEYS IN LAGOS, 1865-1913 - O. Adewoye • STEFAN SZOLC ROGOZINSKI AND THE ANGLO-GERMAN RIVALRY IN THE CAMEROONS - J. A. Betley
1970 (Vol. 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THE "JIHAD" IN THE SOUTH: AN OUTLINE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY • NUPE HEGEMONY IN NORTH-EASTERN YORUBALAND AND AFENMAI (pp. 193-209) - Michael Mason • THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE YORUBA WARS OF THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY: A RECONSIDERATION -R. C. C. Law • RĀBIḤ FAḌLALLĀH 1879-1893: EXPLOITS AND IMPACT ON POLITICAL RELATIONS IN CENTRAL SUDAN - R. A. Adeleye • THE FREETOWN COLONY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF 'LEGITIMATE' COMMERCE IN THE ADJOINING TERRITORIES - E. A. Ijagbemi
1970 (Vol. 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SOME CONSIDERATIONS RELATING TO THE FORMATION OF STATES IN HAUSALAND Abdullahi Smith • SIR RALPH MOOR AND THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTHERN NIGERIA: 1896-1903 - A. E. Afigbo • RĀBIḤ B. FAḌLALLĀH AND THE DIPLOMACY OF EUROPEAN IMPERIAL INVASION IN THE CENTRAL SUDAN, 1893-1902 - R. A. Adeleye

Table V: Historical Society of Nigeria: 1971 – 1972
Record of Journal Publications for 2 years following Biafra

Volumes: (Years)	Journal Content
1971 (Vol. 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TRIPOLI—BORNU POLITICAL RELATIONS, 1817-1825 - KolaFolayan • THE FALL OF THE OLD OYO EMPIRE: A RE-CONSIDERATION OF ITS CAUSE - J. A. Atanda • Nineteenth Century Revolutions in the Delta State and Calabar - E.J Alagoa • LONG-DISTANCE TRADE AND ISLAM: THE CASE OF THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY HAUSA KOLA TRADE - Paul E. Lovejoy
1971 (Vol. 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THE ECLIPSE OF THE ARO SLAVING OLIGARCHY OF SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA 1901–1927 -A. E. Afigbo • THE CHURCH AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE NIGERIAN THEATRE, 1866–1914 - J. A. Adedeji • SAPARA WILLIAMS: THE LAWYER AND THE PUBLIC SERVANT - O. Adewoye • FRANCO-SAMORI RELATIONS 1886–1889: DIPLOMACY AS WAR - B. Olatunji Oloruntimehin
1972 (Vol. 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EARLY AGRICULTURE IN AFRICA -Thurstan Shaw • MAHDIST TRIUMPH AND BRITISH REVENGE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: SATIRU 1906 -R. A. Adeleye • SLAVERY AND SLAVE REVOLTS IN THE SULTANATE OF ZANZIBAR IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY - G. A. Akinola • THE IMAMATE QUESTION AMONG YORUBA MUSLIMS - G. O. Gbadamosi
1972 Vol.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAFÉ AU LAIT: SENEGAL'S MULATTO COMMUNITY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY - H. O. Idowu • THEORIES AND REALITIES IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF COLONIAL FRENCH WEST AFRICA FROM 1890 TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR B. Olatunji Oloruntimehin • THE IGBO-UKWU 'BRONZES': A SEARCH FOR THE ECONOMIC EVIDENCE (pp. 313-321)

In a period with war-torn Nigeria experiencing the most devastating indictment of its post-independence existence, below is a snapshot reproduction from **Table V** above, of the journals' submissions:

The establishment of Western education amongst Muslims in Nigeria 1896-1926 (1967);

To the Palaver Islands: War and Diplomacy on the Lagos Lagoon in 1852 – 1854 (1969);

Rabih B. Fadlallah and the diplomacy of European imperial Invasion in the central Sudan, 1893 – 1902 (1970);

Railway Projects and British Attitude towards the development of West Africa, 1872 – 1903 (1971);

Nineteenth Century Revolutions in the Eastern Delta State and Calabar (1971)

The Church and the emergence of the Nigerian Theatre, 1866 -1974 (1971);

Slavery and Slave revolts in the Sultanate of Zanzibar in the Nineteenth Century (1972)

It is unsurprising that in the midst of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil war, the JHSN contributors have war on their mind. In the *establishment of Western education amongst Muslims in Nigeria 1896-1926 (1967)*, the issue of conflict bubbles to the surface with observation of 'a tension and dislocation within the society' which brought about 'the emergence of the so-called Mahdis' and inspired 'a morbid fear of Muslim "fanaticism" which manifested itself in many Mahdist agitations.'³⁷³

On To the Palaver Islands: War and Diplomacy on the Lagos Lagoon in 1852 – 1854, the author chronicles life around 'the great lagoon' where 'the Lagos and Ijebu kingdoms maintained fleets of war canoes on its shallow waters, and it was by this route that the armies of Benin travelled to establish in the sixteenth or seventeenth century a still-reigning dynasty at Lagos.'³⁷⁴ It is an intricate study that explains the power dynamics at the heart of what was to become Nigeria's first capital – 'In the middle of the nineteenth century the lagoon was disturbed by a feud between two claimants to the Lagos throne, Kosoko, who reigned from 1845 until 1851, and first Akitoye, who had been expelled from the throne by Kosoko.'³⁷⁵ The author framed his aim in this study as seeking to 'throw light on the political and economic relations of the lagoon peoples and on their warfare. It should also illustrate the beginnings of official contacts between the Yoruba and the British and give an insight into African, as well as European, methods of diplomacy.'³⁷⁶

The interesting thing about the entry *Rabih B. Fadlallah and the diplomacy of European imperial Invasion in the central Sudan, 1893 – 1902* is that war and conquest is the central story, chronicling the Islamic conquest of Bornu state by Egyptian fugitive from Sudan, Rābih el-Ghazal in 1879. However, in the shadow of this conquest, is presented the scramble for Africa, which reports that 'with his

³⁷³ G. O. Gbadamosi, "The Establishment of Western Education among Muslims in Nigeria 1896-1926." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4, no. 1 (1967): 89–115. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41971202>.

³⁷⁴ Robert Smith, "To the Palavar Islands: War and Diplomacy on The Lagos Lagoon in 1852-1854." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 5, no. 1 (1969): 3–25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41856820>.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

establishment in Bornu from 1893, Rābih had firmly planted his power in unwitting opposition to the conflicting imperial ambition of France, Great Britain and Germany. His inexorable march through Central Africa had profoundly affected pre-existing political relations in the area.³⁷⁷ The author concludes that Rābih 'ultimately brought about his ruin' given that 'it was the age of European big-power imperialism in which the black imperialism of Rābih - a veritable 'Napoleon' of Africa as he has been aptly described - had no place.'³⁷⁸

This strategy could also be discerned, for example, in reading *Nineteenth Century Revolutions in the Delta State and Calabar* written by E.J Alagoa during the height of the civil war, published thereafter and submitted in the 1971 Vol.5 journal edition. Alagoa's piece opens by stating previous accounts of the 'revolutions' had merely 'characterized these disturbances of the status quo as "slave revolts". It is the object of this paper to review this aspect of Nigerian history and to suggest a revised conclusion.'³⁷⁹ So there is a setting the account straight motive. For Alagoa, these 'disturbances', which started ostensibly as slave revolts, equate ultimately to more than mere disturbances as he refers to them as 'political upheavals'. He states, 'there can be no slave revolt without a situation in which the slaves as a class suffer grave injustices or consider themselves the victims of such injustice. Finally, even if such grievances existed, a revolt can rarely get underway unless the slaves had opportunities to organize. Such opportunities were more likely to occur where the slaves were segregated socially as a class apart, and often also physically, in locations, camps, or plantations.'³⁸⁰ Obvious parallels come to mind, with the grievances of the Ibos in the run-up to Biafra, who in the North of Nigeria particularly felt mistreated

³⁷⁷ R. A. Adeleḡe, "Rābih B. Fādllāh and the Diplomacy of European Imperial Invasion in the Central Sudan, 1893-1902." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 5, no. 3 (1970): 399-418. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41856864>.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ E. J. Alagoa, "Nineteenth Century Revolutions in the Eastern Delta States and Calabar." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 5, no. 4 (1971): 565-73. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41856884>.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

and were also physically segregated as a class apart in areas of the cities – such as Sabon Gari in Kano³⁸¹ - where indigenes did not reside.

The piece details a regional 19th Century rebellion, in precisely the geographical location a century hence, which in that present day was being contested as a site of genocidal massacre due also to a historic rebellion against the state, in the shape of the Biafra war. The parallels could not be more striking between Alagoa's 19th Century revolution and what was happening on the ground in real time in Biafra. The link did not need to be any more explicit; the connection was clear as was the moral of the story – still more importantly, the JHSN project was clear and defined – to extract and produce histories first and foremost, where none had previously been presented. Once again, this unwavering focus in light of the unique assignment that the new postcolonial landscape assigned the builder-historians was perfectly adjudged at its time. It would then only be appropriate later on, when these foundations of freshly-laid history had set and hardened, that the luxury of mixing the retrospective with the contemporaneous could be critically connected to fuller historical accounts; that the brush of history could be widened to comprise, reference, consider and interpret the old Nigeria within the perimeters of the new. That this did not exactly happen is no indictment of the builder-historians but an indictment of the next waves of historians whom Aderinto and Osifodunrin later criticized stating 'Nigerian historians still prefer to hold on tenaciously to their eternal quest for precolonial and colonial history... in the eye of the Nigerian public at the present time is the fact that it is believed to be an irrelevant discipline ... Nigerian historians must begin to welcome the study of contemporary events.'³⁸²

1980s-1990s: The Expiration of History

³⁸¹ Sabon Gari literally translates as 'Strangers' Quarters'.

³⁸² Saheed Aderinto and Paul Osifodunrin, *The Third Wave of Historical Scholarship On Nigeria* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) p.367.

In the 1980s, journals were published bi-annually from June 1980 to June 1985. After the June 1985 publication, which completed the journal allocation for that year, Gen. Babangida seized power in a military coup on 27th August 1985. From that moment through the 1990s – Babangida (1985-1993) and Abacha (1993-1998) ruled most of the decade – the Society did not produce or publish a single journal. As the discipline of History was expunged from secondary schools in 1982, the Society's 1985 cessation of journal publication marked a deferred acknowledgement of history's demise. Dike, the President of the HSN had died in 1983. The two major features of the 1985 editions, in fittingly epitaphic mode, focused submissions on a tribute and funeral oration to Dike respectively:

- *Towards a more enduring sense of History: A tribute to K.O. Dike by J.F. Ajayi*
- *Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike, 1917 – 1983: A funeral Oration (delivered at the graveside on behalf of the Historical Society of Nigeria).*

In *Towards a more enduring sense of History: A tribute to K.O. Dike*, Ajayi berates the nation that 'has no sense of history' and further declares 'we lack statesmen with any sense of history. Politics of the moment dominates our life.' Ajayi's pronouncement, in 1985 whilst the presidency is occupied by Babangida, is a not-too-subtle chastisement of the preceding Heads of States from the Gowon period up to Babangida's tenure. Undoubtedly, the Babangida and subsequently the Abacha tenure represented an extended obituary of sorts for history. One difficulty that unavoidably confronted members of the HSN as it did other researchers of Nigerian history, related to the non-accession of government documents to national archives, which invariably limited and blighted historical research. On these archival obstructions, Daly notes that this 'has been especially true for historians of the post-colonial period, who often find that state repositories contain few or no records from the years after independence', noting further that historians and university researchers often 'have to obtain and interpret documentary materials in the absence of centralized state archives.'³⁸³ This non-access to

³⁸³ Samuel Fury Childs Daly, "Archival research in Africa", *African Affairs*, Volume 116, Issue 463, April 2017, Pages 311–320, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adw082>.

governmental and national archives often took the form of a generally intransigent and obstructionist stance from military governments whom, as Ajayi et al note, often 'lacked legitimacy' and were innately suspicious of universities' potential to mobilise organized protests that may 'initiate revolution.'³⁸⁴

Regarding national archives, it is ironic when we note that Dike is considered the original founder of the Nigerian Record Office (now National Archives of Nigeria) which was established in 1954 from Dike's efforts and recommendation to the pre-independence government³⁸⁵ - yet the post-independent actions of successive military governments regarding central archives, whether wilfully obstructive or negligent as Daly reports, contributed to inhibiting the work of the direct heirs to Dike's HSN, especially from the mid 80s to 90s when Nigeria's military regimes from Babangida to Abacha was at full throttle.

The JHSN, voluntarily retired for the second half of the 80s and the entire 90s, did not return until the 2000s. In the years since the Society was formed, the 1990s was the first decade in which the journal fell silent. Given that the journal publication and the Society was active since its 50s founding, even through the 1980s when Nigeria's political reality became increasingly volatile with coup d'états, the hiatus in the 1990's was a significant hiatus that required further explanation beyond the discussed issue of archival difficulties. I contacted Presidents of the Historical Society past and present to gain further insight into the cessation of publication during the 1990s. Dr. Ochayi Okpeh, the current National President of the Historical Society of Nigeria underlined funding difficulties as critical, stating 'the challenge was more of funding issues. Our journal almost became extinct because of funding challenges, basically.'³⁸⁶ The previous HSN President, Dr. Olayemi Akinwumi whom I also contacted, whilst acknowledging the funding issue, also claimed a disinterested leadership impacted the output. 'What happened was the lack of interest by the various Executive Officers of the Society during the period under discussion. It was the time meetings and conferences stopped. People who were not committed

³⁸⁴ J.F.Ade Ajayi, Lameck K.H. Goma & G. Ampah Johnson, *The African Experience with Higher Education*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996) p.114.

³⁸⁵ Jörg Adelberger, "The National Archives: Kaduna (NAK), Nigeria." *History in Africa* 19 (1992): 435–39. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3172011>.

³⁸⁶ Dr. OChayi Okpeh, interviewed by Author, Online, 22 April 2022.

took over the administration of the Society. It was only in 2005, that a new generation of scholars, young and committed took over and the narrative was changed.³⁸⁷

New blood notwithstanding, the issue of funding is key – and if we look at the historical context of what was educationally afoot in the 1990s, especially regarding the universities, we get a broader sense of the collateral impact to a Society that was itself borne of and steeped in the Nigerian University research tradition. Ajayi, Goma and Johnson reference funding issues as ‘the problems of the 1990s’³⁸⁸ stating, ‘the damage sustained by under-resourcing the universities during the years of economic decline, in almost all Sub-Saharan African countries, has been massive generally ... in fact, the first impression one gets of an African university campus in the 1990s is one of an all-pervading state of physical, managerial, and intellectual dilapidation.’³⁸⁹ Coombe supports this, stating these African universities at the turn of the 1990s were ‘impoverished, frustrated, dilapidated and overcrowded.’³⁹⁰ This state of affairs would inescapably impact and have negative consequences for the study and appreciation of history in Nigeria – not to mention impact the Society and JHSN as collateral damage, since many of its contributors first and foremost were getting their daily bread as university practitioners.

Similarly, to understand the difficulties faced by HSN members in terms of their institutional ability to carry out research and access historical sources during this period, one must revisit the unfavourable economic situation that manifested nationally in the 1980s – (but had begun to impact the universities in the late 70’s) - and peaked in the 1990s. As Tim Livsey notes, ‘by the later 1970s Nigerian Universities started to encounter serious funding difficulties. Between 1975 and 1982, 22 new universities were founded, but government spending on higher education failed to keep pace with the expansion of the

³⁸⁷ Dr. Olayemi Akinwumi, interviewed by Author, Online, 26 April 2022.

³⁸⁸ J.F.Ade Ajayi, Lameck K.H. Goma & G. Ampah Johnson, *The African Experience with Higher Education*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996) p.144.

³⁸⁹ Ibid. p.145.

³⁹⁰ Trevor Coombe, *A Consultation on Higher Education in Africa: A Report to the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation* (Institute of Education, University of London) 1991.

sector.’³⁹¹

By the mid-late 80s, Anyanwu notes that the under-funding of universities was so ‘crippling’, that ‘Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian universities sent a delegation to the president in 1998 to demand more funds.’³⁹² Ajayi et al concur noting that from the mid 80s ‘resources available to the universities began to dwindle as the economies ceased to grow and even decline’, the end result being that ‘the relationship between university communities and governments became more troubled.’³⁹³ There was a precedent to this situation since the 1970s, as Tim Livsey noted, ‘although universities proliferated under military rule in the 1970s, their relationship with the government could be tense.’³⁹⁴

The Abacha government’s relationship with the universities was certainly tense, with Anyanwu stating ‘the fate of universities was sealed when Abacha became the president in November 1993’, further explaining that ‘despite Abacha’s economic recovery policies, the conditions of universities did not get better; his government ignored ASUU’s consistent demand for improved condition of service and better funding of universities.’³⁹⁵ Abacha subsequently banned ASUU, forcing them to go underground, whereupon they ‘became ineffective’³⁹⁶ and the issue of university funding receded further from view.

Further on funding, both Babangida and Abacha were known to be generous patrons of government funds to projects they felt invested in. This largesse did not exclude historical projects. Babangida, purportedly to engage a nationwide historical discourse established The Nigerian Political Bureau in 1986. This bureau, one of the *appendages* Yandaki alluded to, was inaugurated to conduct a national debate on Nigeria’s political future and was charged amongst other aims to ‘review Nigeria’s political

³⁹¹ Tim Livsey, *Nigeria’s University Age: Reframing Decolonisation and Development*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) p.179.

³⁹² Ogechi, Emmanuel Anyanwu, *The Politics of Access – University Education and Nation-Building in Nigeria, 1948-2000*, (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011) p.178.

³⁹³ J.F.Ade Ajayi, Lameck K.H. Goma & G. Ampah Johnson, *The African Experience with Higher Education*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996) p.114.

³⁹⁴ Tim Livsey, *Nigeria’s University Age*, p.179.

³⁹⁵ Ogechi, Emmanuel Anyanwu, *The Politics of Access*, p.178.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p.198.

history and identify the basic problems which have led to our failure in the past and suggest ways of resolving and coping with these problems.³⁹⁷ Babangida also established the Kano State History and Cultural Bureau as earlier mentioned, whilst Abacha similarly lent weight and funds to the creation of the Katsina State History and Cultural Bureau, making Abacha an unlikely patron of history scholarship. Still, both Babangida and Abacha's rule are distinguished by a moratorium of activity from the Historical Society of Nigeria, which remained uniquely and largely dormant throughout those regimes.

What was undeniable – and should not be underemphasized – was the key role on multiple levels the Society and the JHSN played regarding Nigerian history. Firstly, following independence, the JHSN had been critical in establishing a historical 'framework' for the nation in the face of daunting Western denial; secondly, the Society and JHSN were instrumental in *championing* the study of history as a key feature of responsible citizenship and a vital factor in progressing self-identity. Thirdly, with their choice of research and study, the JHSN displayed a commitment to tackling concerns that struck at understanding the nature of political power on the continent so as to better comprehend the origins and distinct complexities that fashioned and explained the nation. The relevance of this kind of analysis held even more weight in light of the martial political power that gripped Nigeria in the coup years - particularly in the especially exacting regimes of Babangida and then Abacha in the 1990s, which coincided with the silence of the JHSN when arguably the voice and work of the society was most needed. For as Stanford makes clear, 'few governments of any kind – religious or political – can resist the urge to shape our attitudes to history. Historians have a public duty to expose these attempts.'³⁹⁸ Consequently, the Society and JHSN hiatus of the 1980s-90s, only further illustrates the intellectual loss caused by its absence, in a period where history was being removed from the national syllabus and the

³⁹⁷ Baba Aye – 'Nigeria: The Six Year Revolution-June 12; Significance and lessons for the working class', 12 June 2013, *Sahara Reporters*- <http://saharareporters.com/2013/06/12/nigeria-six-year-revolution-june-12-significance-and-lessons-working-class> [Accessed 18 May 2017].

³⁹⁸ Stanford, p55.

dictatorships of Babangida and subsequently Abacha did not constitute positive environments for history scholarship.

This chapter examined the contributions of the HSN and JHSN I following independence. The new nation's budding historians were presented with a unique opportunity to chronicle history through an authentic African lens and in their own words. This chapter argued that the HSN and JHSN, formed by a group of academics from Nigeria's preeminent University of its time – University of Ibadan – represented a useful barometer to measure the historians' preoccupations via their output.

In reference to their opportunity of a post-independent Afrocentric chronicling of history, this chapter coined the term *builder-historian* to denote the pioneering status of the new historians. It was argued that the conceptual rejection of the imperialist-conceived centre that birthed 'Nigeria', which underpinned the HSN's strategy in bringing forth new histories through its JHSN, was bold, visionary and ultimately successful. This success was mainly underpinned by the JHSN understanding well the intricate complexities of the moment, as well as the magnitude of the task in constructing new histories from the colonial debris where 'African history' had been condemned as an incongruity. An exploration and analysis of the histories presented was also undertaken to demonstrate where and how the JHSN sought to present the new African narratives as a buttress to old prejudices, as well as a reaffirmation of the new realities of African independence presented as an old fact.

The chapter explored the HSN's strategy and seemingly parochial approach and considered the distinction and contrast with later criticism of practitioners of history whose narrow treatments in contrast were deemed to inadvertently embolden the anti-historical spaces cultivated by government. A similar parallel and distinction was also presented regarding the builder-historians' histories and the submission of university B.A., M.A. and PhD theses, which were deemed to consciously avoid controversial subject matters, due also to an embedded and constricted anti-historical environment and

culture. Finally, the chapter clarified that funding issues were confirmed as a chief reason why the JHSN ceased publication from the mid-eighties throughout the 1990s and covering the Abacha regime - still, with the HSN going quiet and the JHSN ceasing publication entirely through the decade for the first time in the twentieth century since its inaugural edition, this substantiated the claim of Abacha's tenure representing, by default, design, or a combination of both, the most anti-historical period in Nigeria history up to that point since independence.

CHAPTER VII

Bring Back Our History: The End (and return) of History in Nigerian Schools

The contentious starting point is always the amalgamation of the country in 1914; the date that signifies both the birth of modern Nigeria and the beginning of its problems – **Professor Toyin Falola**.³⁹⁹

Fig.17: 'Story of British Conquest in Africa'⁴⁰⁰ (©Panaramic Entertainment)



³⁹⁹Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010) p.240.

⁴⁰⁰ As an antidote to the banishment of History in Nigerian schools, Nigerian comic book creators founded *Panaramic Entertainment* in 2007, with a mission "to tackle the high illiteracy rate in Nigeria and enable Nigerians and the rest of the world engage in our rich history & culture, helping to promote and preserve it."

The Unscrambling of History In Nigerian Schools

In referencing Museveni *et al* in previous chapters, I explored the prevailing phenomenon of a dissipating scholarship in history within modern African states. Focus primarily was on the ‘progressive’ and hyper-economic outlook of these states, which viewed history as a ‘useless’ subject in today’s globalized, materialistic reality. These attitudes in disparaging the subject is explained in part, as Reid observes, by a general ‘antipathy towards non-profit making activities.’⁴⁰¹ In revisiting the point made in **Chapter III** – regarding the fiscal motivators that attended the emergent Nigerian nation and arguably set the stage for anti-historical tendencies within education provision, it is worth examining fully at this juncture the role of the World Bank – and exploring how its historical stance in Nigeria arguably contributed to an anti-historical culture, which ultimately contributed to actions such as the abolition of history as a standalone secondary school subject.

World Bank

It is important to note that particular circumstances extraneous to the narrative of deliberate anti-historical intent, also predisposed Nigerian governmental policy towards an anti-historical stance – as reflected for example in dropping history in Nigerian schools. The most notable of these circumstances comprise, firstly, historical World Bank education policy in Africa as a whole and Nigeria specifically. The second relates to the vision Nigerian authorities conceived for the framework of Nigerian education following independence.

The World Bank’s role in relation to the development of education in Nigeria dates back to 1953, following establishment of the 1951 MacPherson Constitution (where a semblance of self-governance was enacted prior to the full fledged independence of 1960) and following also the 1952 colonial

⁴⁰¹ Richard Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) p.xxiv.

Education Act.⁴⁰² The MacPherson Constitution divided Nigeria into Northern, Western and Eastern regions, thus realising 'the constituent units of a federation.'⁴⁰³ From the outset, the importance of making provisions for education was recognised as a priority amongst Nigerian leaders, with leaders such as Obafemi Awolowo agitating then 'for free and compulsory elementary education by 1955.'⁴⁰⁴

It thus became evident 'even to the colonial authorities,' as Babalola *et al* note, 'that external financial assistance was required in order to meet the needs of an expanding population.'⁴⁰⁵ Consequently, in 1953 both the Colonial Government in Lagos and the Colonial Office in London 'called upon the World Bank to study the provision of primary education in the colony of Nigeria and the colony's prospects for future economic development.'⁴⁰⁶ Thus, the World Bank, from the onset of Nigeria's journey to nationhood, assumed an influential role in determining the future direction of educational policy in Nigeria, as correlated and indivisibly tied to notions of national and economic development. As Babalola *et al* further note, the 'World Bank Mission' made specific recommendations including 'that enrolment in primary schools should be controlled; secondary school education should be expanded to enhance the quality of trained teachers' and 'trade Centers should be expanded to improve the nation's technical education.'⁴⁰⁷ Notably, from the World Bank's earliest input in the formation of Nigerian educational policy, lay an articulation of the importance of technical instruction. As Segun Ogunsaju notes, 'education was planned to prepare the child for adult life and to take up responsibilities in the

⁴⁰² L. P. M. "Nigeria under the Macpherson Constitution." *The World Today* 9, no. 1 (1953): 12–21.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40392558>.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁵ Babalola, Joel B., Anne L. Sikwibele, and Adeyemi A. Suleiman. "Education as aided by the World Bank: A Critical Analysis of Post-Independence Projects in Nigeria." *Journal of Third World Studies* 17, no. 1 (2000): 155–63.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/45197851>.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

society',⁴⁰⁸ since 'in Nigeria, as well as in other parts of Africa ... education was regarded as a means to an end and not as an end in itself.'⁴⁰⁹

Subbarao, Raney, Dundar and Haworth explain that as of the 1960s, education was viewed as a key investment of human capital in relation to newly independent nations' development and economic advancement - coinciding with when the World Bank commenced, in 1963, lending for education in Nigeria.⁴¹⁰

The first educational project the World Bank supported in Nigeria was a '\$20.1 million credit agreement',⁴¹¹ the objectives of which were 'to increase secondary school enrolments... diversify the secondary school curriculum', as well as 'increase the number of secondary and technical teachers; and to train craftsmen and technicians.'⁴¹² Again, an early emphasis on technical instruction conveyed and reinforced the correlation between practical, technical education and national development, which arguably helped sow seeds of an anti-historical stance; a stance which later underpinned more vocal arguments about the value of humanities – and history specifically – in the context of a developing nation.

Babalola *et al* present the World Bank's injection into the equation of Nigeria's educational affairs as a neo-colonial intrusion representative of the bank's relationship with Africa generally on education policy: 'The role of the World Bank during this period can be seen as part of a continuing effort that

⁴⁰⁸ Segun Ogunsaju, *Educational Planning Progress in Nigeria: An Historical Perspective in Nigerian Education – Trends and Issues*, Kunle Akinyemi and Kayode Ajayi (Eds.) (Ibadan: University of Ife Press, 1983) p.246.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ K. Subbarao, L. Raney, H. Dundar, and J. Haworth, *Women in Higher Education: Progress, Constraints and Promising initiatives* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 1994), p. 16.

⁴¹¹ The credit agreement spanned the period March 1, 1965 to December 31, 1977.

⁴¹² Babalola, Joel B., Anne L. Sikwibele, and Adeyemi A. Suleiman. "Education as aided by The World Bank: A Critical analysis of Independence Projects in Nigeria." *Journal of Third World Studies* 17, no. 1 (2000): 155–63. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45197851>.

began during colonialism, in which the West dictated what Africans learned and how it was done.’⁴¹³ These dictated terms set up an inescapable framework that bound and justified funding in accordance with future job production, thus injecting at the genesis of Nigerian education policy a structural bias towards the technical or the explicitly vocational. As Babalola noted, ‘as far as the World Bank is concerned, the secondary school system should prepare students for a job. The World Bank therefore, provides funds in abundance for rapidly expanding secondary school systems, but emphatically those with practical, work oriented curricula.’⁴¹⁴ Anyanwu notes that ‘since the 1970s, the World Bank had advised African governments to redirect funds from their “incompetent, inefficient, and inequitable” higher education to basic education’⁴¹⁵ – a directive which was forced upon Abacha’s predecessor in 1986 ‘when the government of Babangida was in dire need of World Bank/IMF assistance to resolve its balance of payment deficits, it accepted their conditions, which stipulated diverting resources from higher education.’⁴¹⁶ Afolayan supports this point in stating ‘the military and civilian central governments have been under the pressure of the International Monetary Fund to reduce subventions to public services including education hence the dwindling allocation to the sector.’⁴¹⁷

World Bank projects and lending extended also to university level, with for example the project entitled ‘Federal Universities Development Sector Operation’ which was signed on 18th July 1990.⁴¹⁸ The stated objective was ‘that the federal universities improved the effectiveness and relevance of their teaching

⁴¹³ Babalola, Joel B., Anne L. Sikwibele, and Adeyemi A. Suleiman. “Education as aided by the World Bank: A Critical Analysis of Post-Independence Projects in Nigeria.” *Journal of Third World Studies* 17, no. 1 (2000): 155–63.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/45197851>

⁴¹⁴ Joel B. Babalola, A Reflection On The World Bank Education Projects In Nigeria Between 1965 AND 2001. In *McGill Journal of Education*. 37(2), pp. 177-191.

⁴¹⁵ Ogechi, Emmanuel Anyanwu, *The Politics of Access*, p.179.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ Michael O. Afolayan, *Higher Education in Postcolonial Africa: Paradigms of Development, Decline and Dilemmas*, (New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc, 2007) p72.

⁴¹⁸ The loan was signed on 18 July 1990 and was to close on December 31, 1996.

and research whilst at the same time, becoming more cost-effective.⁴¹⁹ As earlier covered, the anti-historical mindset that was arguably created from the World Bank's position and began to permeate Nigerian Primary and Secondary education policy regarding curricula bias and the humanities, similarly manifested at university level. Abati reported that 'the teaching of history also became threatened at the tertiary level, as it got labelled as one of those disciplines that cannot get anyone a job in the oil and gas sector or the banks.'⁴²⁰

A Twinning Past: Slavery, Colonialism

So: taking a more hardline and direct position than the World Bank, in the eyes of leaders like Museveni and Obasanjo, History is a cross that their developing nations need not bear. Better to focus on the contemporary vehicles of advancement - i.e business and technology - if developing nations are to shed second-class status as the emergent BRIC nations and self-styled Asian Tiger economies have done.⁴²¹ On the surface, this line of argument may find appeal with self-identified progressives who equate historical reflection to impotent rumination. For these detractors, Santayana's caution that those who don't pay attention to history are doomed to repeat it, seems by itself an insufficient basis for the academic study of the subject. In the Santayana ideal of history instruction, with historical accounts arrayed as cautionary tales, the weakness is glaring. Due to the unpredictable human factor, every teachable vision of history is destined to be an imprecise science. Thus, the *looking back* must supersede all else; the past garners its own value for itself, *by itself*. For every African nation without exception, that past is an acutely painful place. This is true of nations; history records the changing vicissitudes of the human experience from the noble to the tragic, from triumphs through misfortunes. But in our

⁴¹⁹ Babalola, Joel B., Anne L. Sikwibele, and Adeyemi A. Suleiman. "Education as aided by the World Bank: A Critical Analysis of Post-Independence Projects in Nigeria." *Journal of Third World Studies* 17, no. 1 (2000): 155–63. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45197851>.

⁴²⁰ Removing History from Education Curriculum in Nigeria is Bad Policy - Why History Should Be Taught in Nigerian Schools – by Reuben Abati – Jonathan's Press Secretary - <https://www.inc-usa.org/blog/removing-history-from-education-curriculum-in-nigeria-is-bad-policy/>.

⁴²¹ BRICS is the acronym coined for the five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Originally the first four were grouped as 'BRIC' before the induction of South Africa in 2010.

modern era, African nations arguably persistently differ from others in this racialised regard: the histories that Africa is most insistently and universally associated with, which affixes the continent as existential weights, are the histories primarily of *slavery* and its spiritual twin, *colonialism*.

The old xenophobic charge that African historiography only began with the history of the Europeans in Africa (on that rationale, African history would have concluded when the whites departed), has solidified into a paradoxical truism. At least as a truism within the universe of world history and the prevailing impressions of how Africa is projected. This accounts for the persistent association with which *slavery* and *colonialism* mostly dominate African history to the exclusion of all else. In the eyes of the Afrocentric elites, they might feel these unshifting notions of Africa's historical framing are sustained through the façade of historical scholarship. They are aware that African history conjured in this tradition, shrouded within those twin traumas of slavery and colonialism, translates as a history of *shame*. In this regard, contemplating African history differs from contemplating the history of Western nations. For Africans, jammed in the insistent shadow of slavery and colonialism, 'history' becomes first a limited word and then a limiting space; where the imbedded stain of shame seems too ingrained to remove. In contrast, 'history' of and for Europeans, correspondingly is an upbeat word with expansive breadth; *shame* features more incidentally in this larger space – it does not stain unduly the context or overwhelm the trajectory of the European narratives. Shame's chief purpose in the European context serves to highlight instead the greater glory that emerges from the triumphant advance that is the *de facto* thrust of European history. It is conceivable the Obasanjos and Musevenis recognize all this. And in assuming the guise of visionary messengers, those leaders caution their people not to look back, lest like Lot's wife the citizens turn into unusable heaps — worthless in the re-building and advancement of their new Jerusalems.

In Obasanjo's case, in his first premiership after the assassination of Murtala Mohammed in 1976, a 1977 National Policy on Education Conference was convened. This conference was organized to address

issues of educational relevance to the needs and aspirations of Nigerians, as well as promoting Nigeria's unity and laying the foundation for national integration. Hauwa Imam explains that 'due to the high level of underdevelopment, the policy aimed at realising a self-reliant and self-sufficient nation to meet the country's developmental needs... the policy made education in Nigeria the Federal Government's responsibility in terms of centralized control and funding of education.'⁴²² Imam explains this was 'a departure from the colonial education policy of financing of education based on cost sharing between the proprietary bodies, local community, parents/guardians and the government.'⁴²³

So, it was through the Obasanjo regime that the Federal Government first gained its stranglehold on education in Nigeria from when Nigeria won Independence. Secondly, a chief stated aim of the 1977 convention as further identified by Martins Fabunmi was to implement a 'policy sought to introduce a functional technology-based education, which could sustain the economy.'⁴²⁴ This shows educationally under Obasanjo's leadership, a conscious harking towards technological drivers to uplift society — at the expense of the humanities — was happening nationally from 1977. It is ironic that Obasanjo, widely recognised as a vocal opponent of the Apartheid regime through the 1970s and who supported black South Africans' heritage against the interloping Afrikaan, neglected the importance of history in his own land. If Obasanjo was current with the educational policies of the Apartheid state, he would have known also that not only were separate schools built exclusively for blacks – Bantu schools – but crucially in those schools the study of a trio of subjects, including history, was banned. The South African comedian Trevor Noah recalls that under apartheid, the government built what was known as Bantu schools - 'Bantu schools taught no science, no history, no civics. It does not serve the Bantu to learn

⁴²² Hauwa Imam, 'Educational Policy in Nigeria from the Colonial Era to the Post-Independence period', *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 1, 2012, *Padova University Press* - http://ijse.padovauniversitypress.it/system/files/papers/2012_1_8.pdf [Accessed 1 July 2019].

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Martins Fabunmi, 'Historical Analysis Of Educational Policy Formulation In Nigeria: Implications For Educational Planning And Policy', Department of Educational Management University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. *International Journal of African & African American Studies* Vol. IV, No. 2, Jul 2005.

history and science because he is primitive, the government said. This will only mislead him, showing him pastures in which he is not allowed to graze.⁴²⁵

Evidently, history was a no-entry pasture for Nigerians too. This thread of reasoning remained an integral part of the Nigerian education narrative from 1977 to recent times. What other considerations may have existed against the study of history? Falola, in suggesting responses to this question, attaches a series of rhetorical-shaped questions of his own:

The democratic government in place now, in the wake of authoritarian regimes, has been unable to stem the tide of religious rivalries, to calm interethnic tensions, or to halt the rise of ethnic militias and religious fundamentalism. Why is memory an issue? Why does the government oppose the retelling of history?⁴²⁶

For Falola, the stemming of history in Nigeria became a routine, deliberate action designed to maintain the so-called integrity of the nation — and to maintain the political status quo. In other words, it appeared safer for the authorities to practice avoidance, if history seemed perpetually stamped with a national health warning. Falola expands:

The answer is clear enough: there is no consensus of the idea of a nation. To talk about the nation may be to revive the memory that could destroy the nation. ... A serious historical review promises to lead to, at worst, fragmentation or, at best, a federal system with a weakened centre.⁴²⁷

In re-interpreting Falola's words, the patent demotion and subsequent absence of history as proposed by my thesis title can be seen as a socio-political conundrum that has plagued those quarters invested in *their* own idea of Nigeria - and the unbreakable sanctity of that. Over the last two chapters, we have arrived at and demonstrated this truth which predates Abacha's regime and which influenced the preceding regimes before Abacha's own. To follow, if Abacha's time in office demonstrates this absence

⁴²⁵ Trevor Noah, *Born A Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood*, (Random House: New York 2016) p.61.

⁴²⁶ Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010), p.239.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.* p.240.

of history, it is the cumulative result also of past considerations - i.e. the unchanging fact of an historic political dynamic. Consequently, the deterioration in history scholarship during Abacha's time was exacerbated by a previous, steady decline – as well as by the unique challenges and machinations peculiar to that time.

For if Falola argues that there was a protracted unwillingness by authorities to engage the subject nationally save the initial Independence years, it follows that professional bodies and their academic offshoots would be inhibited by governmental resistance. Such inhibition could trigger compliant and wilful regression in scholarship, methodology and outcomes; a foreseeable endpoint primed by the authorities' hostility to history and its study following civil war, a denigration of the national archives and lack of transparency thereof, military decrees proscribing historical discourse and the withdrawal of history from Nigerian Secondary schools.

Falola spells out this long-view countermeasure:

A new influx of scholars trained in new methods and new disciplines in the humanities and social sciences should make interventions capable of advancing the field. Second, a new generation of scholars has to take over the management of professional associations, notably the Historical Society of Nigeria, journals, and the re-organisation of the archives in a way that will make them more efficient.⁴²⁸

In mentioning 'interventions', Falola is advocating a re-invention of thinking towards history in Nigeria. Falola does not dismiss outright, either, naysayers who present history scholarship as a relic of a bygone era. Instead, Falola recognizes there is substance to the argument that the approach and methodology of history scholarship *can* ossify; that history needs to remain *relevant*. And rather than the social sciences absorbing and subsuming the discipline of history, perhaps to the point where the subject's identity and purpose is corrupted – at worst erased – Falola advocates the kind of cross-pollination I

⁴²⁸ Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, p.263.

referred to in **Chapter I**. Thus, the ideal composite of historical study today could be likened to a modern fusion dish – with the discipline’s original identity, purpose and individuality retained, despite a new addition of ingredients employed for enhancement. Falola promotes a broadening of the historiographical paradigm in Nigeria – a larger more accommodating tent to offset entrenched political blockages. This requires an expansion of *imagination*, so the subject can express more adaptively and with immediacy, its recognized many-sidedness.

History Studies, we have learned, as a stand-alone subject was abolished in 1982 and merged with Social Studies as part of the school curriculum⁴²⁹. It is of interest that this abolishment was executed by the democratically elected 2nd Republic government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari and not by a military regime.⁴³⁰ Firstly, this supports the view of Falola and others that from the perspective of the country’s rulers and decision makers, history has historically appeared in Nigeria as a problematic issue that requires ‘solving’. Still, it should be noted also that even though the Shagari government was a civilian administration sandwiched as it was between the military regimes of Obasanjo and Buhari, the Shagari regime was considered to be a military-sponsored administration enabled by a powerful cabal of northern interests. So, we may conclude that the abolishment of History during Shagari’s regime was a continuation of policy as enacted during prior military regimes and thus the Shagari regime could be deemed a proxy military regime for our purposes. In highlighting yet another irony regarding this issue, the curriculum ban and long abolishment of history from Nigerian secondary schools was only reversed 34 years later when history was re-instated as a stand-alone subject in 2016. I attended a talk recently chaired by Nigerian Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka in which in referencing these federal level proscriptions on history study and in echoing Falola, Soyinka asked: *What were they afraid of?*⁴³¹

⁴²⁹ There is a coincidental irony in the 1982 date of History’s expulsion from the curriculum: exactly a 100 years prior in 1882, Education legislation began in Nigeria. The 1882 Education Ordinance for British West African territories was passed which included Lagos, Gold Coast (now Ghana), Sierra Leone and Gambia.

⁴³⁰ Alhaji Shehu Shagari served from 1979 – 1983.

⁴³¹ ‘Studio B Unscripted with Wole Soyinka and Elif Shafak’ - Al Jazeera Studios, London, 24th May 2019.

Soyinka's words subscribe to the view that history and its study, being something that can be naturally insurgent and weaponised, has been actively and pre-emptively defanged in Nigeria due to a pervasive, enduring fear. It is a fear that provokes into defensive action what A. E. Afigbo had termed 'anti-historical forces'.⁴³² In relation to these 'anti-historical forces', the overriding recurrent fear entails the idea that the tapestry of the nation is so fragiley concocted that it may not survive a too-close examination of the country's historical narrative. Within this viewpoint is the sometimes subtle, sometimes overt anti-colonial dig at Britain for its shoehorning in 1960 a multiplicity of peoples into an impossible homogeneity. Whilst there is credence to the argument that Nigeria's origins contribute to its difficulties, fastening the story of Nigeria to its origins is to reduce Nigeria to a dual delineation: the British colonization vs African ethnic multiplicity. This is a tribalistic viewpoint that places, so to speak, the ethnic horse before the broad cart of history. It is a regrettable perspective given that the history of Nigeria is not of course exclusively the history of its broad ethnic density – nor is Nigerian History solely defined by how the post-1960 national arrangement transpired.

A House of Memories

The Nigerian example demonstrated a paralyzing fear and insecurity regarding the nation's origins and ethnic plurality. At the heart of that fear and incorporated within the idea of an inherent fragility at the core of Nigeria's ethnic makeup, was the concern of not just maintaining the peace at all costs but also maintaining some type of status quo. Consequently, the view that the study of history is anathema to those that run the nation has been persuasively propounded by several commentators. Adekoya Adekunle, General Editor of Vanguard Newspaper observed:

Official reasons Nigeria advances for expunging history as a course of study are that students are shunning it, as there were few jobs for history graduates, and there is a dearth of history teachers. These are excuses. Nigeria's abhorrence of history is not new. There is no official account of the Civil War. When we obliterate history, we should also destroy our

⁴³² A. E. Afigbo, *The Museum and Nation Building* (Imo: New Africa Publishing Co. Ltd.,1985) p.27.

artifacts, burn our museums and monuments, heritage sites and archaeological activities. A generation of Nigerians without knowledge of history would not appreciate these treasures.⁴³³

Of museums, monuments and heritage sites, I found Adekunle's statement that a 'generation of Nigerians without knowledge of history would not appreciate these treasures' to be historically and demonstrably true. As a history enthusiast since childhood, Adekunle's words jolted old memories and explained new ones. As a teenager returning to Nigeria on holiday from the UK, I sought out museums and heritage sites. I recollect that these sites were often deserted – bar the guide and I and a family member I managed to drag along. I recall seeing the museum guides, stretched out on benches, dozing in the African sun. Evidently, these sites were not frequented. If other visitors appeared, they were often European. On occasion an African-American materialised. In other words, only foreigners in Nigeria appeared interested in history. Subsequently, I was firmly placed in the foreigner class by guides who sought to charge the same exorbitant entry fee purposed for non-Nigerians – until my older relative and reluctant chaperone intervened.

More recently on fieldwork in Northern Nigeria I found a similar setting. I encountered again lounging guides on sun-warmed benches – though occasionally I received a proper vertical welcome, as I gave advance warning when first enquiring on the telephone about opening times. I was nearly always the sole visitor. The outlook in Nigeria that museums were synonymous with foreignness – particularly *western* foreignness – wasn't always so. As Afigbo informs, Sir Tafawa Balewa, the first Premier of an independent Nigeria, was keen on museums and their role in society.

The late Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, was known for his keen interest in museums. Thus, museum activities received government support and attention when he was in charge of the Ministry of Works, which in those days had responsibility for museums. Balewa was responsive towards financial requests for museum development ... the

⁴³³ Adekoya Adekunle, 'History Ends In Nigeria', 12 March 2014, *Vanguard Editorial*, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/03/history-ends-nigeria/#sthash.mtXHvyYK.dpuf> [Accessed 18 July 2017].

late Prime Minister used his ministerial platform to argue in Parliament the case for the establishment of museums.⁴³⁴

Since that first premiership, museums in the care of government often exist on the periphery in Nigeria. Adekunle earlier highlighted the fact that there was no official government record of the Biafra War – this is still the case even if war accounts have finally materialised in the school curriculum. As museums are potentially a key component of nation-building, the erection of a government-sanctioned civil war museum – a house and collection of memories dedicated to the Nigeria-Biafra rupture, will likely be a positive gesture in helping resolve that seminal cleavage in the national psyche.

Though a clear offensive against history in Nigeria can be tagged to 1982 when the discipline was expunged from schools, in reality the end of the civil war on 15 January 1970 appears the true watershed for History scholarship in Nigeria. The preceding war, despite Gowon's conciliatory statement at the war's conclusion, made it clear that the nation's ethnic landscape had a deadly potential: politics was thus more fraught and burdened from this point on. This watershed, in triggering an obstructive surveillance of history and its scholarship, which in one of its tangible manifestations assumed the shape of the 1982 proscription, necessarily devalued the currency of history as a consideration and worthwhile pursuit. Ikime noted in May 1982 when giving a talk to the University of Benin's Students Historical Society:

When I asked members of the Society why they chose the subject of today's lecture, they indicated that many students reading History here at the University of Benin are not clear in their minds as to the value of History in the context of the Nigeria of today. I, in fact, know a few students who have told me that they are reading History only because they could find nothing else to read. In other words, there is no instinctive grasping of the value and role of History in the same way as there is for, say, Medicine or Law.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁴ A.E Afigbo and S.I.O Okita, *The Museum And Nation Building* (Owerri, New Africa Publishing Co., 1985) p.19.

⁴³⁵ Obaro Ikime, *History, The Historian and The Nation: The Voice of a Nigerian Historian* (Ibadan: Oluseyi Press, 2006) p.41.

Echoing Ikime's 1982 observation some 36 years later, Dr. Waisu Iliyasu Safana, History professor at Umaru Musa Yar'adua University published a paper with a similar sentiment entitled *The Phobia of Studying History among students of Umaru Musa Yar'adua University* (as referenced in my **Methodology** Chapter). Safana's observation that students had a phobia to studying history due to a 'lack of historical consciousness'⁴³⁶ demonstrated the impact on universities due to the removal of history at secondary school; two years prior to Safana's paper the study of history was removed from the university of Abuja's course offerings.⁴³⁷

If students lack this 'historical consciousness' as Safana attests, as products of society they necessarily reflect the fact also that this consciousness is lacking in society - as a direct result of the authorities bartering in silence regarding the nation's history. The authorities do not consider this a culpable silence: they do not endorse, for example, George Orwell's counsel that 'if liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear'.⁴³⁸ In fact, the Nigerian authorities appear to subscribe to the opposite – that their silence in producing, say, no official state-sanctioned civil war history is a obligatory silence, preferable to reminding darkly of times when brother killed brother in fratricidal warfare. Wiseberg, in encouraging postwar silence regarding Biafra, we recall advised that one must choose the right time to tell one's story. The time, it appears, has been infinitely out of joint. Alongside the silence, the strategy for the Nigerian authorities in healing the postwar nation was in the adoption of quota systems. The silence was to deny the past like a false memory; a quota system was deemed a way to sweeten the distortion. Quota systems were employed as a shortcut to national harmony; a governmental panacea for the apparently in-built tension of ethnic strife. This

⁴³⁶ Dr. Waisu Iliyasu, 'The Phobia of Studying History among Students of Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina', (Sokoto: Udu Press, 2018) p.316.

⁴³⁷ The NUC removed the study of history from University of Abuja's undergraduate course offerings in 2016

⁴³⁸ In 1945, George Orwell wrote an introduction to his book 'Animal Farm'. The introduction remained unprinted until The New York Times printed it on October 8th 1972. In that introduction, which had this quote in question, Orwell addresses the issue of free speech, freedom of information and one's *right* to information.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1972/10/08/archives/the-freedom-of-the-press-orwell.html> [Accessed 11 August 2017].

system assumed political expression in the balancing act of lawmaking along ethnic and regional lines. This accounted for the 'quota laws' and subsequent governmental allowances and dispensations according to state.⁴³⁹ In other words, a form of affirmative action. As Jibrin Ibrahim stated:

In the past fifty years, Nigeria has been obsessed with fears of domination by one ethnic, regional or religious group over others. Nigeria is inhabited by 470 ethnic groups, which are distinguished by language, customs and religious beliefs and vary in size, power and influence. Much of the country's politics revolves around methods of preventing or resisting such domination. These fears emerged quite clearly during the 1950s in the period preceding independence.⁴⁴⁰

If the fears emerged prior to independence, they intensified postwar. These unending efforts to resist or prevent tribal domination by a particular group is what Rasheed Olaniyi refers to as 'the comedy of ethnicity.'⁴⁴¹ Of course, it is no laughing matter. Of this ethnic/regional favoritism inherent in this tragedy-comedy of unequal patronage, Paul J. Kaiser explains both the historical precedent that instigated a federal 'solution', as well as the continuing legacy:

Nigeria's ethnic and religious communities have challenged the legitimacy of national authority since the early days of colonialism. The British solution to this challenge was to establish federal arrangements that coincided with ethnic/regional groupings, thus undermining the fragile process of nation building. This approach to diversity has continued throughout the independence period, with regional constituencies continually contesting national authority and demanding autonomy in political decision-making and access to natural resources. Long-simmering ethnic tensions culminated in the 1967-70 Biafran civil war, which threatened national authority in the Igbo-dominated eastern region of the country.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁹ Adopted in the 1977 constitution, the Federal character principle gave rise to quota systems in Nigeria in order to solve issues of inequality and marginalization. Other reasons for introducing the system was due to differences in the socio-economic development of different parts of Nigeria and unequal levels of educational development across the nation. The north was considered educationally disadvantaged in comparison to some regions in the south that was considered advantaged.

⁴⁴⁰ Jibrin Ibrahim, 'Inter-Regional Inequality Facility sharing ideas and policies across Africa, Asia and Latin America - Affirmative Action Nigeria' (n.d) *Overseas Development Institute*, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/4082.pdf> [Accessed 16 February 2017].

⁴⁴¹ Said Babura Ahmad, *Resurgent Nigeria - Issues in Nigerian Intellectual History* (A Festschrift in Honour of Dahiru Yahya, Ibadan: University Press Plc, 2011) p.247.

⁴⁴² Paul J. Kaiser, 'Federal Republic of Nigeria Briefing Paper', 2005, *CollegeBoard* https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/apc/ap05_comp_govpol_nige_42255.pdf [Accessed 08 Aug 2017].

It is conceivable that as an underside to the quest for identity, the Nigerian people themselves due to their ethnic multiplicity, unwittingly constitute a hindrance to the study of history. For whilst voices have agitated for the cause of History and the role of its study in grasping a nation's purpose, these voices have been nominal and conventional – i.e. educators, writers, political commentators and historians. It is feasible that subconsciously the Nigerian people as a collective, from the morass of their diversity, do not instinctively see the forging of a national identity as something practicable or even desirable. This may explain why the status quo in relation to the deficiencies epitomizing the national study of History has endured for so long with little challenge. If citizens imagine corralling a distinct homogeneity from the multiplicities of their invented nation to be an impossible (or unmanageable task), then the strands of History that need to be studied, extrapolated and re-shaped may appear a thankless exercise. This can be illustrated in how these contesting ethnicities view themselves and in the semantics employed to self-describe: for example, the Yorubas have long referenced the 'Yoruba Nation' as a term that explains their own distinct cultures, language variations, history and mythology. At the root of this nomenclature to encapsulate all things distinctly Yoruba – which traverses terrain, for the *Yoruba Nation* incorporates a diasporic designation with shades of *lebensraum* about it (communities far afield from Nigeria in Brazil, Cuba and the Caribbean encompass the Yoruba Nation). A central tenet in the idea of the *Nation* is a desire to perpetuate the Yoruba peoples and their singularity. This posture is the antithesis of the blended histories ideal of *One Nigeria*, as considered in **Chapter V**. Blended histories would dilute and threaten Yoruba Nation exceptionality. This brings to mind my interview with Falola where he underlined in his view the inevitable failure of government-inspired bans on History due to the fact that 'narrative spaces are plural'.⁴⁴³ Thus, Falola argued that 'in those plural spaces there are the mosques, the churches, there are the communities, political associations, there are fraternities, there are drinking places, there are bars where histories are being told. And you cannot ban those spaces from the

⁴⁴³ See Interview in **Appendix**

conversation.⁴⁴⁴ Similarly, who knows what ethnic-tinged instruction of old is going on in the narrative spaces of Nigerian homes; where parents may re-confirm to their wards exceptionalisms that indoctrinate and diverts those wards from valuing a formal or national pursuit of history? Perhaps this is taking place indoors all over Nigeria, a peculiarity of the multi-ethnic reality in an invented, historically fragmented land?

Like the Yorubas, the Hausas, the Ibos too have their summative key words to assign and elevate their own nations: their *caliphates*, their *clans*. All nations within a larger dominion intent on a self-preservation that extols their own nations above the Nigerian nation; pursuing a knowledge of the *parts* at the expense of the *whole*. Historian Obaro Ikime touches on this insider-outsider imbalance of discrete nations within the Nigerian space:

In terms of intergroup relations, colonial rule was something of paradox; on the one hand, it brought Nigerian peoples together in new groupings and for new purposes; on the other it emphasized already existing differences and introduced new ones.⁴⁴⁵

Yet the idea of discrete tribes within the Nigerian space being hermetic blocs of selfsame kinsfolk has been challenged. Natural migration, Afigbo *et al* argues, put paid to that:

Then there is the issue of the study of movement and change in society. At one time it was thought that what was described as 'tribal' society was static and unchanging over the centuries. But it is now known that African society, like any other human society known to history, was dynamic and continuously changing.⁴⁴⁶

Of course, the requisite self-knowledge that nations need to truly prosper as a singular unit is holistic and all embracing; shunning one's pooled history may bring turmoil and invite backwardness. Efforts

⁴⁴⁴ See Interview in **Appendix**

⁴⁴⁵ Saheed Aderinto and Paul Osifodunrin, *The Third Wave of Historical Scholarship On Nigeria* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) p.225.

⁴⁴⁶ A.E Afigbo and S.I.O Okita, *The Museum And Nation Building*, (Owerri, New Africa Publishing Co., 1985) p.105.

must be made by these disparate groups to truly realize a nation; efforts Aderinto refers to as 'Inventing Citizenship.'⁴⁴⁷ Historian Adekunle already imagines a nation; he sees the divisions as superficial and feels all can take ownership and celebrate their so-called separate histories with equitable claims. For Adekunle, ethnicity is a buffer that distracts and prevents the due historical process critical in progressing a nation:

How does a country proceed without a knowledge of its heroes and heroines? History is not just a study of events and dates, it provides analytical insights into social formations, anthropological developments, inventions and innovations that shape humanity. The roles of history in governance, conflict resolutions, diplomacy and international relations, science and medical studies, technological developments, advancement of civilizations and human relations are vital.⁴⁴⁸

By referencing the 'role of history' in governance, Adekunle is highlighting in particular the shortcomings of subsequent Nigerian governments who have presided over a country that knows not its 'heroes and heroines'. The continuously missed opportunity whereby subsequent governments have eschewed also an official accounting of the civil war equates to a nation perpetually in denial about its self and statehood.

The denial is an ostensibly defensive act – but on another level it exemplifies an *offensive* governmental strategy. Prussian military strategist Von Clausewitz memorably described war 'as a continuation of politics *by other means*.'⁴⁴⁹ To paraphrase Clausewitz', *politics* in Nigeria after the civil war was like a *continuation of war by other means*. In Nigeria's offensive against History, explicitly expressed in the 1982 banishing of the subject, we established from the war's end a continuance of politics designed to keep history/History out of reach. It is in the shadow of this continuance that we can further confirm the Abacha regime's input.

⁴⁴⁷ Saheed Aderinto and Paul Osifodunrin, *The Third Wave of Historical Scholarship On Nigeria*, p.224.

⁴⁴⁸ Adekoya Adekunle, 'History Ends In Nigeria', 12 March 2014, *Vanguard Editorial*, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/03/history-ends-nigeria/#sthash.mtXHvyYK.dpuf> [Accessed 18 July 2017].

⁴⁴⁹ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, (Trans. Michael Howard, Peter Paret), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

New curriculum: old problems

In between the 1982 banishing of History and its 2016 re-instatement, 2007 witnessed the launching of a new educational curriculum by the Federal Government known as the New Basic Education Curriculum for primary and junior secondary schools. The new curriculum was purported to correct the abnormalities of the former one, which was said to be lacking in the areas of 'human capacity development; eradication of poverty; and the country's quest for total emancipation as an independent entity.'⁴⁵⁰ Once again, Obasanjo's name came up. Though this new curriculum took place under Goodluck Jonathan's leadership (another accidental president just as Obasanjo was in his own first premiership⁴⁵¹), it was acknowledged that Obasanjo started the process in his own preceding tenure. Lecturer Jibril Idris had a gripe with the new 2007 curriculum and penned an open letter to the appointed professor overseeing its implementation. In the letter, Mr. Idris cited Gen. Obasanjo as a persistent dabbler in educational policy and alluded to Obasanjo when claiming that the 'educational system in Nigeria has come under series of attacks from various angles.'⁴⁵² Addressing his specific grievance, Mr. Idris wrote:

In the old curriculum, you either choose French as elective subject or Arabic for which both are languages. With the new system in place, French for whom historically we have no cultural ties whatsoever in any form or shape is now elevated to the same status as English and mathematics in our education system to the detriment of our indigenous languages like: Yoruba, Ibo, Hausa, Tiv and a host of others. Does this sound as a quest for our country's total emancipation as an independent entity, our Dear Professor?⁴⁵³

Mr. Idris' paper was subtitled 'Alienating Arabic and Muslim students.' Idris' complaint is an enquiry about culture and identity, with language the conduit that may fasten, explain, record and validate

⁴⁵⁰ Jibril Idris, 'The New Nigeria School Curriculum Review: Alienating Arabic And Muslim Students' (n.d) <http://www.gamji.com/article8000/NEWS8889.htm> [Accessed 12 Aug 2017].

⁴⁵¹ The then Vice President Jonathan became president after the death of president Yar'Adua, who died of liver failure in office. Obasanjo first became Head of State in 1976 after the assassination of Gen. Murtala Muhammed.

⁴⁵² Jibril Idris, 'The New Nigeria School Curriculum Review'.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

identity. Idris is a Muslim, whom in identifying with Islam, relates linguistically and culturally with Arabic, even though it is not an official or indigenous language to Nigeria. But as a Nigerian Muslim tutored from youth in koranic instruction and recitation, Arabic is as much a part of Idris' identity and *history* as it is for a Middle Eastern Arab Muslim individual. Though Idris is not directly bemoaning the absence of History from the curriculum, which is what his grievance comprises. Half of Nigerians – over a hundred million in number – identify as practicing Muslims. Arabic is and has been a defining part of that demographic's history from the 11th Century when Islam in Nigeria first appeared in Borno in the northeast of the country, later emerging in the Kano and Katsina Hausaland in the northwest. Many of Nigeria's 100+ million Muslims would have had early exposure and instruction in Classical Arabic; they would retain a devoted interest in the Holy Quranic language of their Prophet Mohammed. Given religion has always been a delicate business in Nigeria, it seems inconceivable that proper consideration was not given by the authorities regarding planning the new curriculum. For the new curriculum to relegate a language that is intertwined to the history of half its own people since the 11th Century, displayed the authorities' cavalier approach to historical things. For Arabic – a language, a culture, a shared history for the Islamic north – to get sucked into a parallel black hole that History as a subject had earlier dematerialized into, confirmed the gravitational pull of 'anti-historical forces' that surrounded the decision-making regarding education in Nigeria.

Necessity though, we know, is the mother of invention. In that same year of 2007, in light of the continued excision of History from Nigerian schools, an unlikely new breed of historians emerged through an inventive medium: the comic book. The foremost practitioners of this hybrid genre of didactic comics, *Panaramic Entertainment*, set out its mission as 'to tackle the high illiteracy rate in Nigeria and enable Nigerians and the rest of the world to engage in our rich history & culture, helping to

promote and preserve it. More than just presenting History as childish entertainment, these comics were designed in the face of the subject's absence at curriculum level to seriously teach it.⁴⁵⁴

Fig. 18: - 'Kingdom of Benin' (©Panaramic Entertainment)



The series' creator Oritem Banigo expanded in an interview on why intervention was necessary:

If you just look at the past, if you look at when we started democracy, we seem to be making the same mistakes over and over again. In our stories we emphasize why this has happened, why we should remember it, and how we could stop ourselves from going through the same issues moving forward.⁴⁵⁵

In stating they desired to 'enable Nigerians and the rest of the world to engage in our rich history & culture', Panaramic were underlining the role of history as an educational bridge that binds all people. Consequently, history, no matter how localized, retains a globalizing mechanism that highlights our shared humanity. In all histories, whether it be an account, say, on the mortality of Sherpa people such as *An Exploration of Sherpas' Narratives of Living and Dying in Mountaineering*⁴⁵⁶ or a *History of the*

⁴⁵⁴ Chris Stein, 'How Nigeria is Using Comic Books to Teach History' April 19, 2016, *U.S. News & World Report* – <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2016-04-19/nigerias-possible-solution-for-teaching-history-comic-books> [Accessed 4 February 2017].

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ A PhD research work produced by Ms Maggie Miller, University of Waterloo, Canada, May 2017.

construction of the Mauritania Railway of the Sahara, there exists links to other cultures; to other peoples, to other diametrically different narratives. In this way, history is an unbroken chain of the human story. *Panaramic* are highlighting history's ability and utility in traversing borders. History *travels*. History can illuminate others further afield even as it provides platforms for self-illumination. So a muzzled Nigerian history and distorted scholarship leaves not only Nigerians ignorant but impoverishes the wider world community too.

Whilst comics constituted a novel way to redress the History-shaped hole in schools, traditional voices and stakeholders continued to register their protest regarding History's removal. Prof. Godswill Obioma, the former Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), also called for a review of the education curriculum to accommodate more of Nigerian History. Obioma further referenced in particular that many students knew nothing about the Nigerian Civil War. He argued that knowledge of this epic event in Nigeria's History would actually promote national integration as lessons could be learned from it. This viewpoint is hardly new; in Germany, as in other European nations, learning about the Jewish Holocaust and Nazi Germany is mandatory for students in the equivalent of the British Year 9 and 10. In 2005 in Germany, the authorities went even further by bringing out a new curriculum mandating schools 'to teach the Holocaust in a manner that highlights deeper connections to German society and the broader social and political context of the topic.'⁴⁵⁷ The focus of the authorities since 1945 has been ensuring German students understand the holocaust in the context of the Jewish refrain - 'never again'⁴⁵⁸. The focus is such that in 2008, with the charge of 'Holocaust fatigue' in German schools deliberated upon by German intellectuals, Benedikt Haller the German Foreign Ministry official who served as special representative for relations with Jewish

⁴⁵⁷ Etgar Lefkovits, 'Berlin official: German kids tired of Holocaust', 10 March 2008, *The Jerusalem Post*, <https://www.jpost.com/International/Berlin-official-German-kids-tired-of-Holocaust> [Accessed 12 May 2017].

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

organizations had this counter: 'The Holocaust has a very strong place in our national curriculum and it is not going away or [being taken] out. This is not a reason to take it out of our curriculum.'⁴⁵⁹

In Britain, before options at G.C.S.E give students the choice to drop History, the Holocaust has been a mandatory part of all History syllabi in state-maintained schools. The Independent school sector, with freedom to design their curricula, have in most cases also honoured the mandate on maintained schools. As David Pearce reports, this has helped to create a 'Holocaust Consciousness':

The education system has thus played a central role in the formation of a Holocaust culture in the United Kingdom – particularly in England... It is here that the National Curriculum has reached millions of schoolchildren, and in turn had the greatest impact in shaping Holocaust consciousness.⁴⁶⁰

Pearce goes on to explain how this Holocaust culture derived from Holocaust consciousness has prevailed and informed educational policy despite 'periodic revisions of the curriculum', explaining new iterations have enhanced not diminished and that 'though the Holocaust has only ever been a mandatory requirement in the National Curriculum for history, over the last 25 years other subjects have increasingly broached the subject as well ... contributing to a significant expansion in the level of awareness among a generation of young people.'⁴⁶¹

'Bring Back Our History'

A publicized defense for History in Nigeria came from a campaign called *Bring Back our History*, launched by Dr. Philip Afaha, Head of the Department of History and Diplomatic Studies University of Abuja. It was Professor Afaha's dream that history would one day 'join English language and

⁴⁵⁹ Etgar Lefkovits, 'Berlin official: German kids tired of Holocaust'.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

Mathematics as compulsory subjects in our schools.’⁴⁶² Consequently, with history banished from sight and far from elevation to compulsory studies status, Afaha launched his campaign. That it was an urgent intervention, Afaha had no doubt:

Our children have been deceived by the social media to believe that our unity was conceived in error. The deliberate neglect of our national history has only bequeathed to these children a dizzying victim mentality which manifests in the current distrust, agitations for new identities and nihilistic disruptions of whatever they perceived to represent the system they inherited. That foreign influence is tearing Nigeria to shreds is an understatement; the ensuing vagabond psychology now pushes our youths to carry bombs.⁴⁶³

When Afaha speaks of ‘vagabond psychology’ pushing ‘youths to carry bombs’, he is patently referring to Islamic extremism – more specifically, to Boko Haram’s presence in the north of Nigeria. Boko Haram’s emergence is both complex with historical roots – as Thurston states, ‘Nigeria’s return to democracy in 1999 – and the rise of “shari’a politics” in Northern Nigeria – created openings for Muslim activists to rework the relationship between politics and Islam in Northern Nigeria.’⁴⁶⁴ It was an opening that Boko Haram stepped into. The complexity of Boko Haram is further explicated with Virginia Comolli’s observation that the religious violence of Boko Haram ‘is today an armed struggle arguably directed as much against the state, and even Islamic establishment to some degree, as it is against other faiths (or non-aligned, rival strains within Islam).’⁴⁶⁵ Whilst, in light of its myriad complexities as highlighted, an exploration of Boko Haram constitutes ultimately a diversion from my argument. However, the link Afaha makes in relation to ‘vagabond psychology’ and ‘neglect of history’ is an interesting one that has an echo in Bourne’s claim that Boko Haram’s ‘decayed form of Koranic

⁴⁶² Eno Abasi Sunday, ‘Bring Back Our History’, 19 May 2016, *The Guardian*, <https://guardian.ng/features/education/bring-back-our-history/> [Accessed 14 January 2017].

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press; Reprint edition, 2019) p.47.

⁴⁶⁵ Virginia Comolli, *Boko Haram: Nigeria’s Islamist Insurgency*. London: Hurst and Co., 2015) p.12.

education' has left youths open to gangsterism with a religious twist.⁴⁶⁶ The history, still, is the missing link as Afaha suggested – possibly, if the youths were schooled about the long history of Islamic rebellions in the north, it is also possible Boko Haram might lose some of its 'novel' lustre for youths?

Another reason for the fightback of the re-inclusion of history in Nigerian schools was a simple one: the absence had become normalized. Consequently, professional and invested practitioners such as Afaha grasped that they had a rapidly diminishing opportunity to have their voices heard in history's defense. This injected an urgency that perhaps had been lacking in earlier, more complacent times.

Similarly, when Prof C.B.N Ogbogbo – chair of the Historical Society of Nigeria actively campaigned also for the re-inclusion of history in the school curriculum, he commented on his shock 'that most Nigerians were surprised that the notorious omission of history in the first place was a government policy'.⁴⁶⁷ When I interviewed Prof Ogbogbo, he emphasized this point (See **Appendix**). In fact, in relation to my thesis question, comments Ogbogbo made at a 2018 inaugural lecture was the most categorical from a Nigerian historian I hitherto encountered, linking history suppression in Nigeria directly with governmental policy – thus begetting and reinforcing in its expansiveness, something akin to what I have termed anti-historical by its design and implementation.

The cumulative effect is that for about thirty-six years, Nigerian schoolchildren have been deprived of the study of history as a result of a deliberate government policy. This neglect of historical studies has been replicated in our national life. Government policies are formulated without recourse to the expert advice of historians. For instance, States and Local Government Areas are created and boundaries are adjusted without the critical input of historians.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁶ Richard Bourne, *Nigeria: A new History of a Turbulent Century*, (London: Zed Books, 2015,) p.230.

⁴⁶⁷ Historical Society Of Nigeria Newsletter 20148 – Edition 32 – 2014.

⁴⁶⁸ C.B.N Ogbogbo, "Historical Society of Nigeria: The Study of History and the Nigerian Nation address by the President of the Historical Society of Nigeria." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 24 (2015): 1–13.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24768926>.

On the normalization of history's absence from Nigerian schools, Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka admitted that it was only a few years ago he had learned of the subject's removal from the curriculum. Due to the publicity engendered and effectiveness of the *Bring Back Our History* movement, an authentic grassroots feel took hold and the pool of involvement widened beyond historians and the well known. Thus, the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reported that across the northern states of Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Adamawa, Yobe and Jigawa states, a cross-section of parents, teachers and students had called for the introduction of History as a core subject in primary and junior secondary schools in the country and published interviews in support. In Bauchi, those who spoke with NAN, reported their belief that social and economic problems in the nation, in their view, could be sourced to 'shallow knowledge of the past'⁴⁶⁹. Dr. Isaac Edigba of the History Department, Gombe State University (GSU), restated that the importance of History to national development, highlighting the United States example where a unit of American History is compulsory to for schoolchildren. Michael Ekhesomi, Education Secretary, Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo, stated:

Teaching of History should be reintroduced and made compulsory for students because of its relevance. If we know and understand the work of our past heroes, it helps to mould our character and also propels us to emulate them.⁴⁷⁰

Dr Gaius Jatau, Head of History Department, Kaduna State University, stated that the knowledge of history remained a key aspect of national development and that its absence ensured discord:

This explains why the country remains a crawling giant with ethno-religious chauvinism as the major driving force of Nigeria's polity. The lack of historical consciousness is a major reason why so much violence, aggression, hatred, poverty dominates day to day existence of Nigerians, because we tend to act or react based on the present situation and care little about the past. It is therefore not surprising that only few care about the kind of

⁴⁶⁹ Emmanuel Onwubiko, Stakeholders condemn removal of History from school curriculum, 26 October 2015, *Daily Nigeria Post*, <https://dailypost.ng/2015/10/26/stakeholders-condemn-removal-of-history-from-school-curriculum/> [Accessed 15 June 2017].

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

society we came from, which society we belong and the kind of society we hope to build in the future.⁴⁷¹

An expanding roster of other advocates enjoined the campaign, including even a governmental appointee. Mr. Abdulallaziz Isa of Kaduna State Ministry for Education, admitted the re-introduction of History as a core subject in the syllabus of primary and secondary schools would:

Promote patriotism, develop critical thinking and allow students to make informed choices. When you study history, you will see things differently; you will understand why and how societies developed or stagnate, how leaders and people fail and how to take positive step for a meaningful future.⁴⁷²

Former Minister of Education, Prof. Chinwe Obaji, called for the re-introduction of History, whilst lamenting that many Nigerians had little or no knowledge concerning the country's past:

So many people in our country today know next to nothing about those who fought for the independence of this country called Nigeria. A lot of people do not know some of our heroes past like Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sir Tafawa Balewa and Obafemi Awolowo, among others.⁴⁷³

At the 2014 conference of the History of Education Society of Nigeria at the University of Ibadan, Michael Omolewa, Emeritus Professor of History and former chairman of the committee of Deans of Education of Nigerian universities, noted that as Nigeria marked its first 100 years, History was absent as a core subject in secondary schools. 'If Americans,' Omolewa said, 'could be proud to learn about George Washington, the American civil war or the declaration speech, John Kennedy, Abraham Lincoln, and other great leaders of their country, why are Nigerian schoolchildren deprived of learning about past events and people?'⁴⁷⁴ Dr Babagana Kachalla, a research expert in the Centre for Trans-Saharan

⁴⁷¹ Emmanuel Onwubiko, Stakeholders condemn removal of History from school curriculum.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Eno Abasi Sunday, 'Bring Back Our History', 19 May 2016, *The Guardian*, <https://guardian.ng/features/education/bring-back-our-history/> [Accessed 14 January 2017].

Studies at the University of Maiduguri added his voice, saying ‘we must promote our cultures, values and History in schools, for the forthcoming generation to inherit. The history reminds us of our ways of life, norms and values that we have almost completely forgotten.’⁴⁷⁵

Kachalla’s allusion to inheritance and his mention of ‘values’ is key, for it demonstrated that the debate had become more progressive – now History took on a dimension that incorporated not just a lumped together past, but reflected discrete components – values – and spoke for a future which evoked the individual lives of men and women – ‘our ways of life’– of citizens. History was not just some abstract study of antiquity and expired memories, Kachalla was emphasizing, but a continuum that lived in the present with us and shaped our cultural life and societal ties. The Jigawa Commissioner for Women Affairs, Hajiya Rabi Ishaq advocated this inclusive take on History by lending her voice to the petition and stating that History teaching accessible to *all* would undoubtedly ‘impact positively on national development’⁴⁷⁶. Dr Oluwatoki Jamiu, Head of History and International Studies Department, Lagos State University (LASU), added a Darwinian dimension. He stated that history was ‘man’s struggle to understand his environment.’⁴⁷⁷ The list goes on.

Every good undertaking, they say, must face opposition. Malam Dauda Sani, Chief Information Officer, Bauchi State Ministry of Education, was the highest profile opponent of History re-instatement and stated although History was an important subject, it need not be taught in primary or junior secondary schools due to the subject’s complexity. He advocated keeping Social Studies in place, as this was a more appropriately ‘rudimentary’ form of History.⁴⁷⁸ If history was a person seeking a job, Sani would have branded History as overqualified. Notwithstanding, the momentum was not with the naysayers. Alhaji Bulama Abiso, Borno Chairman of Nigeria Union of Teachers, countered Sani’s charge by pointing

⁴⁷⁵ Emmanuel Onwubiko, Stakeholders condemn removal of History from school curriculum.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ Eno Abasi Sunday, ‘Bring Back Our History’, 19 May 2016, *The Guardian*, <https://guardian.ng/features/education/bring-back-our-history/> [Accessed 14 January 2017].

⁴⁷⁸ Emmanuel Onwubiko, Stakeholders condemn removal of History from school curriculum.

out that developed nations had somehow managed to distil History instruction to its children, emphasizing again the developmental aspect of the subject:

If the country is serious about genuine development at all levels, our schools seriously need to re-introduce the Nigerian History into the curriculums. If we must discover sustainable ideas and solutions to national issues, we must engage more with the past and imbibe that knowledge of our norms and values in schools. History is consciously used to inspire nation-building in many developed nations, and this places a huge gap between the advanced nations and under-developed ones.⁴⁷⁹

The writer Femi Kehinde, with definitive timing, published his book *Of Rusts and Gold: Snippets of History*. This book was a lengthy lamentation against the cancellation of History from the curriculum.

Kehinde explained his offering:

The book is my modest effort in ensuring that society recognises the pace of history in the Nigeria of today and to regulate the imperishable contributions of heroes past (most of them forgotten) who were the precursors of the Nigeria of today. It singles out some historical exemplars who ... contributed to the tangible and intangible developments of the Nigerian society, some of them, in spite of their cultural, political and economic limitations.⁴⁸⁰

The clamor for history's return made an impact. The government agency responsible for the reintroduction of history, Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) testified as much. NERDC Executive Secretary Prof. Ismail Junaidu stated that the 'chorus of voices' calling for the 'disarticulation of History Studies from Social Studies curriculum'⁴⁸¹ would be honored and announced that a draft copy of the curriculum was approved at the 63rd meeting of the National Council on Education (NCE). Junaidu stated:

⁴⁷⁹ Emmanuel Onwubiko, Stakeholders condemn removal of History from school curriculum.

⁴⁸⁰ Ishola Balogun, 'Unveiling snippets of history, 'Of Rusts and Gold' by Femi Kehinde', 15 October 2016, *Vanguard News*, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/10/unveiling-snippets-history-rusts-gold-femi-kehinde/> [Accessed 8 Aug 2018].

⁴⁸¹ Chika Ebuzor, 'NERDC says CRK not removed from schools' curriculum', June 20, 2017, <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/in-abuja-nerdc-says-crk-not-removed-from-schools-curriculum/k4jrvdc> [Accessed 8 May 2018].

The objectives of the disarticulated document was to expose students to knowledge that will enable them appreciate History as an instrument of national integration and nation building. It will deepen positive understanding of traditional values and identities, as well as similarities and differences between different ethnic groups in Nigeria. It is also targeted at promoting the study of Nigerian and African History as a requisite for better understanding and appreciation of challenges of globalization.⁴⁸²

History would be returned to the Secondary School curriculum. Afaha, the founder of the *Bring Back Our History* approved of Junaidu's declaration and consequently called for the subject to be made compulsory across all primary schools in the nation also. Minister of Education Mallam Adamu Adamu, who spoke at a government presentation of the re-introduction to the curriculum document in Abuja, agreed that 'the importance of History to nationbuilding, identity, patriotism and overall human development cannot be over-emphasized.'⁴⁸³

Adamu's statement itself cannot be overstated. The premise of my thesis posited an anti-historical approach from the Abacha government, which as demonstrated thus far, preceded Abacha as a governmental tool and in its entrenchment carried over into subsequent civilian governments long after the last military regime in Nigeria in 1998. A government Education minister no less, re-introducing History to the curriculum and declaring it central to the upholding and expression of Nigerians' identity amongst other things, represents a seismic policy shift.

Adamu announced that the subject would be re-introduced alongside a teachers' guide on how best to administer the course of study. This recalled the words of Benedikt Haller, the German Foreign Ministry official who had stressed the importance not just of teaching the Holocaust but ensuring the methodology was on point so that it could be taught contextually and to maximum effect.

⁴⁸² Chika Ebuzor, 'NERDC says CRK not removed from schools' curriculum'.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

On October 2016, just over 2 years after the Chibok abduction, the Nigerian Federal Government re-instated History as a standalone subject in primary and secondary schools nationwide.

In this chapter, I explored the important role that institutions like the World Bank with their vision for education policy in Africa, may have contributed to and predisposed Nigerian governmental policy toward an anti-historical bent. I presented the framework that the World Bank articulated that created this environment, which came in the form of a preference for technology-based subjects as opposed to the humanities. I charted how this bias and predisposition arguably influenced and resulted in the policy that saw the Nigerian government drop history from Nigerian secondary schools.

This chapter interrogated also the idea that the twin episodes of slavery and colonialism dominated the impression of Africa's history to the extent that this history represented a history of shame above all else; thus potentially contributing to motivating decision makers and rulers to the idea that transcending this burden lay in jettisoning the practice and discipline of History itself. I interrogated also how the anti-historical approach of government had permeated museum and heritage sites, such that funding for these institutions apart from the days of the first premiership all but ceased and how these sites came to represent hollowed spaces devoid of purpose regarding the serious memorialisation of Nigeria's history. I also explored the converse of the Nigerian situation in a place like Germany where due to the traumatic events for the Jews in German History, the subject of history is compulsory – with clear indications of its benefits to German children beyond simply grasping the events of Jewish trauma and the Holocaust in Germany in the lead up to and during WWII.

I concluded this chapter with the *Bring Back Our History* campaign launched in 2007 at the University of Abuja, which ultimately displayed the broad resolve of Nigerians of all stripes in re-establishing the subject, which was successfully re-instated nine years after the campaign launched.

CHAPTER VIII

The Northern Archives: On the ground in Kano, Kaduna, Katsina



Our archives are treasure troves - a testament to many lives lived and the complexity of the way we move forward. They contain clues to the real concerns of day-to-day life that bring the past alive.⁴⁸⁴ **Sara Sheridan**

⁴⁸⁴ Sara Sheridan, 'The Archive', (n.d.), <https://www.cheadleheritage.online/the-archive> [Accessed 9 December 2019].

Perusing the Northern Archives

In relation to History theses produced in Nigeria between 1993 and 1998, there seemed no better place to start an investigation than Kano: the ancient Northern Nigerian city-state of commerce and trading renown – as well as the oldest city in West Africa. After all, Kano was also General Sani Abacha’s birthplace. Logic dictated that any compelling discoveries found here in Kano, Abacha’s own birthplace and seminal spiritual home for pro-Abacha supporters, may have a deeper import — at the very least in providing a comparative platform, whether it be an exemplar or benchmark — with respect to investigations further afield in Nigeria. Bayero University, the largest learning institution in Northern Nigeria, is Kano’s main institution of higher learning and named after Abdullahi Bayero, Emir of Kano from 1926 – 1953.

To begin with at the Bayero archives, I first perused B.A. theses produced within the department between 1993 - 1998. I reproduce below some of these titles.

Table VI: B.A. theses produced within the department between 1993 – 1998

Name	Title	Year	Type
Muhammad Yahaya	A Socio economic history of Garu and its Environs [1900 – 1976]	1993	B.A
Idris Sambo	The impact of Railway on Funtua Town	1993	B.A
Sani Ibrahim Zabura	The History of Hausa Community in Minna	1993	B.A
Sulaiman Dandija Ma’aji	History of Wudil Town to 1970	1993	B.A
Muhammad Abdullahi	History of Islam in Dekina District 1900 – 1990	1993	B.A
Zubair Dutsinma Ibrahim	History of the Office of Magajin Garin Katsina	1993	B.A
Gambo Abdullahi Imam	History of Panshekara	1993	B.A

Kassim S. Jude	An economic History of Keffi 1802 – 1993	1993	B.A
Bello Hamidu	Wamba Under the Mawu-misa: A case study of the Rindre or Nungu and Other peoples of Wamba 1900 – 1969	1993	B.A
Nasiru Jinjiri Ringim	Political and economic history of Taura	1993	B.A
Abubaker Haruna	The history of Kano City Hospital	1994	B.A
Salamatu Coomassie	History of the Coomassie Family	1994	B.A
Rabi M. D. Aliyu (mrs)	History of Nasarawa Hospital	1994	B.A
Adamu Garba Ahmad	A History of Gezawa Town C. 1730 -1993	1995	B.A
Sani Bello	History of Lere Town since 1800	1995	B.A
Abdulmajeed D Musa	The institution of Shaba ship in Bida Emirate c. 1830 – 1993	1995	B.A
Zulaihat Musa Adamu	History of Railway Staff Quarters in Zaria	1995	B.A
Diri Ayibakuro	The History of Kano Chamber of Commerce Industry, Mines and Agriculture	1996	B.A
Yakubu Soja Jibrin	Egume 'Egbe' Festival and its significance to the community	1996	B.A.
Maureen F. Okochu	History of the Motherless Babies Home Nasarawa Kano	1996	B.A.
Ibrahim Ahmadu	A History of Kabala East Kaduna	1997	B.A.
Onyinoyi Abigail Ogedengbe	A comparison of the cloth weaving and pottery industries in Ebiraland: Ihima in Okehi Local Government Authority (LGA) of Kogi State as a case study	1997	B.A.
	The evolution of the cloth dyeing Industry in the mainland local government of Lagos state	1998	B.A.
Isah Grace	Masquerades as agents of political and cultural control among the igala of kogi state	1998	B.A.

Prior to commenting on the titles above, it is worth mentioning a few things in relation to the background and reputation of the Bayero University Department of History. It was soon evident that the department is a respected and well-regarded department within the various schools and structural set-

up of the university's faculties and departments. I ascertained this from both the way the university and department sees itself and articulates its position (more later) and also due to the university and department's history, legacy and current standing amongst other Northern Nigerian universities. This point of the university's standing is instructive in that it informs and clarifies the relationship between the university and the wider community, which for academic purposes and directly related to my thesis question, includes the governmental. As one of the foundation departments established just three years after independence when university teaching first began in February 1964, the department enjoys the distinction of being also one of the cornerstones of the originally inaugurated institution of higher learning. Furthermore, many illustrious alumni, as is celebrated on the departmental literature, passed through the department to serve the nation on a grand scale. Prominent homegrown academics and historians such as B.M. Barkindo and Dr. Haruna Wali taught there, as did Professor Murray Last who has researched and worked on Northern Nigeria since 1961. Murray Last later went on to work at Bayero University and subsequently held the post of Professor of History at Bayero (1978-80).

In illustrating the above esteemed alumni and ongoing championing of them by the department, one can also ascertain clearly that the department has historically taken and continues to take itself and its scholarship seriously. Further, in viewing the listing on its departmental literature of alumni whom have gone on to hold prominent governmental positions – State Governor; State Commissioner; Head of the State Civil Service; Police Commissioner; Assistant Inspector General of Police; Federal Directors; Federal Permanent Secretaries; Foreign Service Officers; Senior Officers of the Central Bank of Nigeria; Chief Executive Officers in public and private enterprises⁴⁸⁵ – it is clear the department views itself proudly through its alumni, as a sometimes key contributor to the nation's governance. Specifically in relation to my thesis question, the Bayero History Department does not consider itself out of step with the governmental or political narratives in the country, past or present. This is a significant detail in

⁴⁸⁵ Bayero University Prospectus 2018.

unpicking the trend(s) of history scholarship embarked upon over the years, the perceived relationship and ensuing dynamic between the university and the state in light of those trends – and later, the differential between this particular institution of higher learning and others across Nigeria in both their output and relationship with the state. These enquiries help interrogate the central question of my thesis concerning how the discipline of history was engaged with and presented at various levels and institutions, during the Abacha regime.

The Bayero History department sits within *The Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies*, thus situating from the outset the discipline's philosophical home within the institution. It is inevitable that in this dwelling where the Arts is wedded to the Islamic, history scholarship at Bayero will be shaped and influenced accordingly, implied by the conflation of religion, history and culture as intimated by the faculty's naming. The departmental web page announces itself thus:

The Department of History is one of the most respected centers of historical studies in Nigeria. Its programmes and products are a unique amalgam of Islamic, Western and indigenous historical perspectives. The department is well known for its interest in contemporary Islamic issues.⁴⁸⁶

From the above declaration that reads like a statement of intent, it can be gleaned that the scholarship of history at Bayero University is – or is *required* to be – validated by an understanding of both Islamic mores and Islamic historiography. In other words, the discipline exists within the shadow and paradigm of Islam. In classifying its history undergraduate curriculum program, the department itemized and presented the units studied as follows:

- i. Nigeria History
- ii. Northern Nigeria History
- iii. History of the Islamic World
- iv. African History
- v. World History
- vi. Economic History
- vii. Historiography

⁴⁸⁶ Faculty Of Arts and Islamic Studies, Bayero University. <https://fai.buk.edu.ng/> [Accessed 12 December 2016].

viii. Historical Methodology

At a glance, the curriculum programme appears more expansive than the departmental declaration, with perhaps only unit iii. *History of the Islamic World* being explicitly linked to religion. However, close examination of the B. A. theses produced between 1993 –1998 above (see **Table VI**) tells its own distinct story. For example, take the following listings:

- *Islam among the Hausa community of NSO in the North West province of Cameroon*
- *'The activities of Islamic foundation of Nigeria, Kano*
- *History of the coming of Islam and Christianity and their impacts among the Ogori people of Kogi State*
- *History of Islam in Dekina District 1900 – 1990*

The above listings center, overtly, on Islamic themes. These five titles out of an offering of thirty-seven as listed in **Table IV**, equates to 16% of the assemblage. This percentage appears a paltry proportion of Islamic-tinged enquiries in relation to Bayero's self-declared objective of Islam being at the nexus of the discipline and its interrogations. However, in examining other seemingly secular, nonaligned titles as follows was further revealing:

- *A History of Nupe Community in Kaduna, History of Market System in Gumel in the 20th Century,*
- *Political and economic history of Taura*
- *Masquerades as agents of political and cultural control among the igala of kogi state*
- *A History of Kabala East Kaduna,*
- *A comparison of the cloth weaving and pottery industries in Ebiraland: Ihima in Okehi Local Government Authority (LGA) of Kogi State as a case study*

One did not need to delve far in the reading of the above theses to encounter Islam as a main component of the discourse. These types of titles, which feature predominantly around the north's history in some fashion, satisfy the second curriculum component *ii. Northern Nigeria History*. These works are sometimes identifiable by their title, which often commences with 'A History of ...' designation.

Due to the particular peculiarities and forces that indelibly shaped Northern Nigeria, overlapping migratory and religious forces, these 'A History of ...' titles are codified studies that represent both

localized histories *alongside* chronicles of faith. Thus, the units ii. *Northern Nigeria History* and iii. *History of the Islamic World* on the Bayero History undergraduate curriculum, can to some extent be viewed as part-interchangeable. In this overlap, Islam retains the common denominator status; thus inclusive of those five titles reproduced above, the percentage of titles with meaningful consideration of Islam comprised in the work, rises now to almost a third (27%) of the entire selection.

Observation of the *Northern Nigeria History* component demonstrates it subdivides into histories of the Emirates and traditional rulers as shown by the representative selection:

- *The institution of Shaba ship in Bida Emirate c. 1830 – 1993*
- *The History of the office of Madawaki in Daura Emirate*
- *An Economic History of Kankara Katsina Emirate*

In understanding that the ruling Emirs and royal houses were intricately bound with Islamic authority, one is not surprised to encounter, expansive discourses on religion also within these titles. Suddenly, the department declaration regarding its connection to Islam appears even more definitive in reality, as Islam looms larger in the sum of the students' output than the disparate components of the declaration suggested at first sight. On occasion, the interchangeable interplay covers multiple components, as it rests also on a foundation of Islam attending all aspects of its enquiry. One example of this being '*An Economic History of Kankara Katsina Emirate*' which overlaps with ii. *Northern Nigeria History*, iii. *History of the Islamic World* and IV. *Economic History*, with the thread of Islam looping through all three suppositions in distinct cultural-socio-economic instances.

The initial conclusions that could be drawn from the B.A theses assembled at Bayero University was that despite the superficially diverse titles on offer from histories of hospitals to accounts of Emirs, there is minimal straying from two main canons: Religion (Islam) and Localized History (Northern Nigeria).

In further exploration of definitive trends, I examined next the history scholarship beyond the undergraduate level at Bayero that was made available to me.

Overall, within the M.A. and PhD submissions in particular that I examined at Bayero University, I once again found initially a diversity of intriguing titles; conceptual queries and investigations which from the outset in their proposals and abstracts piqued interest due to their originality and earnestness. I reproduce below a snapshot of some of the titles:

Table VII: M.A.s and PHDs, Bayero University (1993 – 1998)

Name	Title	Year	Type
Abubakar Babajo Sani	A History of the Livestock Industry and the Establishment of the Abattoir in Kano In the 20th Century	1993	M.A
Murtala Abubaker Ringim	A Socio-economic History of Ringim Town (1903 - 1991)	1993	M.A
Alaine S Hutson	We are Many: Women Sufis and Islamic Scholars In Twentieth Century Kano, Nigeria	1997	M.A
Abdu Lass Aliyu	Kaltungo: A political and Social History from the early times to the 1990s	1994	M.A
Fadesola Abosede Sotinwa	The Growth and development of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria	1996	M.A
Muhammad Dahir Abdu Fagge	Literary life in the intellectual tradition of the Ulama in Kano since 1804	1997	M.A
Ibrahim Alfa Adamu	The Socio-Political History of the Daneji Fulbe of Kano and Katsina from the 17th Century to 1996	1997	M.A
Aisha Ni’Ima Shehu	Kano State under the administration of Audu Bako, 1967 – 1975	1997	M.A
Haruna Wakili	The Phenomenon of Revolts and Riots in Kano - 1893 -1995	1997	M.A
Olaniyi Rasheed Oyewole	Yoruba Entrepreneurs In the Kano Metropolis: A Case of the Printing Industry 1943 – 1983	1998	M.A
Zakariyau Sadiq Sambo	The Establishment and Consolidation of the Ilorin Community in Kano 1819 -1997	1998	M.A

In examining the above representation of offerings within the archive, two observations became clear. The first was that despite the diversity in the offerings as standalone topics in relation to each other (The Royal House and lineage, Town Planning, Revolts, Entrepreneurship, Economic History, Literary life, Transportation, Farming etc.), as a collective there existed a narrow focus to the undertakings that bound them more closely together. Firstly, these offerings were bound thematically by being decidedly local; regarding the geographical boundaries of localities these theses explored, most were *made in Kano* considerations. In other words, these enquiries limited themselves to parochial histories of the most provincial order: the subject matter almost exclusively confined to actual or historical borders of Kano state or its shifting demarcations over time. The premises of these histories cared not to engage or venture beyond state lines and in light of this circumscription, the opportunity for more muscular and multifaceted deliberations, to test arguments and hypotheses, was to an extent reduced. Subsequently, the specificities of these histories in their core essence and insularity are *non-troublesome*. They are non-troublesome in the first instance simply by virtue of their emblematic, geographical inwardness and their sequestering from extraneous happenings. For non-troublesome read *non-controversial*. Still, in relation to the localized aspect, I was conscious of the historical context of when these theses were produced, and appreciated possible pressures due to funding issues that would have negatively impacted the state of university libraries and archives and thus warranted a focus on local history. Nevertheless, a focus on local history does not preclude the presentation of a ‘troublesome’ or controversial history and I shall be returning to this later.

The second observation extends from the first: the so-called non-troublesome insularity of the Bayero M.A. theses takes on a more revealing aspect when we further deconstruct these titles and categorize the offerings. In studying the snapshot of titles — which are faithfully representative of the totality of submissions examined — one can dependably categorise the theses submissions accordingly in the following thematic sub-groupings: **Personages**, **Economic**, **Agrarian**, **Religious**. Subsequently, I shall at times refer to these groupings collectively as the **PEAR** categorization.

To categorize accordingly, whilst overlaps inevitably co-existed, *Personages* centered on putting a face on acts of public service and veered from the collective enquiry — discourses for example on police or other armed forces' contributions to the running of the state — to contributions that singled out individuals, often of the Royal House — or *Emirate* — and resembled on occasion a tribute to or treatise on the *great man* discourse of history. Stanford describes this 'exemplary history'⁴⁸⁷ in noting that 'one of the earliest functions of history was to record great deeds for the encouragement of later generations'⁴⁸⁸. The Bayero M.A theses appear to be assuming an homage function to that old tradition. The *Economic* offerings paid tribute to the bustling commercial history of Kano and encompassed a connective web of economic-dependent signposts exploring social and cultural histories around issues of poverty, status, literacy, transportation and migration. In other words, a life in the day of a Kano citizen. The *Agrarian* thesis, for example, focused mainly on the rural developments and evolution of the Kano regions under the state's historically illustrious livestock-owning and pastoral-nomadic inhabitants and indigenes. The *Religious* classification was self-explanatory in as much as the central theme was Islam: this focused on all things seen principally through the lens of the religion at the crux, whether it was the derivative aspect of religious conquest and its consequences or exploratory narratives of the enduring cultural impact of Islam on certain communities. It was here, for instance, that I unexpectedly encountered, as referenced in my Methodology Chapter, studies on the plight of women, including the above listed study that considered women's role within Islam's mystic branch of Sufism (See **Table VII**)

One must note that the PEAR categorisations I have identified in themselves are not problematic; histories must be categorized and these labels can be normally fitting and appropriate to elucidating our understanding of certain historical accounting. The distinction I highlight is that the labels here have been utilized primarily in a self-limiting fashion. In categorizing the titles, some truths emerged: In addition to the avoidance of the contentious and an absence of *concurrent histories*, an overtly political

⁴⁸⁷ Stanford, p39.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

reading of events was often lacking – even if an interpretation of said event might not be necessarily contentious. Secondly, we understand that history exists in a continuum, with certain demarcated points illustrating the extents to which some actions belong more to the past, whilst others operate more in the present. We, human actors, are of course heirs and protagonists of that continuum. Political theorist and historian Murray Rothbard had stated that ‘every person is born into one or several overlapping communities ... with specific values, cultures, religious beliefs, and traditions. He is always born into a specific historical context of time and place.’⁴⁸⁹ *A specific historical context of time and place*, which is always informed by a communal past that preceded the individual’s emergent present. In transposing individuals into their resultant actions – *happenings* – there are imperceptible lines that perpetually, inextricably link and therefore give definition to various events along an established continuum of past and present.

However, in the theses I examined, these concurrent links were mostly severed to the point that the chronicling assumed a non-disruptive, detached element such that few links between past and the present were explored or proffered; this even when the thesis itself focused on periods that witnessed high disruption such as during Abacha’s tenure. Subsequently, in this assortment of titles produced during the time of Abacha’s tenure, none contemporaneously related, whether partially or abstractly, to the societal issues of the time. Given the actual variety of theses examined, this is a significant omission. Equally noteworthy, is the fact that in my examination of the archival material, I did not encounter a thesis that sought to present a complimentary appraisal of the regime. In the city’s preeminent institution of higher learning, located in the very birthplace of Abacha, the lack of any obsequious thesis invited scrutiny. In Nigeria, up to that point, it was not uncommon to come across sycophantic tributes

⁴⁸⁹ Murray N. Rothbard, “A Libertarian View of Nationalism, Secession, and Ethnic Enclaves”, Mises Institute, 03/05/2014, <https://mises.org/wire/libertarian-view-nationalism-secession-and-ethnic-enclaves> [accessed 11/07/21].

of leading personages within various media outlet. In the time of General Ibrahim Babangida, Abacha's predecessor, several such tributes circulated, with Babangida nicknamed and widely lionized as a political 'Maradona' by a football-mad nation – the inference being that in the sphere of leadership, Babangida was as skillful as the world-famous Argentinian footballer. No matter that Babangida presided over a crime-ridden and crippled economy,⁴⁹⁰ as well as over several human rights violations including the distinction of being at the helm when the first recorded letter bomb in Nigeria featured in the extrajudicial killing of journalist, Dele Giwa.⁴⁹¹

Admittedly, the media represents a different milieu to the academic efforts of institutions of higher learning. Yet, the sycophantic tributes of leaders in the media had come to represent part of an almost cultural fixture in Nigeria, known in vernacular as 'hailing',⁴⁹² long before Babangida took office. As such, I expected some of this reportage might filter its way, stylistically at the least, to the thesis of a student keen to laud the son of the soil who ascended the presidency. So, the omissions of anything Abacha-related within the theses – good or bad – seemed a deliberate act of avoidance. To have titles chronicle all things great and small in relation to Kano, then to overlook Kano's then most famous son, implied a calculated and delicate pivot on the part of the would-be scholars. This raised questions.

When I examined B. A., M.A and PhD theses in Bayero University *prior* to Abacha's rule, in years that also registered political tumult, I found a not dissimilar narrow trope of theses as below:

⁴⁹⁰ Babangida issued a referendum to gain support for austerity measures recommended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, thereafter implementing his Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1986. Initially, the Nigerian economy performed positively. However, wages soon fell, coinciding with reduced expenditure on public services. In the wake of rioting protesters, SAP became increasingly difficult to promote and maintain.

⁴⁹¹ Dele Giwa was killed by a mail bomb in his Lagos home on 19 October 1986. The assassination occurred two days after he had been interviewed by State Security Service (SSS) officials. Dele Giwa and fellow journalists Ray Ekpu, Dan Agbese and Yakubu Mohammed founded *Newswatch* in 1984, and the first edition was distributed on 28 January 1985.

⁴⁹² 'Hailing' represented a form of tribute to another that could be expressed in everyday speech or even in song. At public events, musicians incorporated these personal tributes in their songs, especially if the intended person being 'hailed' was present.

Table VIII: Selection of B.A.s in Bayero University *pre*-Abacha (Before 1993)

Name	Title	Year	Type
A. Shuaibu	An Economic History of Abuja Emirate in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century: A Case Study of the Pottery Industry	1985	B.A
Muhammad Ahmad Abdullahi	Jama'are Under British Over-rule C.1903 – 1940 Adaptation and Change	1985	B.A
Bolanle Olayinka Osatuyi	The Economic and Political role of women in Ekiti 1900 – 1960	1986	B.A
Sheikh Muhammad Wazir	The Establishment and Development of Jada Town	1986	B.A
Muhammad Musbahu Idris	The Development of Weaving in Kura District since 1800 A.D	1986	B.A
Lawal Yahaya	A Political and Economic History of Pauwa in the Nineteenth Century	1986	B.A
Isa Audu Ahmad	The History of the Owe [Kabba] people: foundation and political evolution to 1986	1986	B.A
Habibu Shehu Abdullahi	A Socio-economic History of Dadawakin Kudu in the nineteenth and Twentieth Century	1987	B.A
Siyaka Adeiza Muhammad	Clan Histories Among the Ebiras: Okene Area as a case study [C. 1750 – 1983]	1987	B.A
Mashood O. Yusif	Origin and Development of Chieftancy titles in Offa with Particular Reference to the Essa Title	1987	B.A
Abdullahi Iliya Musa Kankya	A Socio-economic history of kankia in the 19 th and 20 th centuries	1987	B.A
Ahmad Ademoh Oke Okene	An Agricultural History of Ebiraland in the 19 th and 20 th Centuries	1987	B.A
Ruqayyat Kehinde Kofoworola Nuhu	Marriage Pattern of Ilorin Ruling Class in the 19 th and 20 th Centuries	1987	B.A
Musa Muhammad Yakub	Idah-Ankpa relations 1919 – 1976 - The problem of Political Unity in Igalaland	1987	B.A

Ibrahim Alfa Adamu	A Socio-economic History of Funtua in the 20 th Century	1987	B.A
Alexander Uche Nzeadi	A socio-economic History of Abueke Village Area in the 20 th Centuy	1987	B.A
Dije Abdu Ho	Women Education in Kano – the origin and development of dala Girls School	1987	B.A
Aliyu Sule	Dogorai in the History of Bida Emirate	1987	B.A
Suleiman Shehu	Changing Pattern of Cotton Production in Zaria District since 1900	1987	B.A
Aliyu Sulaiman Hardawa	The rise and fall of Dambam Emirate C. 1840 -1915	1988	B.A
Bashir Bala	The History of walls and Gates of Birnin, Katsina	1988	B.A
Uba Waziri	A History of Walls and the Imposition of British Colonial Rule in Bauchi Emirate C. 1861 – 1903	1989	B.A
Bara’atu Haliru Gwarzo	A Biography of Bello Dandago	1989	B.A
Omoniyi Nasiru Salau	The History of Islam in Ikurun Town	1990	B.A
Ibrahim Kabara	The History of Kabara Ward	1990	B.A
Abdul Rahaman Adeshina Abdulra’uf	Changing role of slave title holders in the 19 th and 20 th Centuries in Ilorin	1990	B.A
Ibrahim Bello	A History of the Cadet Unit at Barewa College, Zaria	1991	B.A
Misirat Bukola Busari	A History of Offa Transport Industry with Special Reference to Taxis	1991	B.A
Ahmad M Garba	Hausa in Kwoi	1992	B.A
Nasiru Garba Jigirya	A Socio-economic History of Badawa	1992	B.A

Table IX: Selection of M.A.s in Bayero University *pre*-Abacha (Before 1993)

Name	Title	Year	Type
M.D. Suleiman	The Evolution of a Migrant Community: The Hausa in Lokoja 1860 – 1966	1983	M.A
Daniel Adaji Akubo	The Historical Development of Idah Town to 1960	1983	M.A
Gambo Maturi Ika	Kuteb-Jukun Relations in the Takum Area of Gongola State from C1805 - 1960	1983	M.A
Sani Muhammad Bako	The Impact of Christian Missionary Activities on the Rural Areas of Kano State	1984	M.A
Hamidu Mallam Musa	The Historical Development of Mubi Town 1800 - 1965	1986	M.A
Muhammad Bose Ahmad	The Galadimas of Gombe Emirate: An Outline History of the Institution 1825 - 1984	1986	M.A
Ruqayyatu Ahmad Rufa'i	Gidan Rumfa: The Socio-Political History of the Palace of the Emir of Kano with particular reference to the Twentieth Century	1987	M.A
Abdulkarim U. Dan-Asabe	Comparative Biographies of Selected Leaders of the Kano Commercial Establishment	1987	M.A
Ahmad Bariu Umar	Islam among the Bassa Komo and the Bassa NGE in the 20th Century C. 1900-1976	1987	M.A
Kasim Alu Kigbu	A History of the Eggon People from Earliest Times to 1960	1987	M.A
M.D. Abdu Fagge	Socio Economic History of Fagge Since 1903	1988	M.A

Muhammad M. Abubakar	A Neglected Nigerian Export crop: The growth of Ginger Production and Trade in Kachia District of Southern Zaria 1900 – 1953	1988	M.A
Lukumán S. Muhammad	The Fall of the Segú Caliphate and Tukulor Exodus 1891 - 1903	1988	M.A
Shu'aibu A. Bako	The Historical Development of Abuja Town: 1850 - 1979	1989	M.A
Haruna Wakili	The Buhari of Hadejia Revolt (1848 - 1863) and its Aftermath	1989	M.A
I.K Abdussalam	History of the Exploration and Production of Crude Oil in Nigeria to 1960	1989	M.A
S M Alhassan	The Fellata in the Sudan 1850s – 1990	1990	M.A
Egbunu Samson Ibrahim	History of Labour Migration from the Bassa Komo Area of Benue State to the Cocoa Belt of Nigeria C. 1935 -1980	1990	M.A
Isa N Baba	Cloth Weaving in Gawu District (Niger State) in the 19th and 20th Centuries	1991	M.A
M. M. Gwadebe	History of Gumel from the Earliest Time to 1903	1991	M.A
Manko Yilata Abdul	The Reign of Etsu Nupe Usman Sarki 1962 - 1969	1991	M.A
Idris Muhammad Jiddah	Rice Cultivation in Patigi Emirate in the Twentieth Century	1991	M.A
Muhammad Kyari	The History of the Imam-ship of Borno Under the El-kanemi Dynasty from 1902	1992	M.A
Abu Kassim	The Evolution and Development of Jibiya as a Border Town to 1980	1992	M.A

Abbas A. Abbas	The History of Irrigated Farming in Kura District with Particular reference to Wheat Production	1992	M.A
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Table X: Selection of PhDs in Bayero University *pre*-Abacha (Before 1993)

Name	Title	Year	Type
Tukur Bello Ingawa	A Study of the rural economic History of the major cotton producing districts of Katsina Emirate During the Colonial Period C. 1900 - 1939	1984	PhD
Isa Alkali Abba	Changing patterns of local Authority and Evolution of the District head System in Gombe Emirate C. 1804 – 1960	1985	PhD
Sabo Abdullahi Albasu	The Lebanese in Kano: An Immigrant Community in a Hausa-Muslim Society in the Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods	1989	PhD
Ahmad Bako	A Socio-economic History of Sabon Gari, Kano 1913 – 1989	1990	PhD
M S Abdulkadir	An Economic History of Igala Land 1896 – 1939	1990	PhD
Asma’u G. Sa’eed	A Biographical Study of Shaykh Sa’id B. Hayat (1887 - 1978) and the British Policy Towards the Mahdiyyain Northern Nigeria (1900 -1960) Vol. One	1992	PhD

A similarly narrow trend of scholarship *pre*-Abacha re-affirmed some observations. It confirmed that prior to Abacha’s regime, a *tradition* existed in Bayero University regarding History theses output. These submissions preceding Abacha’s tenure, in their matching post-Abacha ‘non-controversial’ histories conceived in a PEAR arrangement, underscored my findings of theses produced during Abacha’s tenure. Although I have stated that this work sits within a cultural history paradigm, I have been clear about the close alliance and overlaps that exists between social and cultural history. In discussing these overlaps and distinguishing which milieu of social or cultural history particular notions may originally derive from,

Paula Fass as earlier reported in expounding on social history, brought attention to the 'uniqueness of individual experience and the ways in which social life is created through politics.'⁴⁹³ It struck me that the theses I surveyed at Bayero, in sacrificing politics at the altar of their parochial accounts, blunted the possibility of perceiving this 'uniqueness of individual experience' and thus presented us with histories half-formed and opaque in places. Social historian G.M. Trevelyan had stated that 'Social history might be defined negatively as the history of a people with the politics left out . . . [But] without social history, economic history is barren and political history is unintelligible.'⁴⁹⁴ In re-interpreting Trevelyan's observation, we may say that the Bayero theses as they aspired undoubtedly to deliver still culturally and socially literate histories, ultimately fall short in places because of the left-out politics. As per Trevelyan's point, if we agree that a social history account can make an incorporated political history intelligible, there first has to be a political history presented alongside to consider against. The Bayero histories, in their insularity and closed-off metanarratives, present little politics alongside their accounts and thus historical dead-ends preponderate.

As Fulbrook points out, when social histories in their own right were traditionally counterposed to political histories or accounts, they were 'soon found to have its omissions and blind spots.'⁴⁹⁵ This is precisely what I encountered in perusing these archives – omissions and blind spots. Whilst the blind spots Fulbrook refers to are inadvertent, the blind spots in the Bayero theses appear willfully constructed. Of those historical dead ends and blind spots, frequently I found myself whilst reading the Bayero accounts interrupting my reading to ask variously: Why did this event happen the way it did? What was the effect of this individual's particular action? Why are they telling us *this* and not telling us *that*? How was a specific situation resolved without opposition? Who authorized the alliance and to what end? An injection of 'politics' would have stilled my interruptions. To those who self-confine their

⁴⁹³ Paula Fass, 'Cultural History/Social History: Some Reflections on a Continuing Dialogue (The Cultural Turn and Beyond)', *Journal of Social History* (37), Oxford University Press, Fall 2003, pp.39-46.

⁴⁹⁴ Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002) p.38.

⁴⁹⁵ Fulbrook, p.38.

academic exertions to a solitary lane, Stanford had this admonition: 'The historian cannot confine himself to one type of phenomenon (religious, literary, demographic, fiscal etc.) if he is to tell a coherent story.'⁴⁹⁶ The PEAR-shaped writings of the Bayero theses struggled to achieve an adequate coherency in my analysis – in spite of the fact they were in their own right legitimate histories to undertake.

The Abacha regime was preceded by two military regimes which though not viewed with the same dismay Abacha's harsh regime was accorded were dictatorships nonetheless.⁴⁹⁷ The Buhari/Idiagbon regime (1983 – 1985) was hardly a pillar of human rights and was punitive to the extent that the death penalty was considered for students caught teaching at national exams.⁴⁹⁸ The irony of the Buhari coup which ousted the democratically elected government of Shehu Shagari goes beyond the fact that Buhari today is in the seat of power as a twice-democratically elected president; it is that Buhari's 1983 coup announcer was no other than one Brigadier-General Sani Abacha, who addressed Nigerians regarding the take-over and suspension of the 1979 Constitution. In announcing the new government, Abacha decried the state of affairs in the country, pointing out that the nation's economic, health and education sectors needed to be salvaged from further degeneration, while unemployment, non-payment of workers' salaries in some states, corruption and indiscipline were unchecked. In 1985, when Major Gen. Babangida with Abacha's assistance launched a coup against Buhari, Abacha was on hand again to address the nation with the reasons for this latest coup being almost identical to his coup announcement address two years earlier. Abacha was a common denominator in these regimes that preceded his, certainly as spokesman of sorts – what we cannot prove is whether he was a formal or informal policymaker in the regimes and if so, to what extent? What can be deduced is that during Abacha's regime and that of Babangida and Buhari before it, the History Department of Bayero

⁴⁹⁶ Stanford, p103.

⁴⁹⁷ Nigerians and foreign commentators have been in agreement over the years that the Abacha regime was the harshest dictatorship Nigeria has endured in its history.

⁴⁹⁸ Ultimately, it was decided that 21 years in prison was deemed sufficient punishment for a student caught cheating in an exam. The New York Times, in an article '*Nigeria's Discipline Campaign: Not sparing the rod*' (Clifford D. May, Aug 10 1984) decried the sentencing guidelines as 'draconian', 'unreasonable' and 'unjust.'

University produced a type of theses that suggested a tradition of exploring non-controversial histories existed for at least ten years before Abacha took power – and for the five years Abacha was in office. The fact that military affairs were never referenced in this time in the theses, according to the selection of theses made available to me, leads us to conclude that the military regimes exerted an influence, certainly, over the student research output of the History Department of Bayero University. Could there be also other considerations as to why the output – and Department – may happily elect to take the apolitical format these essays assumed? It is possible the ‘tradition’ I speak of was driven also by certain religious, social and cultural norms and etiquette peculiar to the north.

History is replete with politicking and rivalry, feuding splits and controversy; to successfully avoid this in a mass of accounts begs the obvious question of an agenda at work. I examined titles produced at Bayero post-Abacha (see below) and found the same pattern reported previously. This outcome may confirm tradition’s unwavering hand – that despite the demise of the Abacha regime, Bayero did what they had always done. Yet this does not repudiate the military regimes’ influence on the department – on the contrary, it opens also the possibility that the influence of the military regimes was working in tandem with other equally powerful motivating factors.

Table XI: Phds in Bayero University (Post-Abacha)

Name	Title	Year	Type
Abubakar Babajo Sani	The Mercantile Landscape of Northern Katsina Emirate 1805 - 1954	2004	PhD
Rasheed Oyewole Olaniyi	Yoruba in Kano: A Commercial History of a Migrant Community C. 1912 – 1999	2004	PhD
Muhammad Sani Imam	Trade and Economic Development in the Lake Chad Basin: The Case of the Fishing Industry C. 1900 -1999	2004	PhD
Muhammad Kyari	The establishment and administration of Friday Mosques in Maidugri Town, Borno State 1976-C.2000AD	2005	PhD
Jude Azuka Asenime	The Foundation Growth and Transformation of Asaba up to 1991	2005	PhD
Terwase Joshua Mile	Urbanization in Northern Nigeria: The Establishment and Development of Makurdi Town C.1927 -1999 AD	2007	PhD

Table XII: M.A.s in Bayero University *post-Abacha*

Name	Title	Year	Type
Dalha Waziri	The Establishment of British Overrule in Gumel: A Study of Political Administration 1903 – 1939	1999	M.A.
Bello Zakariya Abubaker	History of Islam in the Middle Benue Region: A case study of Wukari since C.1848 – 1960	2000	M.A.
Raliya Zubairu Mahmud	Kano Prisons in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries	2000	M.A.
Azeeza Hassan Gwarzo	The Scholarly Activities of Malama Zainabu Usman Modibbo (1928 - 1984) and Malama Habiba Yahaya (1936 - 1984)	2000	M.A.
Bara'atu Haliru Gwarzo	A Historical Development of Western Education in Kano with Particular Reference to Women 1930 – 1987	2000	M.A.
Nwaugo Ndidi Fabian	Ibo Spare Parts Entrepreneurs	2000	M.A.

	in Kano Metropolis: A Case Study of Automobile Spare Parts 1970 - 1998		
Suberu Ochi Abdurrahman	A Biography of Late Alhaji Habib Raji Abdallah; 1920 – 1982	2000	M.A.
Uchendu M. Reuben-ibe	A History of the Catholic Church in Kano 1924 - 1999	2002	M.A.
Nsebong Ekong Nkanga	The History of Tanning Industries in Kano City: A Comparative Study of Nabegu, Multitan, Mario-Jose, 1949 – 2000	2003	M.A.
Edun Ayodeji Abdul-Aziz	History of Native Administration Police Force in Ilorin Emirate 1930 -1970	2003	M.A.
Suleman Nalado	A History of Anka Motal Industry: 1815 – 1899	2004	M.A.
Iyanda Kamoru Ahmed	Urbanization of Ejigbo from 1820 to 1976	2004	M.A.
Daniel Olisa Iweze	A History of Transport System Between Asaba in Delta and Onitsha in Anambra State from 1954 to 1996	2004	M.A.
Aspen Philip	A History of Electricity and Water Supply in Makurdi Town C. 1927 – 1983	2004	M.A.
Solomon Oyewole Oyeshola	The Development of Machine Tailoring Industry in Sabon Gari, Kano C. 1913 to 1999	2006	M.A.
Shehu Tijjani Yusif	The Impact of the Railway on Madobi and Kwanwaso Towns in Kano	2007	M.A.

Etiquette and Tradition: Religious, Social and Cultural norms

Upon being embedded in the city of Kano during my fieldwork, it was clear how much the city's royal lineage and legend soaks Kano pride, its identity and sense of belonging. Histories surrounding the Emirate and the royal palace permeated the social and cultural fabric of the city in a way that was not in

evidence in say, a major city in the south such as Lagos. In Lagos, the royal houses with the *Oba* of Lagos at the head, whilst of undisputed importance to the histories of the state, was more far removed from the general workings and identity of the state in its day-to-day existence.⁴⁹⁹ One obvious reason for this difference between Kano and Lagos lay in the separation between religion and state. In Lagos, for example, the Oba is more readily associated with traditional African rituals and observances in contrast to the general populace of the state, the majority of who identify publicly with Christianity. The converse is true in Kano where the Emir's identity is steeped in the Islam that most of Kano's citizenry actively practice. This symbiosis on the part of the Emirs in embodying both royal tradition *and* the widely practiced religion, arguably afforded the Emirs, specifically through the shared commonality and power of faith, a more potent and present influence in the lives of the citizens of Kano. This influence – this tangible reach of the Emirs into their subjects' daily lives – was something that was inaccessible to the Obas, the Emirs' southern counterparts. This first raises the question and perhaps explains the preponderance of studies in Bayero that focus also on the Royal House and heritage. It is conceivable that this preponderance is inspired by a shared commonality, itself inspired by a sense of duty. A duty not just of expanding scholarship, as is the basic fundament that powers especially doctoral research – but an overlapping, perhaps overriding, sense of duty *to a group*; a fealty to a commonwealth of peoples dedicated to the propagation and exploration first and foremost of the *idea* and culture of said group. In chapter VI we covered the concept of exceptionalism within Nigerian tribes and this seems here to be of pronounced bearing from what I witnessed firsthand regarding the Kano indigenes self-identification with the composite of the royal house, their Islamic faith and their northern Hausa-Fulani heritage. If fealty to their grouping were a compelling preoccupation for researchers regardless of their chosen topic interest, then this would unavoidably shape the narratives, boundaries and thrust of the histories

⁴⁹⁹Oba means king.

being told into a particularly uniform mould. This would explain the narrow focus and oddly homogenous aspect of the theses I encountered despite the ostensible variance of topics submitted.

The criticism I leveled earlier of finding historical dead-ends in the work due to the shunning of politics and my charge that proportions of the work had inadequate coherency, did not wholly detract from the work's academic application or integrity – what I did question, in line with the exacting criteria of the discipline, was to what extent did the works embrace or elide these rigorous standards to produce *convenient* histories. Nevertheless, I did encounter a particular exception with the politics intact and the history far from convenient - Haruna Wakili's 1997 M.A. study *The Phenomenon of Revolts and Riots in Kano - 1893 -1995: an historical perspective* – which I will be later discussing.

Another question I did consider regarding the theses was: to what extent was this apparent fealty to a group, consciously embarked upon or even culturally and/or socially encouraged? This was a question that probed on aspects of the cultural histories and traditional inheritances regarding the way groups interact with and present themselves to perceived outsiders. Consequently, in the arena of the group that constituted 'northern Nigerians', Islam was the single-most identifiable motif that affixed the group into a banded collective. I found this to be true in Kano, as corroborated in conversation by the presiding professor supervising my field trip in the north, indigenous northerner and Katsina resident Professor Ibrahim Kankara.

Worship is a palpable exercise in the northern regions of Nigeria, as is seen in *Adhan* — call to prayers — which daily punctuates the city's sounds. Sartorially too, religion takes visual precedence as expressed in the near-homogeneous donning of Muslim dress by the city's inhabitants (non-Muslim visitors — inclusive of myself — routinely don passable attire for the purpose of blending in). This is in contrast to southern states, where a greater preponderance of western dress intersperses with traditional attire unaffiliated to any particular religious denomination. This discernibly ubiquitous commitment to Islam in the north, and in Kano specifically regarding the theses I encountered, does demonstrate also beyond just the issue of locale as a cost-effective boundary for the theses, the overarching power of religion in

the north. For the desire to explore and produce theses with Islam at its centre far outweighs the desire to investigate more prosaic, terrestrial matters – geographical boundaries notwithstanding. This patently explains to some extent the array also of Islamic-tinged enquiries even in ostensibly non-religious interrogations, since Islam infuses every aspect of Kano life in a more intense, disciplined way than Christianity does in the south. As Noo Saro-Wiwa commented in her travelogue upon visiting Kano:

Islam, established here long before Christianity arrived, was an older and more languid affair, free of evangelism's teenage fervour. Christianity confronted you and pummeled, whereas Islam lay under your feet, underlining every aspect of society in its quietly dictatorial way.⁵⁰⁰

In relation to the theses I encountered, there's also the expectation, in the tradition of age-old Islamic scholarship famed for innovative approaches to learning and erudition, that there would exist a line of would-be scholars who imagine themselves as inheritors of that tradition. Thus explains the numbers who focus their research with matters regarding Islam and, by subtle or explicit extension, on the dynastic empires of historical renown. To visit the Gidan Makama Museum in Kano is to be schooled by the guides in the dynastic importance of the Kano emirate and the extent to which the local indigenes identify and entrench themselves into the histories and legend of the Kano dynasty.

Fig.19: Central Mosque, Kano



⁵⁰⁰ Noo Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria*, (Berkeley: Granta, 2012) p.143.

Dr. Ismaila Tsigá, a former director of the neighboring Katsina State History and Culture Bureau, which I also visited in Katsina, explained the entanglements that historically existed between Islamic scholarship and a culture of learning in the north. Tsigá expressed the view that little had changed in the present day, stating that ‘analysing the development of the intellectual tradition within the Islamic framework ... provides an avenue for greater understanding of the cultural and intellectual development of the various societies in Northern Nigeria.’⁵⁰¹ In other words, because Islam was the bedrock through which all learning was originally instituted and due to the enduring fact of Islam in the evolution of these societies from antiquity to modernity, one can expect Islam to cast a long shadow in academic endeavours. This explained why in certain enquiries I perused, such as *The Impact of the Railway on Madobi and Kwanwaso Towns in Kano* (Shehu Tijjani Yusif, 2007, M.A. – see **Table X**), Islam featured amongst the railways more than I envisaged it might.

When we take into consideration also that in c1806, Sarkin Musulmi Bello wrote a treatise for the first Emir of Katsina entitled *Usul, as-Siyasa*,⁵⁰² entreating him to be the very vessel of didactic direction for the people, one can clearly see how the Emir, Islam, and the dissemination of knowledge may appear somewhat indivisible culturally within the northern academic spaces. Like Machiavelli’s *Prince* written for the ruling Lorenzo de’ Medici, Bello advises the Emir accordingly:

The Emir should lay down for the people of his domain their worldly and religious duties. He should see to the rearing of craftsmen and the encouragement of artisans whom the people cannot do without ... He should in addition exhort the people to produce and store food; settle populations in urban and rural areas; build walled towns and bridges; maintain markets and roads; and work for the realization of their general welfare as a whole ...’⁵⁰³

⁵⁰¹ Ismai’la A. Tsigá and Abdalla U. Adamu, *Islam and the History of Learning in Katsina*, (Ibadan: Kenbim Press Ltd, 1997) p.80.

⁵⁰² Translates as ‘Principles of Politics’.

⁵⁰³ Ismai’la A. Tsigá and Abdalla U. Adamu, p.11.

When Tsigā later expounds that among the Emir's responsibilities was 'the provision of technical education and training; agricultural and rural development; emergency food policy; building new towns and improving existing ones; build mosques; appoint judges,'⁵⁰⁴ one may spy in Tsigā's list a mapping of the PEAR categorisations that I argue define the academic theses of Bayero.

S.A. Albasu, formerly of the department of History at Usman Danfodio University, Sokoto, furthers this point on the Islamic scholarship and learning tradition when he reports:

The cities of Timbuktu, Gao, Jenne, Aghades and Borno for instance, became famous as, first and foremost, centres of Islamic learning. Others like Kano, Katsina and Zazzau owe their development and fame to the important position they came to occupy when they became renowned centres of learning.⁵⁰⁵

Within the realm also of religious leanings, a third possibility – involving the literal practice and observation of religious edicts – opens up in relation to the dearth of contemporaneous theses at Bayero regarding Abacha's tenure. This possibility may equate to a collective exercise of *self-censure*, as related to the aforementioned concept of duty to the collective. The concept of *Tawḥīd* (– توحيد –) meaning oneness of God, encompasses a number of duties expected of Muslims including rules governing responsibility to the fraternity. In *The Duties of Brotherhood in Islam* (Holland 1980) Imam al-Ghazali writes about the 'the third duty'⁵⁰⁶ which is the 'duty of holding one's tongue'.⁵⁰⁷ Al-Ghazali speaks of this aspect of *Tawḥīd* creating 'strong, warm, rich and durable bonds of love and brotherhood between man and man.'⁵⁰⁸ On the issue of the Kano indigenes' reluctance to say *anything* negative about the Abacha regime, this stood in stark contrast to the way Abacha has been widely, loudly criticized elsewhere in the country and beyond. In fact, some of the people I conversed with in Kano took pains to impress upon me the perceived positives that Abacha's tenure generated: the imposition of order and apparently a hitherto unknown willingness in an African Head of State to defy the colonial

⁵⁰⁴ Isma'īla A. Tsigā and Abdalla U. Adamu, p.11.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Imam al-Ghazali, *The Duty of Brotherhood in Islam*, trans. Muhtar Holland (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1980) p35.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

bullying of Western powers were the most-oft recurring refrains. It struck me that perhaps the general reservation of the people I spoke with in Kano — this self-censure — was motivated not by a rose-tinted and revisionist approach to things but originated from a place that intersected with factors which sought to practicalize the edicts of daily worship in one's actions.

I should mention at this juncture that rose-tinted views did of course exist; later in a Kaduna museum perusing archived newspapers from Abacha's time, I happened upon a northern print of the Guardian dated the day following Abacha's death. It was a front, full-page obituary with the General's face centered and enlarged. Above his unsmiling visage was the headline: *A Pillar is Gone*. I was aware also, following his passing, of a road in Kano named after Abacha – Sanni Abacha Way – as well as a stadium – Sani Abacha Stadium.

Fig.20: Gen. Abacha Obituary, *The Guardian*, Nigeria, 9 June 1998



Rose-tinted glasses aside, the reserved self-censure of Kano indigenes when discussing Abacha, could be, as mentioned, the prevalence of a religious-shaped censure: a reticence driven by the desire to be respectful to a fellow Muslim – observing *Tawhīd* - which overlapped with the silent code of honour for a kinsman, born and bred within their famous city and who rose to the pre-eminent position in the country — culminating in the enduring deference, regardless of his notoriety (which was contested). At one point during my field trip, a prominent History professor and Kano indigene who shall remain nameless challenged the premise of my thesis. What's so special about the Abacha regime and this so-called absence of History that you will not find in any other regime in Nigeria, he asked? I conceded he

may have a point – to an extent. Later, even as I held that his challenge came from an automatically defensive place, it was still in relation to my ultimate thesis findings, an insightful one. Back to Imam al-Ghazali's *The Duties of Brotherhood in Islam*. The seventh duty, al-Ghazali informs us is *loyalty and sincerity*. The Imam advises that 'loyalty includes not listening to gossip about your brother' and 'loyalty includes not befriending your brother's enemy'.⁵⁰⁹ Subsequently, in seeing things through the prism of al-Ghazali's exhortations, I appreciated better why the Kano indigenes presented a hostile and diffident stance to my probings around Brother Abacha.

History and its scholarship, we have established, has had a fragmentary existence in Nigeria's political life and output since independence. I put it also to my unnamed Kano Professor that by most measures, from foreign and Nigerian observers alike, that the Abacha regime was considered the most inimical of all Nigerian governments by quite a margin. It was my reasoning that even if history had a consistently desultory place in the nation, by this rationale the Abacha regime might have had a more extremist interpretation of the norm. He sidestepped my reasoning and postulated instead that looking at a military regime anyhow was counter-intuitive given the nature and pre-occupations of all military regimes. I countered that on the contrary the military by virtue of its martial background and the inevitable connection with war and the civil war in particular was more steeped in history and perhaps had a greater responsibility in ensuring they were responsible handmaidens in power. I do not recall who had the last word regarding our differing views – him I imagine – but on the issue of the unique, atypical place the military inhabited in a place like Nigeria, Paul Kaiser noted:

Even during civilian administrations, the intimidating shadow of the military looms large. In addition, it is one of the few institutions in the country that is national in character... while not democratically inclined, the armed forces are also often characterized as more representative than political parties and other institutions of government that are subject to ethnic-based patronage. Indeed, military leaders have repeatedly conveyed

⁵⁰⁹ Imam al-Ghazali, *The Duty of Brotherhood in Islam*, trans. Muhtar Holland (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1980) p.72.

these rationales to the general public when assuming political power.⁵¹⁰

So, the military in theory were in an advantageous position to be the savior of the nation and heal wounds but failed to live up to the promise they had presented, when co-opting the nation's goodwill. We understand historically in Nigeria, from the alleged wide scale corruption, economic fallout and austerity, human rights abuses, that military regimes in Nigeria failed without exception; with the Abacha regime exceeding previous failures when turning Nigeria into a pariah nation for a time following certain actions in his rule including Ken Saro Wiwa's murder.

On this issue of Muslim 'brotherhood', we may return for a moment to the theses listings; specifically to the *names* of the scholars. In the universities, I was not privy to information regarding the students' ethnicity and state origin. However, in corroboration with Professor Kankara, we determined from the students' names, if not their precise state of origin, their ethnicity and regional origin. Regarding female students, putting aside the unlikelihood of married female students at undergraduate level⁵¹¹, the likelihood of married name vs maiden name complicating assumptions was slim. Names such as 'Abubaker Musa' and 'Kazeem Mohammed' due to their islamised nomenclature pointed to the high probability that these students were northern indigenes. Obvious place-name surnames, such as 'Katsina' or 'Kano' did not need further deliberation; nor others such as 'Bello', which in Nigerian naming etymology originates from Sokoto state through the line of the Sokoto royal family, before the name became more established in Katsina and Kano. On the basis of the selection of theses made available to me, I was thus able to determine that the percentage of northern students in attendance at the northern universities appeared to be around 98% northern indigenes. Coming from the region and being of Islamic persuasion would no doubt mean the students' shared cultural and religious background,

⁵¹⁰ Paul J. Kaiser, 'Federal Republic of Nigeria Briefing Paper', 2005, *CollegeBoard* https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/apc/ap05_comp_govpol_nige_42255.pdf [Accessed 08 Aug 2017].

⁵¹¹ Whilst some women in the Islamic north were married prior to their 17th birthday, when this occurred several traditional and domestic responsibilities for the wife was instigated. This meant the likelihood of marriage for a young woman being followed not by domesticity but by enrolment and matriculation at university was virtually nil.

especially within the pronounced culture of brotherhood as discussed, would have critically influenced their choices and made them more likely to conform to spoken or unspoken expectations of the group at large. This knowledge helped me to substantiate my findings by virtue of introducing and including in my considerations, the cultural and religious backgrounds of the students as critical to influencing their choices.

Ultimately, it is possible these aspects, in some permutation or other and in tandem with some of the other considerations put forth in this chapter regarding 'duty', 'brotherhood' and 'self-censuring', also contributed to the dearth of Abacha-associated enquiries in theses produced in Bayero University between 1993 and 1998.

A Sampling: Three Theses

In arguing that the majority of theses I accessed displayed in their aims and general content a knowingly narrow treatment of history in order to consciously avoid controversial topics, I appreciate might not explain the phenomenon in full. For example, as earlier remarked upon regarding funding, in considering the historical context of when the research was undertaken and written, it is probable the longstanding adverse university funding situation in Nigeria potentially impacted these studies – thus, the less than ideal state of the library and archives might have forcibly imposed a focus on local history as reflected in my PEAR categorisations.

As the number of theses I accessed is sizeable, it would be impracticable to present and engage here a multiplicity of extracts in defense of my argument. Nevertheless, I present below an analysis of three studies, the first two of which I believe mirror and encapsulate the majority of the studies in their configuration, and upon which the main ideas that enabled me to construct my argument is built upon. Curiously, the third study I present is from a thesis I encountered as an outlier, which I believe provided an even more compelling corroboration of my findings.

In perusing Abubaker Babajo Sani's PhD study *The Mercantile Landscape of Northern Katsina Emirate 1805 – 1954*, I found aspects to its approach and treatment I felt echoed faithfully across the majority of the studies I accessed.

In mapping the trading system or 'commercial configuration' of Northern Katsina, Sani's study interlinks overlapping PEAR attributes from the Royal House to economic viability to Islamic conquest. In an initial address of the Emirate's economic landscape, the thesis sets to challenge a prior European outlook of the Emirate. In first arguing that 'Birnin Katsina did not dominate the economy and territory' as previously held by an indigenous, oral version of events, it recalibrates by contesting also the reverse European colonial account, stating 'European travellers who reported about the state of affairs in Katsina emirate in the nineteenth century assumed that Katsina was a diminished economy. The advocates of this view assumed that commerce in Birnin Katsina declined after the early nineteenth century jihad.'⁵¹² The analysis proceeds cogently and in the tradition of the builder-historians of the HSN, as a necessary postcolonial track to revisit and dislodge dubious Eurocentric accounts. Still, the history cannot be considered a radical or politically controversial position, though its research value and objective is undeniable and worthy.⁵¹³

Ensuing discussions of jihad too, in summary, appeared re-translated and mitigated of its intra-tribal violence to highlight instead within the focal commercialised landscape, the propensity and pull of northern brotherhood and community. Thus, it was reported that though 'the nineteenth century Jihad, the Maradi problem certainly had [a] stultifying effect on commercial activities' it failed to hinder the commerce trade in Northern Katsina, given merchants, inhabitants and combatants alike 'formed associations which made them recognizable as communities'. This cohesion in the face of holy war it is

⁵¹² Abubaker Babajo Sani, *The Mercantile Landscape of Northern Katsina Emirate 1805 – 1954*, PhD Thesis 1993, Bayero University.

⁵¹³ A number of the other studies also debunked entrenched European views of the north; however, despite the constancy of this across a number of theses in various places, I declined to incorporate this into the PEAR categorisation because in nearly all cases the rebuff was brief – often a paragraph at most – and failed to assume a consistent thematic mantle to warrant any classification.

reported 'is not a new thing in Hausa land for merchants and other professionals to use group consciousness, and social relationships to advance commercial prospects.'⁵¹⁴

Similarly, Abubakar Murtala's 1993 M.A. study *A Socio-Economic History of Ringim Town 1903 -1991* focuses too on the economic life and evolution of a Northern Nigerian town. The study initially sets the stage by presenting the pre-colonial realities of these mostly agricultural societies, with particular emphasis on displaying the blacksmithing traditions - chronicling the society's produce from agricultural implements such as hoes (*fartanya*), sickles (*gatari*), and rakes (*munjagar*), to weapons like arrows (*kibiyoyi*), knives (*wukake*) and spears (*masu*).⁵¹⁵ In firstly introducing the pre-colonial society of Ringim, the study at the outset parallels also the builder-historians' presentation of an African society's pre-western existence enjoying relative advancement. Beyond this, a conventional history ensues in straight line from the pre-colonial to the modern Ringim Town of 1991, with the narrative focus veering little from a conservative, chronological accounting. In the timespan covered of almost a century to the turn of the 1990s, there appears no place for any of the negative sub-plots that have bedevilled the burgeoning nationhood experience, such as religious or ethnic strife or the persistent, inescapable political upheavals that reverberated nationwide from the 1960s on account, say, of Nigeria's coup culture.

However, in life as in writings, exceptions may emerge from uniformity. Haruna Wakili's 1997 M.A. study *The Phenomenon of Revolts and Riots in Kano - 1893 -1995: an historical perspective* was one such outlier that proved a conspicuous exception to the so-called non-controversial histories of the other theses. Wakili was frank in recounting Kano's history of recurrent riotous violence and disdained from lionising the city as other studies had. Wakili approached the issue of ethnic rivalry with unusual candour; he is open about the hostility the Kano indigenes have towards 'newcomers [and especially the

⁵¹⁴ Abubakar Babajo Sani, "The Mercantile Landscape of Northern Katsina Emirate 1805 – 1954", PhD Thesis, Bayero University, 1993, p.25.

⁵¹⁵ A.R.Murtala, "A Socio-Economic History of Ringim Town 1903-1991", M.A. Thesis, Department of History B.U.K., 1993 p. 57

Igbos]’ who have ‘began to dominate the economy’.⁵¹⁶ Wakili documents ‘eleven large-scale’ Hausa-Igbo riots in Kano between 1953 and 2004 - with those occurring especially in the early aftermath of independence viewed as a contributing factor to Hausas and Igbos ill feeling in the build up to the civil war.⁵¹⁷ Wakili even covers intra-tribal conflict and touches on the hardened class and ethnic divisions between the so-called aristocratic Fulani and commoners (the ‘Talakawa’)⁵¹⁸ — thus eschewing the usual northern brotherhood narrative that other studies appear careful to project. Wakili documents the mounting intensity of these class/identity struggles as the *Talakawa* grows and urbanisation comes to this ‘land of plenty’ as Wakili calls Kano, due to Kano’s prominent colonial groundnut industry and subsequent large-scale development that followed the postcolonial oil boom.⁵¹⁹ On the issue of sectarian religious conflict, Wakili is equally frank and intentional. Where others, commentators and officials alike look to dismiss religious violence as caused principally by ‘hooligans’, Wakili acknowledges the presence of opportunists but is defiant the main causes are social cleavages that need resolving.⁵²⁰ Thus, Wakili is unafraid to tackle politics; he goes as far to evoke Kano’s authentic politics as the radical politics of renown reformist and socialist Aminu Kano who opposed the British as well as the Fulani elite and Emirs – ‘In Kano politics, the dominant ideology is Aminu Kano’s radicalism, politics that sees itself as the protector of the weak and the poor.’⁵²¹ Wakili, writing in 1997 at the apex of Kano-born Abacha’s reign and at the height of a regime widely tarnished for riding roughshod over the downtrodden, is unsparing in presenting thorny historical facts in his study. I was intrigued by the openness of Wakili’s thesis and its marked difference to the others; I resolved it would be profitable to interview him. In pursuing that route, I initially learned Wakili had held a Deputy Vice-Chancellor position at Bayero

⁵¹⁶ Haruna Wakili, *The Phenomenon of Revolts and Riots in Kano, 1893-1995: an Historical Perspective*, Thesis PhD - Bayero University Kano, 1997, p.47.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid. p.235.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid. p.38.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid. p.52.

⁵²⁰ Ibid. p.23.

⁵²¹ Ibid. p.52.

University (he would have been in post when I first attended Bayero for a field trip) but unfortunately subsequently learned he had actually passed away on the 20th June 2020 after a protracted illness.⁵²²

Haruna Wakili's thesis is notable on a number of counts. Wakili's thesis is in its entirety restricted to the Kano locale - some of the other theses even venture further afield within the northern hemisphere from Kano to Katsina or beyond; in this regard Wakili's is the classic *made-in-Kano* thesis. Yet, it tackles several combustible topics, from religious violence to inter-tribal and class conflicts, as well as a rumination – and tacit writer's agreement – on the ideal governmental prototype being of a socialist stripe. Wakili demonstrated that restricting the thesis' landscape to the Kano or northern locale need not dilute or inhibit the content's historical thrust. This fact alone, in differentiating his thesis from the mass not only confirmed his outlier status, but made it more likely that the others in their strict similitude, despite the real issues of funding and resources, operated from a conscious self-limiting place shaped by a entrenched anti-historical culture and expectation.

Kano: The shape of the archives

In a proper and expanded definition of 'archive' this system of recording (listing in particular), storage and retrieval, is an aspect of the history of written language, and the politics of that history.⁵²³

I noted in my Methodology Chapter/'Field Trip' the difficulties I had in accessing the archives, such as the unavailability of digitised records, as well as encountering several gap years where no theses appeared available. This was compounded by the fact some of the physical copies I accessed were in such a poor state that intelligibility was sometimes a challenge. Also, I was unable to secure enrolment figures, as documented in the Methodology Chapter/'Field Trip' which impacted my ability to ascertain both the likelihood of a diminishing number of history enrolments over the years and the extent.

⁵²² I was informed of Wakili's prior post at Bayero and subsequent passing by Professor Kankara of Bayero University.

⁵²³ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2001) p.23.

Undoubtedly, the funding issue had observable consequences – the less than ideal storage facilities and Saharan heat of the archive room unquestionably contributed to the disintegrating and aged condition of some of the archive documents. I earlier referenced Falola, highlighting the lack of investment in history generally across Nigerian institutions. Certainly, requisite funds had not been applied at Bayero in relation to sustaining the archives. I discerned also a wider parallel in relation to the state and its relationship with history generally, in the example of the ancient Kano city gates and walls: the city's antiquated and famous fortification in the time of the Fulani Empire. Centuries before British colonisers set foot in Kano it was ringed by a brown-mud wall standing 3.5-metres high and 1.5-metres thick to protect it from invasion. Today, large parts of this 1,000-year-old barricade is either destroyed or in a state of disrepair. A campaigner for the preservation of the wall, Abbas Yushau, stated on record: 'The wall is our culture. That wall stands for us. When people think of Kano they think of the wall. It is our symbol. We need to preserve and maintain our ancient culture, not destroy or watch it go into ruins.'⁵²⁴

Since the days when the wall was an active barricade, Kano has expanded to a present-day population of approximately 4 million people. This growth has coincided with the destruction of the wall, and disturbingly, with homes and businesses popping up *on* the site of the wall. Other areas of the wall have been turned into a dumpsite. In June 2018, a month before I embarked on my field trip to Kano, Hamza Mohamed, correspondent with Al Jazeera visited parts of the wall and reported that businesses such as mechanic shops were plying trade on the ancient site.⁵²⁵ Other commentators have spoken of government-sanctioned degradation whereby various government agencies, aware of the laws protecting the wall and gates, still issue indiscriminate warrants of approval for construction which encroach the wall and gate sites. With laughable irony, the Kano State Environmental Protection Agency

⁵²⁴Tope Templer Olaiya –'Notre Dame Reignites Loss of Nigeria's Disappearing Monuments', 23 April 2019, *The Guardian*

⁵²⁵Hamza Mohammed, 'Nigeria's ancient Kano wall disappears along with history', 4 June 2018, *Aljazeera*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/6/4/nigerias-ancient-kano-wall-disappears-along-with-history> [Accessed 17 August 2018].

(KASEPA) has been highlighted as a chief agent in the approval of the construction of buildings close to the wall, plainly in violation of the 30 metres minimum allowance rule. On some sections of the wall, hawkers routinely paste posters of their advertising and other announcements (See **Fig. 22**).

The point is that if the state's most prominent historical feature has been simultaneously neglected and debased in complicity with governmental agencies, this in itself says something about the present governmental climate, the city and its attitude in relation to the subject of history. This might also partly explain the state of neglect of the archives in Bayero University. In a sorry validation of Museveni *et al's* statement that history is a largely European affair, a recent development regarding the upkeep of Kano's ancient wall is notable. Due to the Kano authorities blatantly divesting themselves of responsibility for maintenance of the ancient wall, the German government, versed on the situation by one of their diplomatic nationals resident in Kano, approached the Kano authorities with an interventional plan. The Kano authorities accepted and are uninvolved with this exclusively German initiative of restoring the Kano wall. The ancient Kano City wall has indeed become a European affair. At least at Bayero University, the wall's historical significance is still being taught. Professor Tijjani Muhammad of the History department has emphasised the importance of the crumbling wall to Kano's past.

Kano will lose a lot of historic monuments if the destruction continues. The city will lose its cultural value. When people are unaware of their history, they will lose focus and will not have a reference point to look up to. The younger generation will grow up uninformed about the contributions of their forefathers.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁶Hamza Mohammed, 'Nigeria's ancient Kano wall disappears along with history', 4 June 2018, *Aljazeera*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/6/4/nigerias-ancient-kano-wall-disappears-along-with-history> [Accessed 17 August 2018].



Fig.21: Kano City Wall (1922)



Fig.22: Kano City Wall – (2018)

Katsina: Umaru Musa Yar'adua University

Shortly after my arrival at the University in Katsina I was acquainted with the archives and noted their poor state in an almost familiar expectation. In this part of Nigeria where as mentioned temperatures exceed 100°F even in the 'cooler' *Harmattan* season, it was dispiriting to see weather-beaten archival material stacked unprotected in dry, dusty rooms.⁵²⁷ The air condition unit built into the wall, silent, only confirmed what I knew from the stifling heat and my sweaty brow; it was broken.

The sample of B.A.s, M.A.s and PhDs that I accessed here was smaller than at Bayero. There were gaps in some years and again no real explanation was forthcoming when I enquired as to the particular gaps. I surmised some records were available and others simply were not and naturally speculated on the possibility of damaged records having to be discarded. It was easy to see how records might degenerate quickly in the conditions; and my visit to Katsina coincided with the rainy season, which meant the prospect of major mosquito activity, which dictated that the windows remained firmly shut.

⁵²⁷ *Harmattan* refers to a dust-laden wind on the Atlantic coast of Africa in some seasons.

Name	Title	Date	Type
Ibrahim Garba Gwarzo	History of Getso Town	1993	B.A
Dalha Waziri	History of Market System in Gumel in the 20 th Century	1993	B.A
Hadeezah Mailafia Ibrahim	The Changing role of women in Tangale Land in the 20 th century	1993	M.A
Murtala Abubaker Ringim	A Socio-economic History of Ringim Town (1903 - 1991)	1993	M.A
Sa'ida Magaji	An Economic History of Kankara Katsina Emirate	1994	B.A
Auwalu Bala Zakari	The History of Agadasawa Ward	1994	B.A
Abdu Hussaini	The History of the office of Madawaki in Daura Emirate	1994	M.A
Ladi Boney	Islam among the Hausa community of NSO in the North West province of Cameroon	1995	B.A
Suleiman Oladimeji Yusif	The History of Northern People Congress (N.P.C) in Ilorin province 1951 – 1966	1995	B.A
A Aron Chizoba Ugwu	A History of origins of Nigeran military School Zaria [1954 – 1994]	1995	M.A
Bilkisu Ojone Sani	The history of women traditional title holders in Idah	1996	B.A.
Ahmad Shu'aibu	The History of Ujile kola nut Market in Kano to 1995	1996	B.A.
Adamu Mahmud Abiodun	History of the coming of Islam and Christianity and their impacts among the Ogori people of Kogi State	1996	M.A.
Abubaker Muhammad	A History of Nupe Community in Kaduna	1998	B.A.
Suleiman Abubaker Yusif	The activities of Islamic foundation of Nigeria, Kano	1998	B.A.

Table XIII: B.A and M.A. theses Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University

I found at Katsina – as in Bayero University – my PEAR classification very much in evidence in the works considered here. I did find also, encouragingly, more studies focusing on the role of women in society here (albeit ‘society’ again was delimited to the northern sphere). For example, *The Changing role of women in Tangale Land in the 20th Century* (Hadeezah Mailafia Ibrahim, 1993, M.A.) was a well-researched and readable study; ultimately, I would categorise the work in the Religion category as much of the changes charted in the Tangale female’s life, from girl to womanhood, revolved around shifting cultural expectations that were mostly informed by or interpreted through Islamic adherence. Although cultural changes in the society appeared as the main drivers for transforming the lives of these women, it was apparent that a varying relationship between Islam and all invested parties around the women – guardians, educators, spiritual and political leaders, the women themselves – and the re-interpretations of Islamic mores that triggered usually progressive alterations in the women’s cultural life. In other words, the study considered Islam in modernity and how re-interpretations impacted both women’s cultural and spiritual existence. The study referenced the fact that a central tenet of Islamic doctrine is the divine, revealed unchangeable perfection of the Koran and judiciously linked this belief with a slowness to assimilate modernity and life adjustments into this equation, thus slowing the pace of change for women at times, or limiting what that change may look like.

The other female-centered study, Bilkisu Ojone Sani’s 1996 B.A thesis *The History of Women traditional Title holders in Idah*, whilst also channeling Islam in its appraisal, veered a little further off into broader treatment due to its main premise centering on titled female individuals. The town in question, Idah, is a town in Kogi State and Kogi was of strategic interest given its capital, Lokoja, was made the first capital of Northern Nigeria in colonial times by the Lugard administration. By virtue thus of Kogi’s historical strategic placement within the colonial set-up, Bilkisu Sani explores aspects of British indirect rule through the agency of the local chieftaincy system. Through this apparatus, these remarkable women featured here, via a mix of reinterpreting tradition, their strength of personality and political skills –

assumed leadership roles in doubly male-centric communities defined by traditions allied to the patriarchal narratives of dominant interpretations of Koranic text and Islamic worship. I placed Bilkisu Sani's work in the *Personages* category. Certainly, what these women scholars are addressing are suppressed histories. I referenced in my Introduction the heroine Queen Amina. Of heroines across the spectrum from Queen to foot soldier, of northern heritage, there are few and far between chronicled in the histories. I enjoyed reading these works by Ibrahim and Sani and understood that whilst Women and Gender historiography are a personal interest, the frameworks these aspiring historians applied engaged me due to their effective application. Contention was not explicitly employed in these writings, still, the female writers of these histories challenged the traditional religious metanarratives by being clear about how women's lives could be complicated and inhibited by those narratives in ways inapplicable to men. In previous chapters, I discoursed on the requisite coherency of works of history – Fulbrook also declared that a historian's work would be interesting as long as they formed 'coherent shapes'.⁵²⁸ Ultimately, it is the coherent shapes of these works that I believe distinguishes them from some others I perused in the university archives.

Of the straightforward theses of Religious categorization, a snapshot:

- The activities of Islamic foundation of Nigeria, Kano, Suleiman Abubaker Yusuf, 1998, B.A.
- History of the coming of Islam and Christianity and their impacts among the Ogori people of Kogi State, 1996, Adamu Mahmud Abiodun, M.A.
- Islam among the Hausa community of NSO in the North West province of Cameroon, Ladi Boney, 1995, B.A.

Whilst the Abiodun thesis - 'coming of Islam and Christianity' - departed from previously examined religion-based theses in the northern sphere by not focusing religious deliberations *exclusively* on Islam, in my reading the allocation was still unequally tilted toward Islam. Perhaps, this may be justified in that Kogi state is unusual in the north/middle belt in having a sizeable Christian population which whilst

⁵²⁸ Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002) p.53.

according to census figures equates to just 25% of the total Kogi population, is significantly higher than that of other northern states that tally closer to 3% for non-Muslim residents.⁵²⁹

Table XIV: PhDs Theses Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University

Thesis Title (Student Name)	Date
The Origin and development of Gwagwarwa up to 1979 (Isa Lawan Abd'allah	1994
A History of Economic and Social Transformation in the 19th and 20th Centuries Kano Emirate (Ibrahim Hamza	1994
A History of Modern Road Transport in Igala-Land with special reference to Ankpa 1913 - 1993 (Mohammed Must Yakub	1995
The Socio-Political History of the Daneji Fulbe of Kano and Katsina from the 17th Century to 1996 (Ibrahim Alfa Adamu)	1997
The History of the Imamship of Kano in the 19th and 20th Centuries (Muhammad Wada)	1998
The Origin and the Role of the Native Administration Police Force of The Kano Emirate 1925 - 1970 (Aminu Ya'u Chiranchi)	1998

Of the PhD offerings, the narrow trend of scholarship seen elsewhere was very much in evidence here also at UMY, even if admittedly the pool I had access to was smaller. In the seven listings I accessed of researchers working between 1994-1998, thus overlapping the Abacha tenure, there was the obligatory economic thesis, the road transport one, the personages, the religious one that charted a history of Imams, and one on the Police Force – which overlapped with personages and religion as it charted the individuals distinguishing themselves in service of the colonial administration, whilst also logging ongoing challenges to their familial cohesion and faith in light of newly introduced and often alien work practices.

⁵²⁹ 2006 Nigerian National Census figures from the office of national statistics. According to census figures also, the Igala people form the major ethnic group with a population of 1,484,345, of whom are mostly Muslim.

As in Bayero, the work examined here at UMY corroborated the charge that *during* the Abacha regime the topical and political was clearly eschewed for non-controversial topics. I did not have access to pre or post Abacha records here but History Professor Kankara, lecturer at UMY, informed me that these titles and preoccupations 'over the years' was 'typical' of the subjects of interest in the department.⁵³⁰ 'Over the years' sounded to me like an embedded tradition. On the evidence of the theses seen and Professor Kankara's declaration that the submissions thematically resembled the scope of prior and later theses produced, some conclusions can be drawn.

It may be argued, just as in Bayero University, that the general insularity and strikingly narrow historiographic palette of submissions in UMY, displayed both the consequence of the anti-historical philosophy of Nigerian governance, as well as a co-operative mentality in further perpetrating this anti-historical tradition from the epicentre of government.

Katsina State History And Cultural Bureau

A widespread view of Abacha was of a philistine character who possessed little intellectual rigour and was unmoved by the Arts. This criticism had been leveled against him by several observers including illustrious Nigerian writer Achebe who stated that in Abacha 'we were now dealing with yet another soldier, who was even worse in terms of intellect, in terms of anything, to Babangida.'⁵³¹ Nobel laureate Soyinka, referencing Abacha's attempt to self-succeed from military dictator to Civilian Presidential candidate wrote:

It is a fair assessment of the IQ of Abacha that he actually imagines that this transparent ploy for self-perpetuation would fool the market woman, the roadside mechanic, the student, factory worker, or religious leader of whatever persuasion. Even the village idiot must marvel at such banal attempts...⁵³²

⁵³⁰ In conversation with Professor Kankara on site at UMY on 1st September 2018.

⁵³¹ 'An intimate interview with Chinua Achebe' (n.d)– *Hopes on The Horizon – Africa in the 1990s - PBS -* <https://www.pbs.org/hopes/nigeria/essays.html> [Accessed 23 April 2019].

⁵³² Wole Soyinka, *The open sore of a continent: A personal narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) p.18.

Soyinka further stated that Abacha, like other dictators he had interacted with, ‘had a fascination for—and a fear of—the intellectual world,’⁵³³ and described Abacha as an ‘intellectual and spiritual dwarf’.⁵³⁴ By the time I embarked on field trip to Nigeria, I had interrogated my premise for close to two years and had thus surmised at length on the Abacha regime’s anti-historical bent. With this in mind, in addition to the anti-intellectual and enemy of the Arts charge leveled personally against Abacha, it felt odd touring the Katsina State History and Cultural Bureau and the Katsina Open Air Theatre that sits on the site – for it was Abacha who had commissioned the site in 1993; it was built in 1995. The relationship between dictators and architecture is a well-trodden one. Usually, they build colossal monuments to project power, to radiate a prestige both they and the people may bask in, and to symbolize also in the gigantic, invulnerable stone of their constructs, the durability of the dictator himself and his rule. But the Katsina State History and Cultural Bureau and the Katsina Open Air Theatre buildings was none of that – in their relatively modest, if slightly eccentric rendering, they threatened not to have been built for effect but for function.

As I toured the open-air theatre, this surprising and incongruous part of Abacha’s legacy initially queried the validity of my premise since I argued that the Abacha regime perpetrated anti-historical spaces. Yet here was an Abacha created space I was seeing with my own eyes, which was emphatically created in the name of and as a paean to *history*. What I was momentarily experiencing, of course, was the persuasiveness of the visual narrative.

I have argued at various points, in defense of my premise, that certain situations and actions have demonstrated that Abacha was conscious of the uses of history and thus cannot be excused from the anti-historical charge due to apparent disinterest or anti-intellectualism as his critics have alleged. To be

⁵³³ Dave Gilson (Dep. Editor), ‘Wole Soyinka: Running to Stand Still’ – *Mother Jones Magazine* - JULY/AUGUST 2006 ISSUE- <https://www.motherjones.com/media/2006/07/wole-soyinka-interview-running-stand-still/> [Accessed 12 October 2017].

⁵³⁴ Wole Soyinka, *The open sore of a continent: A personal narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) p.18.

anti-intellectual and simultaneously conversant with the uses of history as a governmental tool are not mutually exclusive positions. Abacha's commissioning of a History Cultural Bureau in Katsina State, authorized in the first light of his assuming power, imbues the action with an urgency that incontrovertibly demonstrates Abacha's awareness regarding the uses of history and also betrays a personal agenda in the service of this awareness. The construction took two years and in perhaps perverse symmetry, the Bureau and adjoining theatre became a reality in 1995, the same year Abacha dispatched Ken Saro- Wiwa – activist, writer, journalist, chronicler – via the hangman's noose into the annals of an infamous Nigerian history.

Though Abacha's predecessor, Babangida, was initially viewed as a friend to the Arts, the reputation of military leaders with a supposed aversion to the intelligentsia and/or the Arts goes back a long way. Babangida himself in 1986, executed his good friend and the best man at his wedding, General Mamman Vatsa who was an accomplished author known affectionately as the 'soldier-poet.'⁵³⁵ Vatsa had published several poetry collections for adults and children alike, with his literary interests and efforts extending to organizing writing workshops for soldiers and their families, as well as donating funds and land to the Children's Literature Association. On the charge that Vatsa had plotted to overthrow Babangida in a coup d'état,⁵³⁶ Vatsa was executed in a strange echo of the way Saro-Wiwa was hastily and unceremoniously dispatched: it was reported that three leading Nigerian literary icons, the afore mentioned Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and John Pepper Clark had gone to plead with Babangida for clemency, only to be shocked by news of Vatsa's execution just minutes after they departed Dodan Barracks, the President's residence.⁵³⁷

Having been ignorant of the Bureau's existence until I embarked on some due diligence prior to my field trip, I was of the view that many Nigerians who resided outside the north would also be similarly

⁵³⁵ Edlyne Eze Anugwom, *From Biafra to the Niger Delta Conflict – Memory, Ethnicity and the State in Nigeria* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2019,) p144.

⁵³⁶ Major General Vatsa was tried alongside other officers under the Treason and Other Offences (Special Military Tribunal) Decree 1 of 1986 – and subsequently executed.

⁵³⁷ Chinua Achebe, *There Was A Country*, p.72.

unaware of its construction and who authorized it. The thought struck me as potentially indicative of the separate lives Nigerians sometimes deigned to live demarcated by region – and symbolized also the separate ways that history may be utilized and applied to one community and denied the other.

The open theatre, with rows of seating steps in Roman-type formation, all uniformly sun-bleached, had aged to assume a ruin-like classical authenticity. Of its original function, Lawal Ibrahim reported for the *Daily Trust* that ‘the theatre was established to serve the dual purposes of preserving the state's ancient culture, tradition and promote same through arts and entertainment.’⁵³⁸ In this regard, the theatre was intended as a satellite of the History and Culture Bureau, which Abacha similarly set up for the development of history and culture in Katsina state. What old histories were, and would be, re-enacted here, I wondered?

So: Abacha, as de facto patron had actively promoted the study of social and cultural History in Katsina State to the point where he set up an overarching agency – a *Bureau* - as well as sanctioned the construction of an inlying theatre within the grounds where the public could be actively enthused and engaged by this History-centered project. Consequently, it couldn't be argued that Abacha's regime wholly subscribed to denigrating history and its scholarship in Nigeria. However, a number of factors qualify Abacha's actions here.

Following further investigation, I discovered that the Katsina History and Culture Bureau was the only one of its kind that Abacha set up in his time in office. Importantly also, there was a precedent: the *Kano State History and Culture Bureau*, commissioned by Babangida, was inaugurated in 1987. So, Abacha seemed to be following in Babangida's strategic footsteps once again, as he had done also with the joining of the D-8, which mirrored Babangida's enlisting of Nigeria into the OIC.

⁵³⁸ Lawal Ibrahim, ‘Nigeria: Inside Katsina's Neglected Open Air Theater’, 10 November 2006 - *Daily Trust*, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200611100673.html> [Accessed 1920 August 2017].

Is the Katsina Bureau and Kano before it nothing more than vanity projects for preening dictators? Or more charitably, vanity projects for these cities?

A cultural platform dedicated to propagate and explore the history of a specific region is by definition a regional vanity project and is justified, as this is a chief and openly stated aim. Institutions of this ilk are part touristic, part heritage. Organisations such as *Heritage of London Trust* have a similar function as can be deduced by its moniker and tag line: 'Keeping London's history alive: The Heritage of London Trust helps preserve the buildings and monuments that tell the story of the city and its people'.⁵³⁹ In juxtaposing the narrow trajectories and insular preoccupations of the B.A.s, M.A.s and PhD theses of the northern Universities with the Kano State History and Culture Bureau's publications, the theses from the universities suddenly seemed like they were annexed to the larger municipal vanity project of Kano – and by extension, part of a preoccupation with things of the *north*. If this was an accurate assessment, it raised two possibilities. Firstly, it again highlighted the issue of a shared philosophy and brotherhood amongst the northern mentality of uniformity as previously discussed. In this way, the incidence of Abacha sanctioning the construction of the Katsina History Bureau was less a radical and more a dutiful act; following in the path of the bureau already established in his adopted hometown of Kano, thus satisfying the call and responsibility of brotherhood duty by contributing to the perpetuation and celebration of the northern identity in neighbouring Katsina. Abacha understood the Katsina Bureau would leave a legacy, for him and for northern interests. Establishing a bureau whilst Head of State of the entire nation but only in a state that neighboured the town of his birth revealed and underscored Abacha's approach to history. We cannot take for granted that because Abacha was a northerner, his establishment of a northern bureau of history is a straightforward action of favoritism and thus dismiss the bureau's implementation on those grounds. However, Abacha consciously sought not to contribute to a *national* history – he could have commissioned the opening of several other bureaus nationwide,

⁵³⁹ Heritage of London Trust. <https://www.heritageoflondon.org/> [Accessed 3 September 2019].

even if he were to outsource this responsibility to other ministers. Instead, Abacha's was a fraternal and parochial gesture designed to elevate his clan at the *exclusion* of others despite having the power – and responsibility given Nigeria's tribalistic sensitivities, to facilitate this gesture more widely. In this regard, Abacha's actions being rooted in the concept of utilizing and harnessing power to specific ends, mirrors the same principle in which the suppression of history was used as a tool to aid governance. Here, the power that is utilized, which I address fully below, is used instead as a selective tool for a selective posterity in aid of consolidating and extending the reach of northern interests. In this way paradoxically, far from contradicting the regime's alleged anti-historical propensity, Abacha's implementation of the Katsina Cultural Bureau instead highlighted it.

The Abacha Post-structuralist View: On Foucauldian History and Power

According to a tenet of Foucault's theories on *power*, power is both a feature of governmental control, as well as an interactionary expression of governmental action operating within certain spheres of knowledge. Expressions of power – and all power, inherently – is defined by its *relationship* to those it subjects and interacts with. Foucault says:

Basically power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government. This word must be allowed the very broad meaning which it had in the sixteenth century. "Government" did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed.⁵⁴⁰

There is a distinction to Foucault's description: the power of states, conferred and appropriated by ruling individuals or groups, has a manifold nature. There is also a subtlety and deliberation to Foucault's particular use of the words 'might be directed'. Those words illustrate power is not just the thing that subjects or dominates as an end product; power is also a *preceding* force. These twinned multiplicities are highlighted in Foucault's delineation of the term power, whilst the suggestive 'might be directed'

⁵⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power." *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. 2nd edition. Ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) p.220.

further illustrates the conscious, kinetic aspect of power as a force with intent. Like electricity, Foucault's power is not just that final outcome which illuminates the filament in a bulb; power is also the directed voltage seeking a particular path to the illumination.

In interpreting Abacha's establishment of the Katsina State History and Culture Bureau, Foucault comes to mind. Power is designated, as Foucault stated, by 'the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed.' In this sense, power ultimately constitutes the relationship between government stakeholders (individuals or groups) and citizenry (civilian stakeholders). My explication of Foucauldian power as the 'interactionary expression of governmental action operating within certain spheres of knowledge,' helps us deconstruct Abacha's establishment of the Katsina Bureau and its relevance in addressing my thesis question. Some initial targeted questions aid us in this regard:

- 1) What 'spheres of knowledge' was Abacha operating within when establishing the Katsina Bureau?
- 2) What relationship was revealed in Abacha's action between himself and the citizenry?
- 3) What did the conduct of Abacha denote, in establishing the Katsina Bureau?

What 'spheres of knowledge' was Abacha operating within when establishing the Katsina Bureau?

In relation to the above enquiry on spheres of knowledge, the following words by Samaila Suleiman are useful:

The writings of Michel Foucault, particularly *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Order of Things* inspired a new shift in historiography in which the past is seen as socially constructed. History, viewed from the Foucauldian perspective, is a study in power relations. How history is written, archived, curated, and published is deeply implicated in structures of power in a given society. Thus, historical knowledge is controlled through mechanisms of power such as history departments, museums, archives, and the publishing industry. In other words, history is not only composed of discourses, but also embedded and situated in concrete institutions, which operate largely through rules of inclusion and exclusion.⁵⁴¹

⁵⁴¹ Samaila Suleiman, 'The Nigerian "History Machine"', in Michael J. Kelly and Arthur Rose, *Theories of History-History Read across the Humanities* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018) p.124.

A chief sphere of knowledge, especially when it comes to matters of state, is the historiographical paradigm. Within this paradigm, power resides in those who control 'the mechanisms of power' as Suleiman notes with given examples such as history departments, museums, archives etc. In Abacha's dictatorial Nigeria, as during other Nigerian military governments, those named institutions are under the surveillance and control of the state. The Katsina Historical Bureau, already explicitly situated within the historical paradigm as so-named, constitutes a combination of archive and museum in its function. In establishing this archival initiative, a devolved sphere of knowledge that Abacha is operating within here is the knowledge of heritage; further to be devolved as knowledge of *self*. In a multi-tribal, ethnically diverse and religion-divided Nigeria, the obvious rejoinder is: which self?

At the time of Abacha's rule, 30 states existed in the Nigerian federation. Abacha did not initiate or establish, as mentioned, any other Historical bureau in his five years in power. By obvious deduction in explaining his singular action, Abacha felt a connection with Katsina to the exclusion of all the other states in the federation – excepting Kano, his birthplace. However, a Kano State History and Culture Bureau had already been established as mentioned, in 1987, five years prior to Abacha's rule. Even in that action, Abacha's hand may be glimpsed. Would Babangida, with no direct personal connections to Kano, establish a History Bureau in the state that his Defence Minister and No. 2 hailed from and Abacha be ignorant of this plan? To the question why did Babangida not establish a bureau in his own hometown of Minna, Niger state, as opposed to one in Kano? The simple answer is that in Kano embodying the ancient Hausa-Fulani civilization and history and symbolising the spiritual home of the people of the north, Babangida's choice seemed a directed, canny and strategic one.

The Kingdoms of Daura and Katsina, neighbouring Kano and surrounded by city walls, was considered between the 17th and 18th century the commercial heart of Hausaland; it grew to become the largest of the seven city-states in Hausaland. The Daura and Katsina kingdoms, previously incorporated in Kaduna

state, metamorphosed on September 23rd 1987 into present day Katsina state. Today, Katsina evokes and remains a strategic state in the north of Nigeria, with its strong Islamic, royal, trade and commercial links. If the co-joined spheres of knowledge that Abacha is operating within is that of *heritage-self*, then the particular discourse of that heritage-self which the Katsina Historical Bureau exemplifies is the discourse of an Islamic-Hausa-Fulani culture. Suleiman tells us: 'In other words, history is not only composed of discourses, but also embedded and situated in concrete institutions, which operate largely through rules of inclusion and exclusion.'⁵⁴² Abacha in his symbolic establishment of a sole Historical Bureau in Katsina on the borderlands of his birthplace, operates by that principle of an exclusion which encompasses all southern, non-islamic states that populate the Nigerian federation. By the same principle, Abacha does not need to establish another Bureau in another Muslim state for the indices of inclusion to be fulfilled: in the knowledge a Kano Bureau had already been established, his sole implemented Katsina Bureau, in as much as it represents also an Islamic History depository alongside the Hausa-Fulani dispensation, serves as an inclusive symbol also for the entire Islamic north.

What relationship was revealed in Abacha's action between himself and the citizenry?

In the spheres of knowledge that he operates, the *self* Abacha justifies by excluding half of the non-Muslim population is the self of the nation Abacha embodies: Islamic, northern, Hausa-Fulani culture.

In Foucault's essay 'The Subject and Power' (Foucault 1983), Foucault argued that in order to study how humans are made subjects by ruling authorities, one must study 'power relations'⁵⁴³. This apparently simplistic statement in its deft subtlety, is again reminiscent of the twin multiplicities of power delineating into both existential force and after-effect. Here instead, the delineation speaks of cleavages

⁵⁴² Samaila Suleiman, 'The Nigerian "History Machine"', in Michael J. Kelly and Arthur Rose, *Theories of History-History Read across the Humanities* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018) p124-125.

⁵⁴³ Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power." In *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, edited by H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, 208-226. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) p220.

in relation to the varied *relationships* – or ‘power relations’ – that’s loosed and fashioned by the actions of the ruling authority or individual. In this case of the Katsina Bureau, in the deliberate exclusion of the southern, non-Islamic bloc, Abacha’s actions assume that of an overlord or protector of a shared heritage. This is the power-relationship between him and the *targeted* citizenry of that shared heritage he has deigned to promote. In one sense, it would not be remiss to state that in this power-relationship with the intended, targeted citizenry, Abacha in his establishment of the Katsina Bureau assumed the mantle of *Defender of the faith*. On the surface, *Defender of the faith* may appear a misnomer as the Bureau does not appear exclusively conceived as an Islamic-tinged affair, given also the Hausa-Fulani ethnographic dimensions. But 16th century Tudor England affords us a helpful insight. After King Henry VIII produced the theological treatise *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* (Defense of the Seven Sacraments, 1521), Pope Leo X granted Henry VIII on 11 October 1521 the title *Fidei Defensor* – ‘Defender of the Faith’ The conferred title was ostensibly for Henry’s upholding of the Catholic faith in the face of the Protestant Reformation and the radical ideas of Martin Luther. However, the title the Pope conferred on Henry comprised more than the Catholic faith: the title encompassed and confirmed the elevation of the culture and politics of Rome and the alliance system of like-minded allies. The Catholic faith was the inexorable glue that held all the other critical cultural pieces together. Similarly, Abacha assumed in his promotion of Katsina historical heritage the mantle of defender of an expanded creed; a faith-referenced creed which encompassed the culture, politics and history of a Hausa-Fulani society, held together by the Islamic glue bonding all Northern Nigerians irrespective of state origin.

My thesis question promulgates the absence of History in the Abacha dictatorship of Nigeria. The establishment of the Katsina Bureau of History by Abacha himself appears on the surface, as noted, a one-time contradiction of this. Conversely, to borrow the parlance of mathematical Logic, Abacha’s involvement in the Katsina Bureau could be considered proof by *counterexample* of his consciousness of the uses of History and his typical suppression of it thereof. For the atypical and counterintuitive action

goes some way in adding critical significance to that anomalous action, given Abacha's track record – *nil* - of overtly implementing things of historical import prior to and following his establishment of the Katsina Bureau.

What did the conduct of Abacha denote, in establishing the Katsina Bureau?

In an interview I conducted with the Nigerian Historian Toyin Falola (See **Appendix**), Falola argues that the case for Abacha consciously suppressing History may be overstated: Abacha was not 'intellectually-minded', Falola said. As relayed, this point has been echoed by several other commentators such as Soyinka who also memorably described Abacha as an 'intellectual pygmy',⁵⁴⁴ and by Amuwo who stated 'Abacha did little to improve himself intellectually, and had considerable disdain for anything that taxed the intellect.'⁵⁴⁵ All this might be true; Abacha was not a soldier-scholar by any means. But here again the counter-intuitive argument aids: Abacha clearly was disinclined to champion intellectual or History projects – and consequently, no evidence exists of him doing the contrary – *except* when it came to the issue of the Katsina Bureau. The uncommon action is potentially imbued with more significance than the habitual. Similarly, our realities are often shiftable constructs and not always based on experiential truths. Of the postmodern reality, Derrida had declared 'il n'y a pas de hors-texte',⁵⁴⁶ or *there is no outside text* to underline this shiftable reality that's dependent on interpretive context. Derrida expounds: 'This context is what makes sense of things, what crystallises meaningless puffs of unnoticed reality into the hard rock of the solid real.'⁵⁴⁷ So it was with the Katsina Bureau; Abacha's perceived anti-intellectualism did not preclude the reality of his establishing the Bureau outside his personal proclivities, nor did his intellectual proclivities and leanings negate his motivation and the contextual reality of why he established the Bureau in the first place and moved for its construction from the outset

⁵⁴⁴ Wole Soyinka, *The open sore of a continent: A personal narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) p.27.

⁵⁴⁵ Kunle Amuwo, *Nigeria During The Abacha Years (1993-1998) -Transition as Democratic Regression*, (Ibadan: Open Edition, 2013) p.23.

⁵⁴⁶ Jaques Derrida, *Of grammatology*, transl. G.C. Spivak, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2016) p.158.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

of his rule. In explicating on Foucault, Suleiman had stated that 'how history is written, archived, curated, and published is deeply implicated in structures of power in a given society'⁵⁴⁸. Abacha, despite his apparent anti-intellectualism, evidently grasped this truth in relation to the Katsina Bureau. He understood that the archiving, curating and publishing of Katsina history which the Bureau would undertake like the Kano Bureau before it, would help advance and strengthen the cultural lines of the northern narratives of power. He understood that the Bureau stood as both a bulwark and competing force against the southern narratives – for the modern chronicling of history had gained a head start in the southern bloc since independence. Vainglory may have been attached to Abacha's initiation of the Katsina project; but this is immaterial – if that were all it was, he would have raised a monument, had a statue erected or built a bridge (incidentally, he built a football stadium in Kano to this end instead?). Abacha was content with the Katsina Bureau being a conduit of power in lending his weight to advancing the northern bloc in the Nigerian culture wars. In my thesis title I speak of 'fragmented memory'. I have explained that to some extent this fragmentation encompasses the pre-colonial histories of Nigeria, scrambled anew – and unsuccessfully – through the process of Independence and beyond. I have explained that to an extent, the tribalistic blocs of Nigeria have fought to reposition their fragmented histories front and centre in a cultural war of *self*, rooted in the power dynamics of the new nation. I have established that this cultural war is a political act that takes place on the battleground of *Historical memory*. Steven Pierce's words elucidates further, stating 'this politicization of memory stems in part from individuals' ideology, but more significant is their positions in complex chains of patronage and clientage that subtend much of economic and political life.'⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁸ Suleiman, p.124.

⁵⁴⁹ Steven Pierce, 'Looking like a State: Colonialism and the Discourse of Corruption in Northern Nigeria' - *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Oct., 2006), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 887-914.

Pierce encapsulates precisely Abacha's position regarding the Katsina Bureau. In my mentioning previously that Abacha assumed the *Defender of the Faith* role for the northern demography, I explained that designation encompassed more than faith. That by being the glue that held in place all the other parts, the Islamic faith becomes also the irreplaceable and pre-eminent ingredient that elevated all the parts into the category of ideology. In mapping Pierce's words, we can conclude: Abacha's establishment of the Katsina Bureau can be summed up as the politicization of Northern Nigerian memory, which emanates partially – and crucially – from the ideological place of Abacha's Islamism, but which ultimately is also subservient to the levers and self-serving processes of the currency of power and its exchange: those 'complex chains of patronage and clientage.'

In relation to Islamism, Abacha in his introversion did not display a virulently or relentlessly Islamic exterior. Yet any doubting the pull of his faith – even if he wore it loosely – or his ideological investment in it, may be dispelled with our knowledge of the D-8 debacle which I covered in **Chapter V**. Abacha's brazen conceit here in tampering with the secularity of the Nigerian State betrayed the strength of his ideological leanings and demonstrated his willingness to engage then, albeit more explicitly, in a cultural war to the detriment of approximately 75 million of his citizens who at the time identified as Christian.

Kaduna: Arewa House Museum

Lord Lugard, the Governor-General of the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria liked Kaduna. He liked it so much that during WWII he sought to have the capital moved from Lagos to Kaduna. This idea received short shrift from the editor of the *The Times of Nigeria* James Bright-Davies who had written a series of articles about the cruel rule of the colonial authority. Bright-Davies wrote:

It threatens with ruin the progress and prosperity of the only town of importance in the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria and which ... by austerities and severities of a continuous series of measures and enactments which could only have been dictated by a rancorous *negrophobism* and which apart from German rule could only flourish

under the British crown Colony system of government or under a constituted or authorized autocracy.⁵⁵⁰

Bright-Davies, a Briton identifying with the Africans and opposed to colonialism, was prosecuted for seditious libel and sentenced to six months in prison. Harshly punished he was but his words certainly stymied the proposed migration of the capital from Lagos to Kaduna: Lagos was to remain the capital for another 75 years until the Babangida regime relocated the capital to Abuja. Still, of all Bright-Davies' so-called dissenting articles for the *The Times of Nigeria*, the theme never strayed far from the charge of racism against the colonial force and its imperial exploitation of the black masses. Lugard, as the government's main representative and exponent of imperialism epitomized this exploitative face of Empire and was thus similarly targeted and opposed by other key figures such as Nigerian nationalist Herbert Macaulay. Macaulay, being violently hostile to the administration and white racism, had inevitable run-ins with the courts. Lugard subsequently dismissed Macaulay as a 'convict'.⁵⁵¹

As a youth, I learned about Lugard's role in the administration and creation of Nigeria; this is inescapable history. But commentators such as Chief Charles Nwodo when they state 'we don't just need to learn about Lugard', is advocating not a revision of historical fact but a *balance* of narratives where the indigenous histories can emerge from the shadows and take national precedence. Or at the very least not be overshadowed by colonial history such that this becomes the only shape that the country must fit into.

Arewa House, built in the 1950s, is an important historical museum as well as a site of historic import being at the time the official residence of Sir Ahmadu Bello – descendant of jihadist Uthman Dan Fodio and member of the Sokoto Caliphate dynasty. Consequently, I was unsurprised to see a number of photographs of Sir Bello displayed. But I noted also the ubiquity of photos of Lugard here (and in Kaduna

⁵⁵⁰ Richard Bourne, *Nigeria: A new History of a Turbulent century*, (London: Zed Books, 2015,) p.28.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.* p.29.

generally). Lugard is viewed unfavourably in the south and even Lugard's bequeathing of Nigeria's naming to his wife Flora Shaw has generated historical resentment: for years, intermittently, citizens have agitated for a name change. In 2021, Gen. Buhari the Fulani aristocratic-born outgoing President of Nigeria, announced a renaming of Nigeria was something his administration will look into.⁵⁵² Lugard's pervasive images epitomises the contrasting perspectives between the so-called two Nigeria – north and south – that seem to be separated not only by culture and religion but also by differing interpretations of a shared history.

The House went through an intermediate stage in the 1970s as a research center after a committee known as the History of Northern Nigerian Committee was given the responsibility to produce a history of Northern Nigeria. The museum houses all manner of historical paraphernalia, from ancient books and manuscripts, to antiquated cultural artifacts, and of course photographs. Arewa House, in its capacity as an advocate and channel for Kaduna history, serves also as a centre for historical documentation and research for the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Thus, via its alliances, the museum acts as an academic hub for archival material related to the cultural history of Kaduna, as well as academic archival centre for the History Research Department of Ahmadu Bello University.

Arewa Museum House is unapologetic about its aims. Its mission statement reads: 'To serve as a Research based reference point for the preservation and generation of new knowledge that would be the catalyst for social, political, economic and transformation of Northern Nigeria in particular and the Nigerian nation in general.'⁵⁵³

The exacting wording of 'Northern Nigeria in particular and the Nigerian nation in general' delivers the tonal message that the tri-combination of tribe, faith and region that constitutes the *northerner*, takes

⁵⁵² Buhari's office recently clarified that the proposed Nigeria name change to United African Republic, did not originate with Buhari but with a group that submitted the proposal to Gen. Buhari – Dennis Erezi, 'United African Republic – Buhari not responsible for Nigeria's proposed name change - aide', 4 June 2021, *The Guardian*, <https://guardian.ng/news/united-african-republic-buhari-not-responsible-for-nigerias-proposed-name-change-aide/> [Accessed 1st July 2021].

⁵⁵³ 'Mission and Vision', ArewaHouse.ng, <https://arewahouse.ng/> [Accessed 22 March 2020].

precedence over whatever it means to be a Nigerian; *in particular* speaks to a well-defined peoples and identity, whilst *in general* alludes to a loose, downgraded indefinability. This recalls my earlier noted reference of Ikime labelling tribes in Nigeria as *nations* – an enduring self-identification which prevents reconciliation into a more integrated Nigeria.

Regarding stated 'Goals' also, Arewa House declares: 'Arewa House ... is primarily concerned with procuring, preserving, analyzing and discussing issues of national and international interest, particularly as they affect the development of Northern Nigeria.'⁵⁵⁴

The key words in the stated goals is the '*development* of Northern Nigeria.' Arewa House, established in 1975, represents an unambiguous celebration of northern life and history and symbolizes a strategic outpost of northern culture. To appreciate the thinking that links Arewa House and the Bureaus, let us revisit Sulaiman's declaration of concreated and institutional histories, operating physically and conceptually 'through rules of inclusion and exclusion.'⁵⁵⁵ We have seen how in its north-centric aspect, Arewa House certainly operates along exclusionary principles. But to understand to what extent – and grasp also the depth and impetus of this exclusionary principle – one has to look at how Arewa House was conceived. Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, Premier of Northern Nigeria, was in pre-independent Nigeria a spokesman for the north. Conservative in outlook, Bello was also unapologetic in his northernization and 'north first agenda', even after Nigeria gained Independence from Britain. Virulently tribalistic and anti-*Nigerian*, Bello gave an interview in 1964 to the BBC in which he expressed negative views about the Igbo people and disclosed to the white interviewer that he would employ said interviewer ahead of his so-called fellow Nigerian if that individual happened to be Igbo. Below is an extract of the interview transcript.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁴ 'Mission and Vision', Arewa House.

⁵⁵⁵ Suleiman, p124-125.

⁵⁵⁶ 'The 1960 Interview of Sir Ahmadu Bello: 'The Facts And Truths About Nigeria Unity' (n.d.) *Nairaland*, <https://www.nairaland.com/3676960/1960-interview-sir-ahmadu-bello> [Accessed 8 March 2021].

Interviewer: "One thing I have noticed while I have been here is that northerners seem to have the worst form of obsession about the Igbos, could you please explain that?"

Ahmadu Bello: "Well, the Igbos are mainly the type of people whose desire is to dominate everybody. If they go to the village or town, they want to monopolise everything in that area.

If you put them as a labourer, within a year they will try to emerge as the headman of that camp...and so on....

We are not alive to their responsibilities because you can see from our modernisation policy that in 1952 when I came here, there was less Northerners in our service. Then I fought. Now all important posts are being held by Northerners".

Interviewer: "Is this policy of filling all the posts in the north solely with northerners and no Nigerian a temporary or permanent one?"

Ahmadu Bello: "In actual fact, what it is, is a northerner first. Then if we can't get a northerner, then we take an expatriate like yourself (looking at the interviewer), if we can't then, we can employ another Nigerian, but on contract too. It is not going to be permanent as far as I can foresee, because it will be rather vengeance to see many of our boys are now turning from all institutions without having work to do. Am sure whatever government it will be, it will be rather embarrassing; it might even lead to black-sheep".

Interviewer: "It might damage the idea of all people in all regions of Nigeria being part citizens of one country."

Ahmadu Bello: "Well it might but...amm...we are known to our reasons...how many northerners are employed in the east and west? The answer is none. And if they are, they may be only ten labourers employed in the two regions."

On 15 January 1966, Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu an Igbo Nigerian Army officer assassinated Bello in the first coup of the Nigerian era. To some, the proverbial chickens had come home to roost given Bello's previous pronouncements on Igbos. What was clear was that ethnic rivalries could be a life and death matter in Nigeria and a cycle of retribution was unleashed in the following coup of that same year where Igbo officers were felled – and which stood as a bloody backdrop to the even bloodier civil war that followed the year after. Following the civil war, the then Gowon government sought a way to honour Bello and Arewa House as a museum site was conceived. As well as federal funds being made available, historical expertise was enlisted. Enter famed Historian of African Studies, Murray Last and archaeologist G.E. Connah. As Falola reports:

G.E Connah carried out archaeological work in the Kanem-Borno area. A historian, Murray Last, used Arabic sources to write an account of the Sokoto Caliphate. The enormity of the data in the North and further financial support from the regional government led to the establishment of the Arewa House, a centre for historical documentation...⁵⁵⁷

When Arewa Museum House opened in 1975, it did so as a site of history and History scholarship, in the honour of a great man and representative from the north. Some might argue that Arewa Museum House was thus conceived in the spirit of a fervent anti-nationalist, anti-Igbo and anti-Nigerian sentiment and that this is what the institution embodies. Lest we forget, the Gowon that authorised the Arewa project was the same Gowon, as covered in Chapter VI, who stands accused of initiating an anti-historical approach to governance following the civil war, which successive governments adopted and adhered to. Cue echoes of Abacha and the Katsina Bureau.

In touring the grounds and archives I noticed at once the higher level of organization of these protected archives compared to my experience elsewhere, as well as the discernible cool of the appropriately air-

⁵⁵⁷ Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010) p.230.

conditioned archive rooms. The offerings were diverse and the following is by no means exhaustive in addition to those presented in my Methodology Chapter/'Field work':

- Colonial Reports and Records
- Correspondences
- Treaties, Intelligence Reports
- 'Confidential' governmental Reports
- Assessment Reports on Political, Educational, Economic Development
- Agricultural archives and reports
- Chieftaincy and Religious Matters – Reports and files
- Boundaries and Land Matters, Personal Files, Reports of Constitutional Conferences, Laws and Administrative records from 1900-1957
- Reports of the Committees of Enquiries, Special Reports, Annual Reports, Government's White Papers, Audit and Financial Reports, etc.
- Economic and Commercial Development Blueprints; Agricultural and Industrial Development Policies; and, Constitutions and Laws
- Arabic manuscripts in form of Correspondences, Jurisprudences, History and Politics, Islamic Sciences, and Poetry.

It was apparent to me that Arewa Museum House, in contrast to other museums or the university archives I had visited along the way, was a well-funded, organized and earnest operation. As earlier noted, the main distinguishing factor between Arewa House or the History and Culture Bureaus established by the previous presidents Gowon, Babangida and Abacha, and the other institutions in which I have bemoaned the state of the archives for example, was certainly to a large extent funding, but the funding materialised as a result of an initial *intention*. And that intention was personal and subsequently had 'governmental' backing and came in the form of championing one history to the exclusion of another; thus corroborating my argument that government's use of history, implemented as a tool of control and partiality, may still constitute an anti-historical gesture even where it might ostensibly appear the reverse as in this case of Arewa House and the History and Culture Bureaus.

Fig.23: *Arewa House Archives: Boxed, labeled, air-conditioned*



This chapter documented the commencement of my fieldwork in Gen Abacha's adopted hometown of Kano. In Kano, I accessed the B.A., Masters and PhD History theses archives records (for the Abacha years 1993 -1998) of the pre-eminent university in the north, the Bayero University. The first definitive conclusion of this chapter was the fact that the Bayero History department sits within the Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies. Thus, history was situated within a religious-tinged remit and presumed the lens through which the discipline was perceived and refracted within that institution. In relation to findings, there was little deviation to previous observations of a narrow engagement of the discipline within the PEAR perimeters – and this proved true also of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University, Katsina, in exploring the admittedly contracted number of theses that was made available to me here.

The chief conclusion of this chapter was the discovery that the key subject matter regarding the history focus of the theses, was almost exclusively restricted to the afore-mentioned areas: Personages Agrarian, Economic, Religion. Thus, the histories investigated local non-controversial issues that focused on Islamic History, the northern Royal Houses and famous sons of the areas – with an almost total absence of political issues that may be considered divisive. In the theses examined, the chapter also concluded that these concurrent links were wholly severed to the point that the chronicling of histories

assumed such a non-disruptive, detached element that no links between past and the present were explored or proffered, even when said thesis focused on a period that included Abacha's tenure. Two stand-out theses discovered at UMY despite adhering somewhat to the Religious and Personage aspects of my PEAR categorization, were still distinguished in their narratives comprising women histories for their theoretical application and informed engagement of normally suppressed histories. Finally, in exploring the Katsina State History and Cultural Bureau, we touched first on 'spheres of knowledge' and deliberated on the inclusion/exclusion power that may be so deployed; in the case of the Katsina State History And Cultural Bureau, Abacha acted as an exclusionary agent in the cause to advance the cultural lines of the northern narratives of influence and thus, power.

Both Katsina, and Arewa House Museum, Kaduna, we ascertained were similarly established and linked by a desire to propagate the history of the region and the peoples, an ideal explicitly expressed by Sir Ahmadu Bello in 1964 – with his 'northern agenda' and 'northerners first' activism – and to whose spirit and memory Arewa House was conceived and arguably operates from.

Chapter IX

Perusing a Southern Archive: The Abuja Gateway

Fig.24: *University of Abuja*



Nigeria's made-to-measure capital, Abuja was founded during the boom years of the 1970s. After the divisive Biafran War, the decision was made to move the capital from Lagos to the ethnically neutral centre of the country. Clean, quiet and with a good electricity supply, sometimes Abuja hardly feels like Nigeria at all. There's not much to do, but it's a good place to catch your breath - ***The Lonely Planet***

The University of Abuja, founded in 1988, seemed the most logical university for me to visit after my exploration of the northern Universities. Abuja, named as the new federal capital in 1991, was ostensibly created to be an ethnically neutral space in Nigeria; a space which would boast a more balanced political outlook than the northern or southern states steeped ostensibly in their regional, tribalistic politics.

This aspiration for neutrality was further reflected in Abuja's actual positioning. In occupying almost precisely a central geographical spot in the country, Abuja being neither in the northern or southern realms would seem both an idealistic and geographical improvement on the former capital, Lagos. Contrastingly, coastal city Lagos was a heavily Yoruba-influenced state, bordered to the north and east by another large Yoruba state in Ogun state.

Consequently, Abuja was both physically and philosophically meant to be a gateway to both the north and south; a central hub and bridge where the best of both extremities could meet and be moderated. In other words, the Abuja capital potentially represented an encapsulation of that elusive *Nigerianness* - a space with no pronounced ethnic or religious connotations which represented and belonged to all. I considered the possibility that the history scholarship Abuja University produced might indeed align along this stated neutrality and constitute a scholarship less parochial than I had encountered so far in the north.

Just prior to perusing the archives, the Department of History and Diplomatic Services at Abuja University informed me they could only meet my requests partially – from the 5 years of the founding to 1993, the theses would be unavailable. Again, I noted how much this issue had attended my field trip at the northern universities and recalled Carolyn Steedman's observation about the chaotic realities of the archival process in general:

But in actual Archives, though the bundles may be mountainous, there isn't in fact, very much there. [...] The Archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and just ended up there.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁸ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust*, p.68.

In relation to the theses I was provided with, I was also helpfully furnished with the students' matriculation numbers and matriculation slips that detailed the students' ethnicity and state of origin. This information proved valuable.

In the northern universities as reported, I had not been formally privy to information regarding the students' ethnic, tribal or state origins. However, as mentioned, using northern indigene Professor Kankara's knowledge of local names and their origins, in tandem with the preponderance of northerners to self-identify with islamized given names, I was able to deduce that the majority of students hailed from the northern region and from ostensibly Muslim households. This meant I could take this cultural fact into consideration in reaching conclusions concerning thesis choices of these mostly monolithic student cohorts in my selected northern universities.

As detailed in my Methodology Chapter/'Field work' the percentage of northerners in the submissions for history theses made available to me in Abuja averaged at 17% of submissions. We cannot draw conclusively from this figure given the samplings were incomplete – and also given that the sampling would vary according to other unknown variables. However, we might conclude from the sampling that the Abuja student body is non-monolithic, which reflects the view that Abuja represents a more diversified gateway of the country than the monolithic north. To re-iterate, though the 17% figure appears small in relation to conceiving of Nigeria as an evenly split north/south duality, this is a somewhat misleading demarcation given the ethno-tribal split of the south sub-divides that region more readily than the monolithic homogenous Muslim north. Hence, the south comprises diverse tribes in the majority Yoruba and Igbo states, as well as other minor tribes with their own principalities. Consequently, in sub-dividing the southern region as south (Yorubas), west (Yorubas, Igbos and other minor tribes such as Uhrobos, Itsekiris etc.) and the east (Igbo, Ijaw, Ibibio) I was able to arrive at the approximately representational figure of 25% for the four hypothetical regions inclusive of the north.

In tabling my findings, I thus designated with an ‘N’ the student matriculation records related to those of northern origin, and an ‘S’ related to students as explained, who originated from south, east and western Nigeria. In light of not being privy to the number of northerners that enlist to study history annually in comparison to other disciplines,⁵⁵⁹ it was near impossible to hazard at the differential in my calculations; however, the initial 17% figure I was able to arrive at with the data given was not significantly far off the 25% figure I arrived at as a representational model figure.

The non-monolithic student intake in Abuja University, in comparison with the near monolithic intake of the northern sampling, means the concept of cultural-homogeneity pressures that applied to the northern sampling may be discounted when reaching our conclusions given the multi-ethnic, multi-religious enrolment of students from all regions of the country in the Abuja sampling.

Table XV: BA 1994 Session Abuja University

(S) = Of Southern origin and ethnicity (N) = Of northern origin and ethnicity

NAMES	*MAT NO:	APPROVED PROJECT TOPIC
Anene Cynthia Agatha Nwaukpo	9014002 (S)	<i>Women in National Development: A Case Study of Better Life Programme in Gwagwalada Area Council</i>
Ali Abdulazeez Balaraba	99014003 (N)	<i>A Survey of the Socio-Economic Activities in Abaji during the Colonial Period</i>
Egbe Innocent Icha	9014010 (S)	<i>Urbanization in the Federal Capital Territory: A Case Study of Gwagwalada Town</i>
Yakubu Mohammad Sani	99014010 (N)	<i>A History of Tin mining in Toro Area (C. 1852 to 1960)</i>
Okehie Leonard	9114010	<i>A Study of Communal Crises in Jema’a Emirate of Southern</i>

⁵⁵⁹ I approached the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics in Abuja with this and other enquiries over a year ago but to date that data is still pending.

Chuwkuemeka	(S)	<i>Kaduna State in the Last Quarter of the 20th Century</i>
Onuba Ukum Aka	9114011 (S)	<i>Women in Agriculture: A Case Study of Kuje Area Council of FCT Abuja</i>

A perusal of the 1994-95 B.A titles and theses displayed a similarity to that observed in the northern universities. As previously observed, there was evidently a narrow engagement in relation to political subject matter with a preponderance of local history enquiries. Just how narrow the engagement was is evident in two theses in the 94-95 year group basing their study on the *Gwagwalada* town/area council. It is not that Gwagwalada is unremarkable or underserving of study; Gwagwalada is a large municipality headquartered in Abuja with a population of roughly 200,000 people. I cannot dismiss without evidence the integrity of the student researchers in their choices – however, I am aware, as discussed with Professor Kankara that the ‘approved project’ for research is something that the supervising professor has a strong input in. Thus, if students of the 1994-95 session were steered towards Gwagwalada enquiries perhaps because it was a supervisor’s specialty, this might explain why in a modest intake of five students for that year, lightning appeared to strike twice regarding Gwagwalada town.⁵⁶⁰

As in the northern archives, we see here too the requisite royal house thesis: *A Study of Communal Crises in Jema’a Emirate of Southern Kaduna State in the Last Quarter of the 20th Century* (Okehie Leonard Chuwkuemeka, 1994, B.A.). It can be disingenuous or even perilous perhaps to read into research choices a correlation between the choices and the ethnicity or cultural and religious leanings of the researcher. We discovered this was unavoidably part of the landscape in relation to the northern universities and we determined that in the proclivity of local studies chosen as research choices, the researcher’s likely origin and religion, amongst other influences, were contributing factors to their

⁵⁶⁰ Albeit with differing case studies at the centre of the studies.

choices – especially regarding royal houses where both Islam and a particular region or locale was intertwined and celebrated.

However, in the example of the *'Jema'a Emirate'* thesis, this was not the case; the researcher is an Igbo southerner. So, pushing aside the 'identity politics' quotient of the northern research choices, we might in Abuja allow for the fact that this was an independent research choice from someone simply with an interest in the Southern Kaduna Emirate. Might there still be other deciding factors? Again, professorial inclination and expertise matters.

Professorial expertise might have had its say in the choices of the Abuja B.A theses. This still might be just one of *other* defining factors. Looking past the Gwagwalada theses, we notice amongst the full set of submissions, various matches to the prescriptive scaffolding of the northern samples. In other words, there is the **Agrarian** theses - *Women in Agriculture: A Case Study of Kuje Area Council of FCT Abuja*; the **Economic** one - *A History of Tin mining in Toro Area (C. 1852 to 1960)* and *A Survey of the Socio-Economic Activities in Abaji during the Colonial Period*. With the *'Better Life Programme in Gwagwalada'* also coming under the economic label and the *'Communal Crises in Jema'a Emirate of Southern Kaduna State'* study overlapping both **Religious** (Islamic) and **Personages** (Royal House) interests, even in this small sample those prescriptive labels of Personages, Economic, Agrarian and Religion have been well applied. These theses do cover *histories*; however, these histories in their boxed-in rigidity and sociological preoccupation are really *sociological* studies. This distinction is key as when History was removed from the curriculum in 1986, it was *Sociology Studies* that replaced it. Sociology is a vast terrain with overlapping historical import. But in its simplest rendition, sociology may present and undertake a straightforward chronicling and commentary that may forgo the controversial residue often attendant to the history discipline. In my perusal of the Abuja theses, I found this to be true. So: if the Abuja cohort of '94, more diverse than the northern universities from both an ethnic and religion perspective, displays in its theses pronounced similarity with the northern set, then we can intelligently reach

comparable conclusions. We may thus far conclude that the B.A. theses of the Abuja '94 cohort inhabited a sociological space devoid of purist historical engagement. This substantiates my thesis proposition that an anti-historical space existed which both encouraged and impacted sites of history to comply accordingly. Again, as a War Studies undergraduate, I recalled the words of one Professor Paskins, delivered in the form of a near-weekly mantra: when the guns go off, there lies your historical junctions. Paskins' mantra was both a metaphorical and literal exhortation to underline how the peace is often vexed, challenged and interrupted by the unpredictable flow that is historical narrative. In all the B.A. theses I read of the '94 cohort, none were punctuated with the sound of angry guns.

Table XVI: BA 1997 cohort, Abuja University

(S) = Of Southern origin and ethnicity (N) = Of northern origin and ethnicity

NAMES	*MAT NO:	APPROVED PROJECT TOPIC
Ankyaa Terzua	94214002 (N)	<i>Mass Transport in Nigeria: A Case study of Abuja Urban Transport Company (AuMTCO) 1989-97</i>
Apollo Chindo Pwafiyi	94214003 (S)	<i>The Growth and Development of Kutunku in the Gwagwalada Area Council of the FCT up to 1975</i>
Anyanwu Elias	920405007 (S)	<i>A History of Development of Nyaya up to 1975</i>
Omaji Paul Theobanus	94214007 (S)	<i>Evolution of Traditional Rulership in the FCT: A Case Study of Kwali</i>
Suberu Jimoh	94214009 (S)	<i>The Development and Growth of Health services in the FCT: A Case Study of Kuje and Abaji Area Council</i>
Ekechukw Alex Ezeakolam Victor	921005009	<i>The Evolution and Development of the Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON) 1971 – 1997</i>

	(S)	
Peter O. Emeka	921005010 (S)	<i>The Evolution and Development of the Nigerian Aviation Industry 1925 – 1997</i>
Unwerhiagwe Ambrose	94214011 (S)	<i>Changing Population trends in the Federal Capital territory 1985 – 1995</i>
Yinusa Amina	94214012 (N)	<i>A History of Zuba Settlement Pattern in the Federal Capital Territory</i>
Okere, Robert Okechukwu	921005017 (S)	<i>A History of First Bank of Nigeria Plc (1894 – 1997)</i>
Clifford Akubudike Okpe	921005018 (S)	<i>The Egba Dahomey Wars of 1851 to 1864 and the Peopling of Badagry, Lagos State</i>
Chinedu Eneude	Not recorded	<i>Crisis and conflict in the Middle Benue: A Case Study of the Tiv and Junkun 1960 – 1966</i>
Ukoh, Justina Joseph	920405021 (S)	<i>Traditional Socio-Political System in the FCT: A Study of the Gbagyi (Gwari) Political System from the Pre-Colonial Period to the Present</i>
Mato Emmanuel Anyor	Not recorded (S)	<i>The Evolution of the Federal Capital Territory Prisons Command</i>
Osi Braimoh Agioboh	9210005002 (S)	<i>The Socio Economic and Political Development of Weppa-Wanno Community from the Pre-Colonial Period to 1992</i>

There appeared some angry guns in two of the 1997 entries.

These were: *The Egba-Dahomey Wars of 1851 to 1864 and the Peopling of Badagry, Lagos State* (Clifford Akubudike Okpe) and *Crisis and conflict in the Middle Benue: A Case Study of the Tiv and Junkun 1960 – 1966* (Samuel Chinedu Eneude).

The Egba-Dahomey wars, fought between neighbouring kingdoms of Egba and Dahomey (now part of the Republic of Benin), was in effect part of the Yoruba civil wars. These entries were remarkable in as much as they had belied the sociological format of previous entries as discussed, and enlisted a part purist historical narrative steeped in that most demarcating of historical junctures: bloodshed. The war was a war not of conquest per se but a war fought to keep Yorubaland intact, following the Dahomeans rebellious action in seeking to secede from the Yoruba Empire in an attempted break for independence. In other words, Clifford Okpe's theses was presenting a twin issue – civil war and secession – that both remained arguably the fundamental challenges to the modern Nigerian nation and had been the basis for the post-war anti-historical backlash that ensued.

In a comparison between the Abuja and northern archives, I recalled that amongst the northern samples I did not encounter much even in the way of Dan Fodio's exploits, a Muslim conquering war hero – such was the conditioning away, it appeared from the so-called angry guns. Okpe's entry did suggest a certain welcome deviation from the previously constricted PEAR categories. However, in this entry I found no comparison, mention or exploration into the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War of which the Yoruba Civil Wars were a not too distant precedent. The temptation to dismiss this omission as the lapse of an inexperienced undergraduate researcher holds some merit. However, the omission is the more glaring when we consider this parallel between those wars of 1851-1864 and the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. During the Nigeria-Biafra Civil war, Britain, the erstwhile colonial power, meddled by secretly arming and aiding the Nigerians against the Biafrans in clandestine support of the Nigerians' mantra to 'keep Nigeria one.' The British did precisely the same thing in the Egba-Dahomey Wars. British support of Egba against the Dahomeans with strategic war training and the supply of ammunition was key to the Egba victory in keeping Yorubaland intact – which benefitted the British who had been conducting slave-trade business with a centralized Yorubaland command. The British were keen to maintain the status quo. The researcher covered the British involvement in Egba in his thesis and so the lack of further exploration is

instructive whether it be an oversight or intentional. If an oversight, the paucity of knowledge and scholarship and professorial guidance and supervision is plain. If the omission is deliberate, then that speaks for itself.

The other history - *Crisis and conflict in the Middle Benue: A Case Study of the Tiv and Junkun 1960-1966* (Samuel Chinedu Eneude) – in theory alongside the Egba-Dahomey thesis also represents an anomaly in relation to the usual offerings. The Tiv people originate from Congo and the Cameroon mountains; the Junkun are a tribe that descend from Kwararafa, the Hausa name given to a confederacy of north-central states located around the Benue River. Both Junkun and Tiv life centered around a pagan spirituality. The source of the Tiv-Junkun animosity, which Eneude's thesis covers, is due to the fact that as with the Igbos, the British found the Tiv's non-centralised monarch-less existence difficult to subjugate in line with British indirect rule policy which utilized local kings and chiefs. Thus, the British colonial officers sought to put the Tiv under administrative control of the Jukun, whom the British found more amenable. It is that gesture of divide and rule, which the Tiv resisted fiercely, that still accounts for the conflict between the Tiv and Jukun that festers to date. The researcher covers this aspect well – but as with Okpe's thesis, Eneude omits to reference the seemingly inescapable British-Igbo parallel. During the Fulani wars of conquest of the 19th century, the Fulani mauraunders subjugated the Jukun into accepting Islamic culture. Not so much the Tiv, which further accounts for the animosity between the Tiv and Jukun. The Tiv instead largely retained their traditional pagan practices and when they converted to other religions, they mostly favoured Christianity. A large chunk of Eneude's writing is dedicated to this fact and to the troubles the Tiv weathered over the years from the dominant northern Fulanis who historically referred to the Tiv as 'munshi', translated loosely as 'wild ones' or 'savage.' We recall also the Igbos were referred to as 'savages' in the build-up and during the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. Again, Eneude entertains no such references to the Igbos. The Igbo reference omission is the more conspicuous given the likeliest ethnicity of Chinedu Eneude. Eneude is an Igbo surname and Chinedu is a masculine

Igbo first name meaning ‘God leads.’ Eneude would be versed in Igbo customs and traditions; he would know of and have opinions on Biafra. Were the openings to Igbo comparisons willfully unheeded in order to avoid even a cursory exploration into Biafra? After all, this thesis was produced from a 1997 cohort; the Abacha regime’s penultimate year where Abacha’s *Treason and Treasonable Offences Decree No.29*, which expressly forbade discussion and debate on Biafra, was in effect. A final observation of Eneude’s thesis: his case study covered the years 1960-66. As stated, the animosity between the Tiv and Junkun continues to the present. Whilst researchers must pare enquiries within workable perimeters, I wondered if the study’s 1966 cut-off constituted a convenient finale, uncomplicated by needing to examine Tiv-Junkun hostility following commencement of the 1967 Civil War.

Table XVII: B.A. 1998 Session Abuja University

(S) = Of Southern origin and ethnicity (N) = Of northern origin and ethnicity

NAMES	*MAT NO:	APPROVED PROJECT TOPIC
Orazu Kamao Ify	Not recorded	<i>Traditional Institution in Igboland: A Case Study of the nnewi System in the Pre-Colonial Period</i>
Umar A. Muhammad	Not recorded (N)	<i>Agidi of Utako: A Biographical Sketch of an Anti-Colonial Leader in Okene circa 1809 -1916</i>
Abi Susan Se’ember	98213020 (S)	<i>A Study of Perennial Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria: A Case Study of Tiv-Jukun Crises in the Last Quarter of the Twentieth Century to date</i>
Young-Harry Jene	98213037 (S)	<i>The Socio-Economic History of the Ouim People of Abia State 1800 – 1960</i>
Ojie James Mathias	98213050 (S)	<i>Communal Conflict in Northern Cross River State, Causes, Impact and implications on Inter-Group relations</i>

In the 1998 submissions above, a Tiv-Jukun study makes a return as a case study of 'perennial ethnic conflict' in Nigeria. The re-appearance of a Tiv-Jukun enquiry here, by Abi Susan Se'ember, is as likely due to both the regularity of their skirmishes and the adversaries' geographical locality; Abuja is central and the Tiv-Jukun vicinity is not far from the Nigerian capital. This study by Abi Se'ember resembles the previously mentioned study in its absence of possible Igbo references or citations. Also of note once again is the study's timeline: 'the last quarter of the Twentieth Century to date.' Written on the eve of the millennium, the timeline of Se'ember's thesis commences in 1975 – five years after the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War ended, a new post-war government in place with Gen. Gowon having been ousted by coup d'état. The Ojie Mathias study – *Communal Conflict in Northern Cross River State, Causes, Impact and implications on Inter-Group relations* - is of interest as it sits also outside my initial PEAR designation in its covering of a conflict within a subsociety. These named studies from the 98 cohort – and the Tiv Jukun and Egba-Dahomey ones from the previous year – are outliers in the sense that they introduce a broader possibility of coverage, whilst focusing on conflict either between neighbouring tribes or within homogenous groups. Still, the studies resemble sociological type enquiries – and of the references made to explain the breakdown of relations between groups, the issue was often threaded back to the scene of colonialism – as shown with the Egba-Dahomey wars – without much acknowledgement of the political actions, consequences and history of the post-independent nation.

In relation to the other three outstanding theses of the 98-99 cohort above, they followed a clear PEAR format: *Traditional Institution in Igboland: A Case Study of the nnewi System in the Pre-Colonial Period (P)*;⁵⁶¹ *Agidi of Utako: A Biographical Sketch of an Anti-Colonial Leader in Okene circa 1809 -1916 (P)*; *The Socio-Economic History of the Ouim People of Abia State 1800 – 1960 (E)*.

⁵⁶¹ Nnewi refers to an ancient Igbo independent kingdom in Nnewi, Igboland. The Nnewi system thus constitutes a 'Royal House' designation and consequently satisfies our Personages (P) designation. The kingdom existed independently from the 15th century until 1904 when it was subsumed by British colonial administration.

Table XVIII: MA 1998/1999 Session Abuja University

(S) = Of Southern origin and ethnicity (N) = Of northern origin and ethnicity

NAMES	*MAT NO:	APPROVED PROJECT TOPIC
Ume May Olachi	95214003 (S)	<i>The Evolution of the Federal Capital Abuja (1980 – 1997)</i>
Oladipo Johnson Kayode	95214002 (S)	<i>The Rise and Growth of Christian Missionary Outreaches in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM)</i>
Hope A.I. Brodie- Mends	95214004 (S)	<i>The Igbo in the Federal Capital Territory 1978 -98: A Socioeconomic and Political Study</i>
Suleiman Abdullahi Ladi	95214005 (N)	<i>A History of the Egbira of the Federal Capital Territory: A Case study of Abaji, Abuja C. 1800 – the Present</i>
Obinna Shedrack Dike	92105006 (S)	<i>The Evolution of Central Bank of Nigeria (A Case study of Abuja Branch)</i>

The 1998-99 Masters (M.A.) submissions were more straightforward in their PEAR orientation. Regarding the first thesis by Ume Olachi - *The Evolution of the Federal Capital Abuja (1980 – 1997)* – the ‘evolution’ it focuses on is mostly an overlapping transformation from agrarian-economic following the signposting of Abuja as a future capital by of Gen. Murtala Mohammed. The second by Oladipo Johnson Kayode - *The Rise and Growth of Christian Missionary Outreaches in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM)* - focused wholly on religion and the development of Christian faith in Nigeria; the third by Hope A.I. Brodie-Mends – *The Igbo in the Federal Capital Territory 1978-98: A Socioeconomic and Political Study* – is mostly an economic study that centres on Igbo migration from the East to become chief traders in the newly established capital, as they had been in Lagos for years. Of the *political* component of Brodie-Mends’ title, whilst there is deliberation in her thesis on increased migration of the Igbos to Abuja following the civil war, a deeper exploration into the war and the Igbos

desire to start afresh on neutral ground is not forthcoming. The timeline again might prove a significant lever. 1978 is eight years after the war, with the immediacy of the war receded; beyond the cursory background mention of the war, Brodie-Mends focuses on the expertise and skill of the Igbo and validates their reputation for sniffing out entrepreneurial opportunities as they profitably colonise corners of Abuja with all manner of enterprise from bookshops and market stalls to eating houses and hotels. That is as political as it gets.

Suleiman Abdullahi Ladi's *A History of the Epira of the Federal Capital Territory: A Case study of Abaji, Abuja C. 1800 – the Present* centres on the migrations of the Epira clan and their economic welfare in Abuja. Whilst Ladi's timeline is extensive, the focus is on the changing shape of the Epira's economic welfare over the years rather than the political impact of concomitant affairs at the time being considered. Ladi's thesis is notable in establishing that many of the customs and traditions of the Epira mirror the Junkun, the Epira people's distant ancestors.

Finally, Obinna Shedrack Dike's thesis - *The Evolution of Central Bank of Nigeria (A Case study of Abuja Branch)* – presents the Abuja Branch as its bedrock for an economic case study of the nation's fiscal performance and regulatory development, as it charts a history of the Central bank from its implementation via the CBN Act of 1958, through various amendments over the years. I found Dike's thesis to be amongst the most explicitly economic-themed studies I encountered in the History Department archives; engagement of a dense vernacular of finance lingo was required to navigate its narrative – whereas other economic-centered studies I had encountered applied a lighter touch and deigned, at times, to veer into a cultural history landscape – albeit a niche one – which took in more of the sights. Dike's hyper-narrowed focus, entrenched in financial jargon, fit ever more snugly my charge of the scholarship and histories produced by the Nigerian universities History departments being niche to the point of arcane and devoid of a decisive, identifiable historical root due to an absence of contention or *frisson* in the discourse.

It was noticeable also that of all those approved 98-99 Masters (M.A) submissions, all but one featured Abuja as the main site of the case study. Even the Oladipo Johnson Kayode's thesis on Christian missionaries, which set to portray outreach programs throughout Nigeria, focused disproportionately on the Federal Capital. Again, the theses analysed here display a remarkable narrowness and substantiates my charge that the broad, disordered offerings that a less constrained faculty would produce is not in evidence here.

Table XIX: B.A 2001 Session Abuja University

(S) = Of Southern origin and ethnicity (N) = Of northern origin and ethnicity

NAMES	*MAT NO:	APPROVED PROJECT TOPIC
1. Iheanacho C M Henry	98213002 (S)	<i>Nigeria's Relation with the Frontline State and their impact on Namibia's Independence</i>
2. Kalu Mba Sand N.N.	98213003 (S)	<i>Conflict Management and Development in Nigeria 1986 – 2000</i>
3. Okeke Tochukwu Innocent	98213005 (S)	<i>The Rise and Decline of Agriculture in the Nigerian Economy, 1900 – 1980</i>
4. Bawa Bawari Aishatu	98213008 (N)	<i>The Life and Times of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida</i>
5. Malaki Joseph	98213009 (N)	<i>Local Government and Rural Development in the FCT Abuja: A Case Study of Gwagwalada Area Council (C 1976 – 2000 AD)</i>
6. Jokpeyibo Igbo Andy	98213010 (S)	<i>Ugheli Clan of Delta State: Its Traditions of Origin and Development up to the Present</i>
7. Obieny Ogechukwu	98213011 (S)	<i>A Preliminary Survey of the Nigerian Foreign Policy under General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida 1985 – 1993</i>
8. Haruna Eleojo Ruth	98213012 (N)	<i>The Impact of Christian Missionary Activities in Igala Land: A Case Study Qua Ibom Mission Between 1950 to 2002</i>
9. Phil Ebosie Chibogu Stephanie	98213014 (S)	<i>Onitsha: A Preliminary Examination of its Tradition of Origin, Migration and Settlement Pattern, from the Uath to the 19th Century</i>
10. Uche Adaobi Udoamaka	98213015 (S)	<i>Landownership and Communal Clashes in Isuochi C1895 to the Present</i>
11. Constance Erieshe Samuel	98213019 (S)	<i>Ibilo Market, its History and Development from its foundation (Origin) to the Present</i>

12. Suleiman Adamu Gombe	98213020 (N)	<i>A History of Gombe Emirate from 1804 – 1960</i>
13. Chris David Ajayi	98213022 (S)	<i>The Evolution of Markets in Igarra</i>
14. Akogwu Daniel Razack	98213023 (S)	<i>The impact of Christian Missionaries' Activities in Akpanya District of Igalamela LGA Kogi State</i>
15. Oloye Andabafa Benedict	98213024 (S)	<i>Issues in Nigeria Federalism: A Study of the Quest for Resource Control by the Peoples of the Niger Delta</i>
16. Mbah I. Ifeanichukwu	98213025 (S)	<i>The Socioeconomic Activities in Asaba Area c.1800 – 1902</i>
17. Moses Charity	98213027 (S)	<i>The Socio Political and Economic History of Ochekwu People in Idomaland 1800 – 1960</i>
18. Blessing N. Ede	98213028 (S)	<i>Igbos and Transportation Business in Northern Nigeria: A Case Study of FCT Abuja from 1976 – 2002</i>
19. Agbatar Mimi Mercy	98213031 (S)	<i>Female Migrant Labour in Igede Land</i>
20. Mary Ojowugwu Acholo	98213032 (S)	<i>Communal Conflict in Kaduna State</i>
21. Adejoh Unenwojo O.	98213033 (S)	<i>A History of Colonial Dominance and Activities in Idah between 1896 – 1930</i>
22. Abalaka Atadoga Daniel	98213035 (S)	<i>The Socio-Political Activities in Igala Area C.1800 to 1950 (With particular reference to Idah as citadels of Civilization and Culture)</i>
23. Adode Mary Onyum	98213036 (N)	<i>Intergroup Relations between Awo People of Ankpa in Igala Land and Adoka People of Idoma Land</i>
24. Okedu Ernest Chikodinaka	98213038	<i>Communal Conflict in Anambra State: A Case Study of Aguleri and Umuleri Community Conflict in Anambra East Local Government Area, Anambra State</i>
25. Ojo Joseph Temitope	98213040 (S)	<i>Socio-economic History of Imesi-Ile Area (C. 1800 – 19600)</i>
26. Oscar Z. Stephen	98213042 (S)	<i>The Evolution of Sudan United Mission into the Church of Christian Nigeria – C.O.C.I.N 1904 – 2000</i>
27. Anthony Samuel	98213043 (S)	<i>Kaduna State Government Policy on Education – 1993 – 1996</i>
28. Ihekoronye Emeka Vintan	98213044 (S)	<i>Urbanization and Transport Development in the Federal Capital Territory: A Case Study of Abuja Union Urban Mass Transit</i>
29. Salihu Fatima Binta	98213045 (N)	<i>Ethno Cultural Relation of the Niger Benue Confluence Area: A Case Study of Igbrra and Igala 18th and 19th Century</i>

30. Nwodo Fidelis Emeka	98213046	<i>The Nkwor Deity among the Nsukka People: Historical Perspective</i>
31. Onyeaghala Adaobi Chinenye	98213047 (S)	<i>A History of the Tourism Industry in Nigeria from 1960 to the Present Day: A case Study of Agbor</i>
32. Odumegwu Ernest Curtis	98213048 (S)	<i>Some Aspects of Delta State History: A Case Study of Agbor</i>
33. Balogun Mudashru	98213053 (S)	<i>The History of Akoko People of Ondo State Before the Advent of Colonialism</i>
34. Oche Alexander Abdun	98213055 (S)	<i>A Socioeconomic Development of Etutekpe and Okpo in Olamboro LGA of Kogi State from 1900 – 1960 A.D</i>
35. Asimegbe Usmar Omozuapo	98213056 (S)	<i>The Impact of the 14th Century Nupe Incursion of Eisakoland of Edo State (c.1840 – 1900)</i>
36. Emmanuel O. Alamiyo	982132965 (S)	<i>The History of Nigerian Police Force and Crime Control: A Case Study of FCT Abuja (1988 – 1999)</i>

The B.A 2001 cohort is notable on two grounds. Firstly, the comparably large intake suggests that post-Abacha and military rule, the attendant constrictions of studying history appeared to ease sufficiently in the minds of candidates? Secondly, regarding submitted theses, some titles demonstrated a shift towards a broadening of the subject matter to align more closely with an historical framework of enquiry, as opposed to prior, narrow sociological commentary. This hints at a loosening of coercive influence of the usual anti-historical climate: from increased intake numbers, to the thesis selection process, to student-professor relations and academic experience.

The titles in question are Bawa Bawari Aishatu's *The Life and Times of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida* and Obieny Ogechukwu's *A Preliminary Survey of the Nigerian Foreign Policy under General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida 1985 – 1993*. These titles are noteworthy in that not only do they endeavor to tackle Nigeria's relatively recent political history which up to that point had been decidedly off limits – they also operate in the centre of the machinery I have charged responsible for anti-historical spaces: the military. Thus, though the offerings do not venture into notions of what I termed *anti-historical*, whilst assuming still the **Personages (P)** mantle of my PEAR assignation (Babangida the personality looms large in both theses), they constitute a discernible shift by inhabiting a space

previously uninhabited due to anti-historical forces who formerly rendered that academic space uninhabitable. Inevitably, I scanned these titles for contentious matter⁵⁶² and my disappointment when I found none was managed by the timeworn maxim *Rome was not built in a day*. Yet, even though Aishatu in his observations managed to balance on the safe side of historical objectivism, he did cover traditionally controversial topics in Babangida's coup plotting and annulment of the June 12 elections. Similarly, Ogechukwu's foreign policy investigation deferred from assigning personal blame to Babangida's choices, though he too covered infamous Babangida policies such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which was implemented at the behest of foreign institutions including the World Bank and resulted in widespread inflation in Nigeria. The bright spots – such as hostile foreign policy against South Africa in condemnation of its Apartheid regime and the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to lead on regional conflict resolution starting with the Liberian Civil War – were unequivocally celebrated despite some strategic, longstanding errors committed by the regime, especially in relation to ECOMOG. Granted, this is a B.A thesis and one should not be over-critical or expect perfection and I was ultimately cheered by the direction taken by Aishatu and Ogechukwu with their theses. Of the remaining 34 theses of that cohort, they were all mappable with the PEAR designation – even the ones that focussed on 'conflict' of some description were ultimately centered around skirmishes which were inspired, motivated or worsened by religion (**R**). Emmanuel Alamiyo's *The History of Nigerian Police Force and Crime Control: A Case Study of FCT Abuja (1988 – 1999)* settled into a personages (**P**) study of charismatic leaders driving – and often failing – to contain the antisocial delinquencies of the world's most populous black nation.

⁵⁶² I was not seeking contentious matter for its sake as a marker of what might be considered appropriate historical investigation – but was on the lookout for content that would have been considered controversial if published during Babangida's tenure.

Table XX: PhD Abuja University

(S) = Of Southern origin and ethnicity (N) = Of northern origin and ethnicity

NAMES	*MAT NO:	APPROVED PROJECT TOPIC
Owan Maria Arou	93214001	Health Care Delivery in the Federal Capital Territory from 1976 – 1996

For the 2002 Research cohort, there was a sole doctoral candidate, Owan Maria Arou, who graduated in 2007.

Though there were no other candidates or comparisons to juxtapose against Owan Mari Arou’s thesis, it was difficult not to view the subject matter and content – Health Care delivery in Abuja – as at slight odds sitting within a History Department. This is not to deny that a history of health care delivery does not constitute a *history*. But the specific focus and content seemed the kind of commissioned paper a pharmaceutical company might sponsor. Similarly, for a doctoral research project, a pharmaceutical company again might have been invested in this kind of research, which one might encounter in a department of Health Sciences or some related university department. After all, who would be the supervisory expert on health care delivery flourishing within a History Department?

This submission, even as a sole entry for the year, underlined for me the continued extent to the seeming avoidance of purist historical subject matter, to pursue either niche or narrowed interests. I noted in **Chapter VII** historian Ikime had bemoaned the fact that many students who failed to be admitted into their first-choice major at university had been welcomed as a last resort in university History Departments. Arguably, the relaxation of that admissions vetting and selection process might have extended to the choices and titles of certain theses presented in the History Departments.

Table XXI: BA 2003 Session Abuja University

(S) = Of Southern origin and ethnicity (N) = Of northern origin and ethnicity

Personages (P), Economic (E), Agrarian (A), Religious (R)

NAMES	*MAT NO:	APPROVED PROJECT TOPIC
1. Abubakar Abdullahi	99214001 (N)	The Evolution and Development of Emirate Institution in Keffi up to 1903. (P)
2. Fatima Abdullahi	99214002 (N)	Clan System and Political History of Okene since the Colonial Period. (P)
3. Fawu A Hauwa	99214004 (N)	The Political History of Tangale Waja from 1904 – 1945. A Case Study of Tangale Waje Local Government (P) (R)
4. Salau A Harod	98213004 (N)	The Evolution of Local Governments in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT Abuja): A Case Study of Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) (1976 – 2003) (P) (E)
5. Mohammed L. Murtala	99214005 (N)	Bauchi – Sokoto Relations up to 1903 (P) (R)
6. Ekechukwu U Promise	99214006 (S)	The Impact of the Creation of FCT on the Gbaya Agricultural Economy: A Case Study of Kuje and Gwagwalada Area Councils (E)
7. Ekwealor Augustine Igwe	99214009 (S)	Historical Relations between Nzam and Nmia ta since 1900 (E)
8. Odi Ifeanyi	99214010 (S)	Ethno-Political Organisation in Nigerian Politics: A Case Study of Ohanaeze Ndigbo (P) (R)
9. Yahaya Ishaku Magami	99214012 (N)	Christian Mission Activities in Tafawa Balewa Area: A Case Study of the Zar (Sayawa, 1929 – 2000) (R)
10. Gaadi Hundekra Mercy	99214016 (S)	The Role of Women in the Socioeconomic Development of Makurdi Town since 1900 – 2004 (E)
11. Amadi Obisike Cyril	981031018 (S)	A History of Oil Exploration in Nigeria (E) (A)
12. Paul Gyang Matta	98214018 (S)	Land Hungry and Environmental Degradation: A Century of Oil Exploration in Berom Land (E) (A)
13. Harrison Ekeoma Iheke	99214019 (S)	The Socio-economic impact of Aba from c1929 – 2003 (E) (P)
14. Roselyn O.	99214020	A History of Ozumi Chieftaincy Title in Okene (P)

Fache	(S)	
15. Racahel Rahila Haruna	99214021 (N)	Cash Crop Economy in Northern Nigeria: A Case Study of Groundnut and Cotton Production in the Bajju (Kaje) area of Kaduna State 1900 – 1960 (E)
16. Basse Cyprian	99214022 (N)	The Socio Political and Economic History of Ochekwu People in Idomaland 1800 – 1960 (E) (P)
17. Onuchi Eugane Adinoyi	99214023 (S)	A Social History of Ebiraland With Particular Reference to Festivals (1850 – Present) (R)

In looking at the B.A. 2003 cohort, five years after the demise of Abacha and Nigeria's last military regime, these thesis submissions do not much deviate from the PEAR format. To re-iterate: epitomizing the PEAR format and being an in-depth thesis with historical depth is not a mutually exclusive possibility. However, as observed when formulating the PEAR designation, I clarified that using this particular framework assisted the researcher to cleave to a narrow categorization and treatment when perhaps the will or the means to broaden and diversify the investigation was lacking for whatever reason. This is the case in this cohort, where the promise of the 2001 cohort, which had two studies on Gen. Babangida was not realized or duplicated. I have categorized in the 'approved project' column the PEAR designation, including the particular overlaps.

The relational histories that explore ethnic or tribal migrations and rivalries focus on the colonial period up to an end date of independence at the latest in most cases. In the case of the Bauchi-Sokoto relations, 1903 is deemed a safe end point. I expected, following the Abacha regime's end and five years of a civilian government that there would be at least a couple of studies on military history, as there had been in the 2001 cohort – especially in a university that was based in the capital city of government where the fortress-like Aso Rock Presidential Palace housed military statesman from Babangida to Abacha. And Obasanjo too, albeit in his second coming as a civilian. The absence here of a study that even acknowledged or made reference to the seminal upheavals Nigeria had passed through

in those last few years of military dictatorship to budding democracy only confirmed the extent of an ahistorical bent that had impacted the sites and tracts of history dissemination in Nigerian university scholarship.

Table XXII: PhD 2003 Abuja University

(S) = Of southern origin and ethnicity (N) = Of northern origin and ethnicity

NAMES	*MAT NO:	APPROVED PROJECT TOPIC
Dodo Rhoda	96213007 (N)	Ginger Production in Jaba Area From 1900 – 1980
Odeh Onyebi Josephine	96213012 (S)	Pottery Industry in Ushafa Area of the FCT: An Aspect of its Development
Tyokighir Akrase Godwin	96213013 (S)	The Evolution of the Ter Institution in Tiv Traditional Administration: A Case Study of Kwande LGA

The final records I had access to at Abuja University was the 2003 PhD Research finalists, which consisted of three doctoral students. All three submissions again adhered to my PEAR designation. In fact, in their construction and reading, they resembled the overly niche and narrowed titles I had first encountered in the northern universities. Josephine Onyebi Odeh's *Pottery Industry in Ushafa Area of the FCT: An Aspect of its Development* recalled my reading of a two earlier dated theses at Bayero University, namely 1) *An Economic History of Abuja Emirate in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century: A Case Study of the Pottery Industry* (A. Shuaibu, 1985, B.A.), Ado Bayero University, Kano, and 2) *A comparison of the cloth weaving and pottery industries in Ebiraland: Ihima in Okehi Local Government Authority (LGA) of Kogi State as a case study* (Onyinoyi Abigail Ogedengbe, 1997), Bayero University, Kano.

Doda Rhoda's *Ginger Production in Jaba Area From 1900 – 1980* recalled my reading of an M.A, study also at Bayero University: *A Neglected Nigerian Export Crop: The growth of Ginger Production and Trade in Kachia District of Southern Zaria 1900 – 1953* (Muhammad M. Abubakar, 1988, M.A) Bayero

University, Kano. Arguably, despite the denser volume, Rhoda's study was the more elementary as in a reflection of its no frills title, there was little pretension to the thesis being anything more than incidents pertaining to the trajectory of ginger production, its rise and ultimate decline. Abubaker's study introduced a more political dimension at least in bemoaning how Nigeria's political set-up and over reliance on oil wealth and oil production contributed to the stifling of other *bona fide* commercial opportunities and industries in Nigeria – of unusually contemporaneous relevance given the existential issue in Nigeria today regarding oil dependency.

Of Tyokighir Akrase Godwin's *The Evolution of the Ter Institution in Tiv Traditional Administration: A Case Study of Kwande LGA*, we encountered previously several such studies that focused on the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial administrative procedures peculiar to particular ethnic communities, which evolved from those communities' specific traditions and practices. Godwin's study here proved to be a highly niche history of the Tiv peoples, detailing their opaque practices and hierarchical administrative councils steeped in the lineage of their Bantu inheritance and tradition. Again, this final entry of records gleaned from the University archive, served only to further cement my findings, as notable from the outset of my archival research in the universities, of a preponderance of niche enquiries.

In this chapter, which in part constituted the southern counterpoint to my northern Fieldwork, I explored the University of Abuja archives. My main conclusion was that my findings were ultimately similar to that in Kano, Kaduna and Katsina. I expected a little more variation based on the fact Abuja was geographically and culturally viewed to be in the centre of the nation with a variety of ethnicities resident there. The results were also surprising given that in the roll-call of students within the university's demographic and regarding their ethnic origins, it was clear the northern Islamic monolith that one encountered in the northern universities was absent here. The conclusions reached, which

mirrored that of my northern universities archival exploration, further consolidated the previous chapter's findings that there was an entrenchment within the academic environment of avoiding non-controversial histories or any overtly topical accounting with political overtones. In relation to the thesis question, this chapter concludes with the supposition that as Abuja is and was the governmental seat of power during Abacha's tenure from 1993-1998, history expression in Abuja scholarship between those years might have been even more self-consciously constricted in eyeing a broader exploration of histories, being mindful of governmental disapproval.

While specific unavoidable constraints potentially limited my intended research - to explore the south selectively but in equal measure to my trips in the north - they also demonstrate as Antoinette Burton and Carolyn Steedman intimated, the half-told inevitabilities of stories we tell due to the fragmentary aspects of archives we source those stories from. As Steedman stated 'you find nothing in the Archive but stories caught half way through: the middle of things; discontinuities.'⁵⁶³

Steedman speaks to the realities of historical research, to its selection processes, to its erasures, obstacles and chance events. Spivak too, in remarking of 'the archives, where the past is already digested as the raw material for history writing'⁵⁶⁴ is speaking dubiously of a potentially transmogrified resource on account of passing through archival processes. In all, they expose the inescapable partiality of historiography, which speaks also to the *fragmentation* at the heart of my project.

⁵⁶³ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust*, p.45.

⁵⁶⁴ Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) p.239.

Conclusions

Land and water may exist prior to human history, but regions and civilizations are products of human action. In this sense, history produces geography, not the other way around.⁵⁶⁵ – **Arjun Appadurai**

In light of my investigations and findings, I can thus determine that the absence of History in the Abacha military regime existed – and originated from the informal and continuous policy of previous Nigerian military governments deploying an anti-historical approach as a tool of governance. Based on my findings, using a metric of a balance of probabilities as argued, I conclude that this *absence* was wilful and premeditated in so much as it was a continuation of prior entrenched policy.

I illustrated that after the Nigeria-Biafra civil war the Gowon administration set the precedent for an anti-historical environment and governance in its dealings with the people. I demonstrated that this anti-historical environment was discernible in subsequent military regimes such as in the Buhari, Babangida and the Abacha regime. Though I demonstrated that this anti-historical imperative prevailed also in the civilian Shagari government which was sandwiched between two military regimes, the Shagari regime was considered to be a militarily sponsored administration enabled by a powerful cabal of northern interests – and thus could be deemed a proxy military regime for our purposes.

In proclaiming in my abstract that Abacha's regime represented an 'overt composite of prior military regimes', I advanced the seemingly paradoxical allusion that though the Abacha regime was maverick in some ways, it was conformist in others. This contradiction is resolved in noting that the military monopolization of political power has been a cultural phenomenon in Nigeria and represents an age-old

⁵⁶⁵ Arjun Appadurai, 'Beyond Domination: The future and past of decolonization', 6 March 2021, *The Nation*, <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/achille-mbembe-walter-mignolo-catherine-walsh-decolonization/> [Accessed 7 March 2021].

tradition that commenced roughly five years into the country's independence. Abacha was part of, a contributor to and product of that tradition. Historian Kayode Samuel once asked '*was Abacha an aberration?*'⁵⁶⁶ Gen. Obasanjo responded affirmatively by declaring Abacha was indeed 'an aberration in the army',⁵⁶⁷ with Obasanjo proceeding to expound via a Christian analogy that the Nigerian Army Corps symbolised a holy collective – whilst presenting Abacha, 'the betrayer', as Judas.⁵⁶⁸ Abacha we know imprisoned Obasanjo in 1995. Obasanjo's conversion to Christianity during that incarceration might explain Obasanjo's associative biblical take on Abacha's apparent treachery. Soyinka's response to Samuel's question was more prosaic and rang truer:

For every uniformed individual that ground society under his heels, there were at least a hundred eager servitors who collaborated and profited, whose notion of a national agenda dovetailed neatly with the predatory mission of the military. And not merely individuals but groups, powerful, organized groups, whose obsession with a privileged control of the fortunes of the nation both directly and indirectly made the incursion of Sani Abacha on the national scene possible, and nurtured his regime.⁵⁶⁹

Abacha was both an inheritor and propagator of the Nigerian military apparatus, which as a tradition of governance commencing from the Gowon regime, promoted an anti-historical agenda in execution of its authority. So, Abacha was a cog – a distinct cog, still – in a regimented, timeworn wheel.

In relation to a novel theory or hypothesis founded from the inductive nature of my research, my research promulgates a novel theory centred on *The concept of an anti-historical framework as applied by Nigerian military regimes as a tool of governance*. In this regard the extent of the distinctiveness of Abacha which I've alluded to from the study's outset, can be corroborated also in that it was his and his regime's demise that sounded the death knell for military regimes in modern Nigeria. It is not a co-incidence that after the end of the Abacha regime, discussions around the nation's history and History scholarship re-emerged into a more open, public forum.

⁵⁶⁶ Kayode Samuel, *Political transition in Nigeria: 1993 -2003*, (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 2007) p.195.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Kayode Samuel, p.196.

My explorations into the newly independent nation highlighted the preferred bent towards how history was to be re-imagined and presented, in the face of the twin challenges of a just concluded colonial subjugation and a prevalent European narrative claiming African history was a misnomer. My assessment of the Nigeria Historical Society (HSN) and their principal vehicle, the JHSN, from independence to the 2000s, illustrated the unique foresight and diligence the founders *aka* the builder-historians brought to establishing a culture of history post-independence – and why their decline and silence from the 1990s to 2000s constituted a real intellectual and national loss. Investigations into the Nigeria-Biafra civil war highlighted the fundamental cleavage inherent in the Nigerian tribal and ethnic body, which encouraged the military regimes' defensive and counter-productive policy of pursuing historical silence (ostensibly to pre-empt future crises). An analysis of the proscription of history from secondary schools' national curriculum highlighted the explicit hostility of successive military governments to the subject; the protracted ban until 2008, a decade after the death of Abacha, highlighted the political cowardice of subsequent civilian administrations. My archival exploration of Nigerian universities' History B.A., Masters (M.A.s) and PhD theses prior to, during and post-Abacha's tenure confirmed the deleterious impact on the subject, due to long-term enmity at Federal level.

Regarding future study, further research might build on and concentrate on Nigerian military regimes as a totality. Historian Hussaini Jibrin recently noted:

Despite the current trend of academic approach to not only inter-disciplinary, but also, multi-disciplinary approach to scholarship, many conservative historians consider military studies as discourse of their colleagues in Social Sciences. This has no doubt, created lacuna in our understanding of the Nigerian Military History which is extremely worthy of study to enable us to fully grasp the real forces at work in the current insecurity in our country and Africa at large.⁵⁷⁰

With a re-aligned, more pluralistic exploration of Nigeria's military regimes, further study might investigate all the eight Nigerian military regimes, perhaps chronologically, ending with the final military regime in

⁵⁷⁰ Hussaini Jibrin, 'Military History In The Northern Nigerian Universities: My Experience', in *The Consequences of Being a Historian: Thought and Reflections of Practitioners and Students of History* (Sokoto: Udu Press, 2018) p.293.

Nigeria's postcolonial history – the Abacha regime. Building on my research, there are a number of explorations of Nigerian military history that future practitioners might address. For example, practitioners may investigate the relationship between the military and the general populace, to determine the extent militarisation of the citizenry occurred and what the social or cultural consequences of this may have been - or continues to be to date. Other avenues that may be explored regarding the military history of Nigeria concerns its legacy in relation to the nation's security. In this thesis, I highlighted the fact that undue exploration of Boko Haram, as well as other active militant groups such as MEND, would likely prove a distraction to my overriding premise. However, post-doctoral research looking at a link between the military and the populace as ventured above, could benefit from such an exploration of such groups for a number of reasons – not least in relation to security and the responsibility of the state to keep its citizens safe. In his book *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State*, Abdulbasit Kassi tracks a historical trail of two centuries and part disabuses the reader of the novelty of Boko Haram by charting a 'long line of millenarian Muslim reform groups to emerge in Northern Nigeria over the last two centuries.'⁵⁷¹ In this thesis, we have centred mainly on the notion of the anti-historical, yet this has also largely dovetailed in Nigeria with the absence of a purposeful and engaging national narrative. Thus, one can see how within Nigeria's ill-defined, historically delinquent national spaces, not just Boko Haram, but the teachings of other militant or radical groups can take root and invite instability. Researchers may investigate *whether* in light of competing hierarchies of power within Nigeria, whether ethnically driven or due to the country's religious formation, combined with the consistent de-skilling of the armed forces since the 1990s to ostensibly render them incapable of mounting *coup d'états*, Nigeria is not, despite its superficially democratic veneer, presenting potential failed state symptoms or even in the primary throes of a coming disintegration?

⁵⁷¹ Abdulbasit Kassi, *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) p.23.

Abachaland: Same but different

I began this study with the notion that the organic expression of history as a discipline and as a conceptual and existential narrative tool indivisible from perceptions of national identity, suffered a willful negation during the 1993-1998 Abacha regime. My hypothesis posited that within the sphere of a cultural history paradigm, this expression as defined by the relational and expected mores of responsibility on how states interact with citizens - which I termed *transactional memorialization* (relating to the exchange or interaction between people) – there existed a manufactured negativistic dysfunction. I affirmed that this dysfunction, steered by the maneuverings and political gestures of the regime, spawned and exploited anti-historical spaces in which the regime operated. Arjun Appadurai's statement that 'regions and civilizations are products of human action; history produces geography, not the other way around', underscores the inexorable march and precedent of history in shaping cultures and identities within unique physical borders. Appadurai highlights the cultural and cerebral markings that delineate the spaces borne of a region's unique histories; spaces that manifest, evolve into discrete hubs and borders of identity. Yet, concerning Nigeria – a unique geographical space fashioned from historic British imaginings – the aforementioned dysfunction at the heart of successive military regimes distorted the process Appadurai speaks of. The 'human action' of the post-1960s Nigerian military regimes resulted instead in actualizing, maintaining and bequeathing nationally a culture of *inaction* in the spheres of historical knowledge and scholarship.

In my interviews with various Nigerian Professors of History (See **APPENDIX**), Prof. Toyin Falola asked the crucial question as to whether my premise appeared to cast Abacha as a singular *bête noir* in the suppression of the history of Nigeria. Falola's point, which denies Abacha the exceptionalism or singularity suggested by my study, was variously echoed by the other Nigerian History Professors I interviewed. These are useful and productive reservations, for in retrospect it is within this very interchangeable duality upon which my research was conceived and upon which my findings and further suggestions of study, as above,

rest. From the outset, I have argued that this is not intended as a study of Abacha the personality but a study of what Abacha's regime represented. Via the long line of military leadership of Nigeria (to which Abacha contributed across regimes), I argued that the Abacha regime itself aided and abetted the deliberate suppression of historical knowledge, perpetrated not just by military means but via the military institution in which Abacha was a major player and continuous presence since 1976.⁵⁷²

Falola and his colleagues are indeed correct when they say Abacha had his predecessors.⁵⁷³ As a dictator, he must be viewed within the military context and as one of a set of military overseers in Nigeria's history. This is the definitive milieu of the history Abacha himself explicitly represents and in this regard Abacha the leader may appear unexceptional. However, Abacha's uniqueness is also established by the fact that though Nigeria experienced a number of military regimes up to 1998 – (8 in total, spanning 35 years) – Abacha was active and prominent in the majority. In many ways, the military regimes of Nigeria, excepting the earlier ones of 1966 and 1967, which displayed explicit signs of factional and tribal in-fighting within the army itself, were similar. The perimeters of their implementation and rule remained roughly within identical boundaries: coups were plotted and executed, typically with loss of life. Reasons for martial takeovers were without exception due to the alleged political breakdown of the country, effectively into failed state status; officers were retired, purged, as the incoming regime consolidated power; decrees were promulgated which restricted certain democratic freedoms regarding the press and media, as well as the invocation of new militarized laws that redefined previous liberties; finally, handover plans were articulated, usually to occur within five years, which would ostensibly lead to civilian, democratic rule. Several observers of Nigeria such as Falola himself, Matthew Heaton, Max Siollun and Richard Bourne have

⁵⁷² In my **Literature Review**, I presented Max Siollun's *Nigeria's Military Coup Culture* in which Siollun described Abacha as 'by some record the most successful coup plotter in the history of Nigeria's military.'

⁵⁷³ Nigerian History Professors C.B.N Ogbogbo and Olayemi Akinwumi whom I interviewed formed part of a delegation that lobbied first President Obasanjo and then President Jonathan to bring back History to the Nigerian school curriculum. In documenting in conversation their challenges in first gaining an audience and then finding their hosts initially 'flippant', they noted that not only had Abacha long died at this stage, but that the school ban on History also predated Abacha.

documented this particular Nigerian coup d'état lifecycle from launch to proposed transition.⁵⁷⁴ So ingrained were these expected processes of a successfully launched coup that Heaton and Falola note one of the reasons Gen. Babangida gave for overthrowing Gen. Buhari's regime was Buhari's 'failure to set forth a clear plan to transfer power back to a civilian administration.'⁵⁷⁵

What differed from regime to regime was the character of the rule and the extent of the regime's political as well as economic corruption; even variation here was negligible in hindsight when juxtaposed with the financial and political realities of the time. I thus determined that the 1993-98 Abacha regime could from its outset be considered an outlier in two regards: Abacha could not legitimately claim in the tradition of previous takeovers he himself had participated in, that his 1993 coup was a mission to save Nigeria from itself due to political breakdown. Abacha could not credibly adopt the 'save Nigeria' stance given the impasse he exploited was artificially constructed from a legitimate and fair election thwarted by his military predecessor and close friend. As Richard Bourne noted, 'the suspension of the results and annulment of the election led to major demonstrations in Lagos, with the National Labour Congress calling for a general strike.'⁵⁷⁶ The general populace was perfectly happy with the election and its initial outcome of an Abiola win. Bourne continued: 'Battered by internal opposition and international disapproval, Babangida gave way and transferred power to the Interim National Government led by Shonekan.'⁵⁷⁷ The very interim government Abacha pushed aside three months later.

The zeitgeist at the time of Abacha's takeover in 1993 was distinctly different from that attendant to previous coups. The Berlin Wall had fallen in 1989. From 1990 came what we might term the *Mandela moment*. The Berlin Wall held geopolitical resonance for Africa given that the wall represented amongst other things, a site of struggle between western powers of opposing ideologies. As these powers – Soviet

⁵⁷⁴ For commentators such as Keith Somerville, military coups in Nigeria have always been an action of bad faith regardless of the reasons coup plotters give for instigating them, due to the domination of the military in political affairs from since the Nigeria-Biafra civil war.

⁵⁷⁵ Toyin Falola and Michael Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.216.

⁵⁷⁶ Richard Bourne, *Nigeria: A new History of a Turbulent Century* (London: Zed Books, 2015) p.185.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p187.

communists and liberal capitalists – sought to commandeer Africa’s sovereignty and political destiny through their dogmas and political systems, the fall of the wall presented Africa with new possibilities politically. Or as John Stremlau, Honorary Professor of International Relations, University of the Witwatersrand, put it: ‘Suddenly there were new opportunities for African agency.’⁵⁷⁸ Thabo Mbeki, who succeeded Mandela as President, also recognized what the fall of the Berlin Wall might symbolize for Africa – ‘The end of the Cold War meant that Africa could assert itself,’⁵⁷⁹ Mbeki stated. Intimated in Mbeki and Stremlau’s comments is more than the liberation from choosing sides. The comments are a consideration to the re-invention of African History. The Berlin Wall – erected in the same city of the infamous 1884 Berlin Conference that formalized the so-called scramble of Africa – encapsulated a subjugated Africa subjected and co-opted into the tussles for supremacy between the communists and capitalists of Europe. Beyond ideology lay, as always, the issue of identity; cultural identity and of history. Thus, the wall also represented for Africa a relic of parochial Western attitudes towards African history. Stremlau’s deliberate use of the word ‘agency’ evokes claims of African history being labeled non-existent – *absent* – unless given voice through Western agency. Mbeki speaking of an Africa that could ‘assert itself’, invokes a shift where the fallen wall presented the possibility Africa might step out of the wall’s Caucasian shadow to forge its own untrammelled history.

Set free from a 27-year incarceration a year after the Berlin Wall tumbled, Mandela embodied the ushering in of a new world order favorable to the African story. With his political star ascendant, Mandela came to be imbued with quasi-spiritual deliverance qualities in this new redemptive moment that might rehabilitate the African narrative and a continent’s history. In relation to my thesis, this juncture - this Mandela *moment* - is highly relevant to the argument of absented history. On the African continent, Apartheid South

⁵⁷⁸ John J Stremlau, ‘How the fall of the Berlin Wall 30 years ago resonated across Africa’, 8 Nov 2019, *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/how-the-fall-of-the-berlin-wall-30-years-ago-resonated-across-africa-126521> [Accessed 7 January 2021].

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

Africa represented the last explicit colonial outpost invested in the negation and erasure of African history. Thus, the postmodern era of Mandela's ascent pre-announced the triumph of a new Africa where the colonial hangover was apparently beating a retreat. Mandela's rise represented a historic and *historical* moment whereby the personal history that Mandela personified – Royal Xhosa lineage, ANC affiliation and insurgency, professional lawyer, political prisoner – substituted as parts of an authentic South African history that supplanted the seemingly bogus history of the Boer in Africa. Mandela had proved dramatically, and ostensibly on behalf of the whole continent, the existence and relevance of an African history. With Mandela's election win and Abacha's palace coup separated by less than 6 months, it is fair to say that Mandela's three-year ascent shifted the ground that Abacha stood on.⁵⁸⁰

Internally within Nigeria, here was a unique historical confluence that challenged the former political narratives of tribalism and religion: Chief Abiola, a southern Muslim Yoruba had won an election with overwhelming support across the country in both the predominantly Hausa-Fulani Muslim north and the Christian south, defeating in the process his Muslim northern opponent, Bashir Tofa. This victory represented an unprecedented critical juncture in the nation's history that comprised a possible resolution point to many of the country's former ills and trauma – especially, ironically, the ills of coup d'états. This unique confluence of time, which Abacha subsequently defied with his phantasmic basis for his coup, constituted more than a mere naked power grab on Abacha's part: it represented a consciously anti-historical gesture given the unique circumstances internally and internationally. It is not impossible that anti-historical gestures may be executed in ignorance or accidentally. What makes the Abacha takeover consciously willful is the prior fact of the interim government that Babangida installed. Thus, Abacha was afforded an intermission – and in that pause as recounted, both the local and international community emphasized in their protests the historical moment that was upon Nigeria – and what was at stake with the

⁵⁸⁰ In Rwanda, genocide was taking place, so evidently other African nations were yet mired in the pre-Mandela moment. The Rwandan genocide occurred between 7 April and 15 July 1994 and was sparked by the death of the Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, when his plane was shot down above Kigali airport on 6 April 1994.

unfairly annulled election. Nigerian Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka warned during this interim and prior to Abacha's takeover: 'A tiny but powerful cabal is toying with the future of our nation.'⁵⁸¹ I thus argued that the anti-historical propensity from the outset of the Abacha takeover would likely be further reflected and evident elsewhere in the regime's subsequent approach to governance.

In alighting on Abacha as a case study, I recognized that previous regimes were also anti-historical in approach. Abacha's reign is noted for his continued ubiquitous presence in military rule. So, while his predecessors may have set the stage for Abacha's anti-historical approach to governance, the outlier aspect of Abacha's 1993-98 regime, in combination with his roles in previous regimes single him out: particularly in its temporal significance - with his death marking a certain ending for the predictable repetitions, as well as erasures of history from Nigerian military governments. Furthermore, crucially, none of the previous military leaders sought to perpetuate themselves in power beyond their pre-announced civilian handover date⁵⁸². Abacha did. One may argue that given the continued question of illegitimacy that stalked the Abacha regime following the June 12th election annulment, Abacha's campaign to succeed himself as a duly elected Nigerian civilian President constituted the final anti-historical notion Abacha pursued prior to his death. We might conclude, in as much as we have that military governance in Nigeria operated and thrived within contrived *anti-historical* spaces, that the suppression of history in the Abacha regime served in part as a tool to also facilitate the ultimate objective of Abacha's perpetuity.

Falola's comments on Abacha's non-exceptionalism – in line with the other Nigerian Historians I interviewed – intersects still with and illuminates my research question on a couple of levels. It does this by further contextualizing my findings within the discipline of History and its processes, whilst addressing these processes *within* the hermetically-sealed political environment of Abacha's dictatorship. Ultimately,

⁵⁸¹ Richard Bourne, *Nigeria: A new History of a Turbulent Century*, (London: Zed Books, 2015) p.185.

⁵⁸² Chief Arthur Nzeribe, prominent Nigerian businessman and politician began a campaign to keep Gen. Babangida in power in 1993 during the handover civilian election campaign. However, Babangida ultimately declined to take the bait and left office shortly after he annulled the elections.

the question at the heart of my research is both a material and an epistemological one. It is a question of knowledge and its production; of *who* knew *what* when during Abacha's tenure and what was done with that knowledge in the pursuit of dominance.

Historically, coloniality, through epistemological means, employed and wielded the power of dominance. In Chapter VIII, I examined through Foucault and his treatise on *power* the power dynamic inherent in the relations between ruler and ruled – and in the context of the Abacha regime and his predecessors, explored Foucault's idea that power equates to the interactionary expression of governmental action operating within certain spheres of knowledge. In suppressing specific knowledge, the Abacha regime and its predecessors also secured an *epistemic* victory in relation to their objective. For even the suppression of knowledge is part of the process of knowledge production. Mignolo had stated that 'Western civilization's ability to manage knowledge explains its success in expanding itself politically and economically'.⁵⁸³ Thus, though the Abacha military model of knowledge management engaged wholly in subtraction, with minimal engagement in knowledge production or dissemination⁵⁸⁴, it remains that the *management* of historical knowledge by Abacha and previous military regimes served as a tool of governance. In other words, to paraphrase Mignolo, the ability of Nigerian military regimes to manage historical knowledge explains its successes in perpetuating itself politically and economically.

It is nigh impossible to consider the full dimension of an African history without pondering the effects of colonization. In this I refer not just to how the colonial experience shaped the erstwhile political trajectories of the nation but also how it could be reconciled – and abrogated – in the ensuing aftermath. It is useful to revisit here the existing concept of *decoloniality*.

The idea that a different form of decolonization or anti-colonialism was and continues to be possible in the Global South – one that

⁵⁸³ Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000) p.11.

⁵⁸⁴ I explored this peculiarity in **Chapter V**, where I underscored the anomaly of the post-Biafran war reality in its scarcity of the victor's war accounts.

does not rest on Western forms of knowledge but instead on Indigenous epistemological styles and claims.⁵⁸⁵

From the perspective of history, the settling of the African colonial question and its impact and consequences requires an epistemological shifting; it is a question of application of an authentic knowledge which eschews the Western cannon that itself represents a self-interested, compromised conduit.⁵⁸⁶ The principles of decoloniality fixes on this adjustment. Decoloniality also engages topographical concerns which explore the connections in a state which parallel its political and geographical evolutions within the context of its history. Current scholarship from Quijano, Mbembe, Appadurai *et al* are agreed and enlighten us to the 'history behind our geographies' and on 'setting the history of regions and continents back into the context of colonialism and empire.'⁵⁸⁷

Nigeria, its unique geographical formation configured around the River Niger from whence Lady Lugard plucked the nation's name, is as eminently primed for an exercise in decoloniality as any other former African colony. The exercise in gauging a nation's decoloniality quotient we understand is an opportunity to measure the extent 'these nation-states has truly fulfilled the liberatory promises of decolonization.'⁵⁸⁸ Appadurai enlightens us to the fact that foremost purveyors of decoloniality in Mbembe, Mignolo and Walsh, reached a 'common recognition' thus:

That the heaviest price extracted by colonizers on the colonized in the past 500 years was not in the currency of labor and resource extraction but in the realm of knowledge.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁵ Arjun Appadurai, 'Beyond Domination: The future and past of decolonization', 6 March 2021, *The Nation*, <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/achille-mbembe-walter-mignolo-catherine-walsh-decolonization/> [Accessed 7 March 2021].

⁵⁸⁶ This recalls my exploration of Franz Fanon's position in Chapter I, where Fanon posited the difficulty of the colonized in realizing their authentic self due to the willful disfigurement and destruction of their past by the colonizer.

⁵⁸⁷ Arjun Appadurai, 'Beyond Domination'.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

In my thesis' exploration of Abacha's Nigeria was a determination that there was a willful suppression of knowledge which constituted both a disinterest in pursuing the realm of historical knowledge, as well as a suppression of historical knowledge for political gain. From a decoloniality aspect, a double-edged sword is at play here. For not only is knowledge of self difficult to attain in light of the unique conditions of colonialism, but any willful suppression of historical knowledge curtails that natural and necessary quest of self. Knowledge suppression also exacerbates the extent – and the challenge – of a correction for that former colonized state to access authentic realms of knowledge that would allow for the state's full postmodern realization. Post-Abacha, my thesis concluded with this very issue for the future Nigerian state, by re-highlighting also the intransigencies of the current archives which still operate on the vestiges of military-era decrees.

In my study the archive represented not just the physical memorialization of the state but symbolized a conscience wherein the state's motive and methodology could be gauged. In discovering the disarray of the archives of the Nigerian University History departments I visited, I grasped the extent of the denigration of the History discipline, as well as the overarching fragmentation that besets the discipline academically and the nation culturally. Of the archives and the State, Mbembe had this to add:

The relationship between the archive and the state is just as complex. It rests on a paradox. On the one hand, there is no state without archives – without its archives. On the other hand, the very existence of the archive constitutes a constant threat to the state. More than its ability to recall, the power of the state rests on its ability to consume time, that is, to abolish the archive and anaesthetize the past.⁵⁹⁰

So it is, that this absence of history I refer to during the Abacha regime (and prior) constituted, to borrow from Mbembe, an anaesthetizing of things past. For beyond the archive, the abolishing of the subject in Nigerian schools most explicitly displayed the threat that the government conceived the study of history to

⁵⁹⁰ Achille Mbembe, 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits', *Refiguring the Archive*, Ed. Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid & Razia Saleh, (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002) p.23.

be. A threat which the military regimes of Nigeria – which represented a cultural phenomenon in the nation – deigned to contain in delivering via their military governing complex, an anti-historical agenda following the historic 1967 civil war.

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Personal Communication

Professor Ibrahim Kankara (Interview) – Audio Recording - 18/07/2018

Dr. Toyin Falola (Interview) – Video recording – 30/07/2020

Dr. Chris Ogbogbo (Interview) – Audio Recording – 03/08/2020

Dr. Olayemi Akinwumi (Interview) – 12/8/2020

John St. Jorre – (Interview) – Audio recording- 16/10/2020

APPENDIX

Interviews

Project Title: *Fragmented Memory In an Invented Land: The Absence of History In The Abacha Military Dictatorship of Nigeria*

Interviewer: Gromyko Dumuje, *Research Student, SOAS*

Respondent: Professor Kankara, *Professor of African History, Department of History and Security Studies, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina*

Date: 18 July 2018

1. The Bayero University History Department has a proud tradition dating back to when the university was first inaugurated. Could it be said that History was viewed from the beginning as just as important as other subjects on offer?

Yes History is viewed as one of the paramount courses in Bayero University considering the fact that the department of History was among the pioneering departments in the institution - together with other Arts courses such as Nigerian Languages, Islamic Studies and English Language departments. History really is viewed as part of the pioneering departments in the institution.

2. What overriding principles, if any, might you say, the study of History in Northern universities was rooted in?

The overriding principle of teaching History in the Northern Nigeria was mainly to promote patriotism, self-consciousness and National unity

3. The well-known British intellectual and Historian Professor Murray Last (who himself had secured a PhD from University of Ibadan; the first to be awarded by an African University) was Professor of History at Bayero from 1978 - 1980. What, if anything, does this say about Bayero and about its History scholarship?

Actually the department of History Bayero University from its onset was an offshoot of the Department of History ABU Zaria. Apart from Prof. Last there were also other British, American and African Historians such as Abdullahi Smith, John E Laver, Philip James Shea, Micheal Crowder, M.A Al-hajj. These scholars and Prof. Last helped to make Bayero University an important centre of historical discourse. The scholars influenced the plotting of seminar series

in the department and the *Ultimate Kano Studies journal*, as well as the FAIS Journal of Humanities in the University.

4. Would you state that History maintained a strong reputation and positive regard throughout the years at Bayero and other northern universities in Nigeria?

It indeed did maintain a very strong reputation in Northern Nigeria, because virtually all the Universities in the region have a Department of History. This is not common everywhere. This shows how important History is viewed in the region

5. Over the years regarding Bayero and other Northern Universities (or other cultural institutions including museums), was there ever a shift in principle in how History was to be taught or interpreted?

There was no shift in the way history was or is being taught. In truth, efforts were and are always being consciously made at all levels to maintain the ethics and standards and principles enshrined in the discipline by the pioneering scholars

6. So, was there ever at any stage regarding Bayero and/other Northern universities whereby a narrative prevailed that History was not a subject worth studying? If so what were the reasons and impact of this narrative?

There was but not during Abacha's regime. It was during Obasanjo's regime that the idea was propagated. To the extent that during the Goodluck Jonathan administration History was removed from secondary school's curriculum. Though it was maintained at the tertiary schools. However, it was returned to the curriculum last year in 2018

7. Was there to your knowledge ever any explicit strategy/policy by the Abacha regime to discourage engagement with the country's History - whether within institutions or elsewhere?

There was none at all considering the effort by his administration in procuring history books and publications of textbooks to schools through the Petroleum Special Trust Fund interventions to schools

- 8. Was there any evidence that the regime actively sought from 93-98 to discourage the study of History (either local or generally) itself, say, in a particular topic such as Military History, or Civil War History?**

To the best of my knowledge there was none

- 9. Were there tangible and innocuous reasons why the study of History might suffer a decline during the years 1993 - 1998 at Bayero or any other Northern university?**

If there are it has to more to do with financial constrains and the economic meltdown of the period

- 10. Do you know of any personal ambivalence that Abacha or his regime might have had towards the study of History?**

To the best of my knowledge, once again, I know of none

Thank You

Thesis Interview Questions

Project Title: *Fragmented Memory In an Invented Land: The Absence of History In The Abacha Military Dictatorship of Nigeria*

Interviewer: Gromyko Dumuje, *Research Student, SOAS*

Respondent: Dr. Toyin Falola, *Professor; Jacob & Frances Sanger Mossiker Chair in the Humanities; University Distinguished Teaching Prof.*

Date: 30 July 2020

1. Do you feel the study of History in Nigeria is currently moving in the right direction?

Historians don't really use the concept of 'right direction.' That's teleological. You're going to find very few historians making use of that term due to its futurism terminology. But if you're just using it as a process in the public face of the discipline, there can only be one answer to the way you have framed the question, which would be 'yes'. It is about building something that was not there before. Such as putting the subject back into the schools. But sitting here in 2020, one must grasp there are layers and layers to this conversation. Because the very fact you introduce an idea, there remains two other things that you can never know: a process. Process is a function of resources – it's a function of passion; a function of how a system works holistically or fragmented – so nobody can tell you the process. But far more complicated is the outcome. So, you can't just say because the subject has been re-introduced, that it is 'moving in the right direction.' Neither you or I have the capacity to measure the outcome. I will illustrate with two anecdotes. When a man and woman fall in love and they announce their wedding, are they moving in the right direction? Yes, because they want to get married. But ten years later this couple may become mortal enemies. Or when the National Youth Service was introduced in 1971, if you were to frame the question was Nigeria moving in the right direction, after the civil war, people would say 'yes'. But we now know the outcome. The more Nigerians were exposed to one another, the more stereotyping they engaged with one another. So, the outcome of the Youth Service has not delivered its original intention. So today, people do not want to serve in Sokoto, in Maidugry. If you're a father in Ibadan and they post your son to Maidugry, you might resist the posting. So, there's no straightforward answer to the question. History is a contested discipline; all segments of Humanities are contested

2. Has there been a systemic suppression of History studies by Nigerian Governments? If so, why?

Part of the argument they gave when they abolished History, and using the Biafra War as their main reason, is that the more there is talk about it, the more the bitterness is revived. Let us complicate the argument. Let us talk about 'collateral comparative experiences': Statues; Rhodes Must Fall; Lee Must Fall; Confederate flag. Following the rise of white supremacy, these things start to collapse. Two weeks ago, students got angry and beheaded a statue of Rhodes in a public

space. Now do you want to remove all the confederacy flags and statues or do you want to put them in a museum. Because something is not pleasant do you want to suppress it or have a vibrant conversation around it. Or do you want to put them in a museum with notes. Rather than destroy them, why not create a museum around confederacy. Those who choose can go and look at them. I've been to the Holocaust museum in Germany. Depressing but do you want your public to say they don't want to talk about the Holocaust? Do you want your public to say they don't want to talk about the slave trade and slavery? Or we can change the subject to managing differences and cleavages. In the 1950s, there was an argument among missionaries, pioneer figures who took diametrical opposition, which is in relation to this question, regarding issues of ethnicity, pluralism... and Azikwe held the position, let us sink our differences, which subsequent people have said. But others said, no, we don't have to. Let us understand our differences. They are two different sides to an argument.

Sidarno said what is wrong with us being different? You're Christian, I'm Muslim. You're Igbo, I'm Fulani. Let's work with that. Let's not homogenize things. Or our friend the President of Rwanda said you can't say you're Hutu or Tutsi: you're Rwandan. But he's not going to visit people in their living rooms. He's not going to visit them in their villages, in their drinking places; they are probably mocking him. Complicating your question which looks so small the way you've framed it, is do you want people to know and benefit from that knowledge of one another, historical processes, or do you want to suppress and hide it? Or do you want to create a collective amnesia, which societies do? And just say let's forget about this. And when you carry the moment forward, that this which they are trying to hide, overblows into a larger separatist agenda. So, you see the Nigerian model has collapsed; the Nigerian Historical model has collapsed. Because all the reasons that led to the civil war, which they are trying to suppress - its memory, its history - have all come back. So you have Kanu, the rabble rouser; you have the Biafra Congress; you have the Oduduwa Republic by Akintoye. All these cleavages have emerged, not only rewriting their own history but also converting these histories into secessionist platforms. And the very fact they are doing that means that the way the state was thinking was fundamentally flawed. Which means that a tool of suppression is counterproductive.

One other danger by the way is that narrative spaces are plural. There is no singularity for narrative spaces. The way you frame your project is an academic space. Culture is plural, tradition is plural; spaces are pluralistic. If you say you are banning History, in one of the pluralistic segments of your society – the school – in those plural spaces there are the mosques, the churches, there are the communities, political associations, there are fraternities, there are drinking places, there are bars where histories are being told. And you can't ban those spaces from the conversation - which means that what you are doing is you are saying rather than give an official syllabus, I will let these plural spaces, whose number we don't know, create hundreds of syllabi. And so the issue you are trying to hide, they will begin to narrate them. Let me give you an example. It is unfortunate that Chinua Achebe ended his career by writing there was once a country. A project borne out of his own disappointment with the Nigerian state. Where did you get 3 million from? Now Igbos have revised the figure to 4 million. In 1970 it was 1 million. They keep revising that figure.

The best way to understand all this is that historical narratives have non-academic spaces. There is research that is just a narrative for academic consumption. Others are narrating their countries outside the academic space. And even in totalitarian societies the state does not have a monopoly on narratives.

3. Have Nigerian military governments' attitudes to the subject and study of History differed from those of civilian governments?

Bear in mind the civilian governments continued with the ban. I was in a delegation to Obasanjo, to Jonathan to lift the History ban, they refused. It was during Buhari it was lifted again.

4. Do you know of any particular antipathy that the Abacha regime might have had towards the study of History?

I think a colleague of mine Chris Ogbobo would know. It was he who eventually won the battle. Chris will have a better insight than me of the rebirth of History. Chris also is the one framing the new syllabus. But an overarching template for that question was that Abacha wasn't an intellectual and he wasn't talkative either. He wasn't the kind of person you could give a policy document of 50 pages to read. He wasn't from that orientation.

5. Is there any evidence that the Abacha regime sought to suppress the study of History any more than any other regimes?

Again, as the previous question, I think that one is more for Chris as that is personal to the personality of Abacha and I didn't know him.

6. Was there to your knowledge ever any explicit strategy/policy by the Abacha regime to discourage engagement with the country's History - whether within institutions or elsewhere?

There's one dimension that you should not escape. State-centric approach has its limitations. Parents in general coming from poverty do not want their children to do humanities; they don't want their children to study History. Parents in Nigeria who have narrowly escaped being farmers, being peasants only know three degrees – Engineering, Law and medicine. They are just discovering IT. During the 1980s because of the structural adjustment programme, STEM was beginning to become relevant, as if you don't have a diversified economy you will have problems.

Appendages – department of history and strategic studies. Department of history and diplomatic history, Department of history and international relations, department of history and heritage studies. They were thinking, to what extent can they look for other things that are skill-oriented just because they are looking for relevance. So, you have to create other layers of interpretation that is beyond Abacha – to the nature of society, to the nature of expectation. To what you can do with degrees?

7. What do you feel the future holds for the Nigerian nation regarding History scholarship?

Well they've brought it back. The historical society is creating a new set of syllabus at all levels of education. As to the outcome I cannot tell you the outcome. I can tell you from that process though that the knowledge base will expand, more students will be interested. But if your question is whether that will shape the nature of the society, will that shape the nature of the state, nobody can know. Anything about outcomes you and I cannot know. Look at the rise of Trump – all the known history of America did not stop him. One thing we do know is that Africa needs knowledge. When it comes to the ideas and the values of knowledge, we're not doing very well. Our people are still primordial when it comes to belief systems – non-scientific belief systems. One thing I know is that the school system cannot overwhelm the public spaces – public spaces will continue to do with their narratives.

The public space and ontologists are Siamese twins. You can't silence your public when it comes to ontology – its virtually impossible. You cannot stop conspiracy theories, innuendos. The public domain of history itself is beyond the capacity of the state to control. It's outside the scope of legitimacy. No state can manage it; that space is chaotic. The history of Buhari is told everyday. That public space does not respect opinions from the universities. You can see how professors who are embedded in the political projects of the state, sometimes their narratives are infused by their ethnicity, identity, their religion - they might hold the same view as a market woman – they might share a consensus and that consensus is not necessarily connected with the libraries and the archives.

8. Would you like to add anything else?

No

Thank you

Project Title: *Fragmented Memory In an Invented Land: The Absence of History In The Abacha Military Dictatorship of Nigeria*

Interviewer: Gromyko Dumuje, *Research Student, SOAS*

Respondent: Dr. Chris Ogbogbo, *Professor of African History, University of Ibadan; Fellow, Historical Society of Nigeria; Lawyer*

Date: 3 August 2020

1. Do you feel the study of History in Nigeria is currently moving in the right direction?

Yes, I do feel that the study of History is currently moving in the right direction. Apart from the reintroduction of History to the first nine years of the school system, there has been a comprehensive review of the History curriculum. The new History syllabus has the study of Nigerian History as the central focus of study.

2. Has there been a systemic suppression of History studies by Nigerian Governments? If so, why?

I would not use the word 'systematic suppression'. I would rather say that there has been a neglect of the study of History in Nigeria. The introduction of Social Studies by American trained educationists resulted in a review of curriculum which sought to incorporate Historical Studies as part of the Social Studies. This resulted in the marginalisation of the History discipline as very few history topics featured in the content of the Social studies that was taught.

3. Have Nigerian military governments' attitudes to the subject and study of History differed from those of civilian governments?

No, it has not been different. Until recently when Historical Society of Nigeria under my leadership led a struggle to ensure the return of History to the first nine years of the Nigerian school system. Under the military regimes, several effort were made but it did not yield the desired result. Same also applied to the civilian governments until a few years ago – 2018, when the government final agreed to return History to the schools.

4. Do you know of any particular antipathy that the Abacha regime might have had towards the study of History?

I don't know of any. The removal of History from the school curriculum predated the Abacha regime. History was yanked off the curriculum in 1983. This was before Abacha emerged in Nigeria's political scene.

5. Is there any evidence that the Abacha regime sought to suppress the study of History any more than any other regimes?

He merely maintained the status quo that he met.

6. Was there to your knowledge ever any explicit strategy/policy by the Abacha regime to discourage engagement with the country's History - whether within institutions or elsewhere?

None to my knowledge.

7. What do you feel the future holds for the Nigerian nation regarding History scholarship?

With the revival that took place in 2018, I am optimistic that Historical scholarship has bright prospects in Nigeria. Currently, good effort is being made to write History textbooks to enable the teaching of the subject in the school system. The Historical Society of Nigeria has written History textbooks for the various levels of Nigeria's school system.

8. Would you like to add anything else?

History was removed from Nigeria's curriculum from 1983 to 2018, i.e. is a period of 35 years.

See *Advocacy for History: A festrichft in Honour of Prof. CBN Ogbogbo*. The book is about the spirited effort made to restore History back to the school curriculum. (Available on Amazon)

Also see *In Defence of Tradition* being a University of Ibadan Inaugural Lecture of Professor CBN Ogbogbo.

Thank you

Thesis Interview Questions

Project Title: *Fragmented Memory In an Invented Land: The Absence of History In The Abacha Military Dictatorship of Nigeria*

Interviewer: Gromyko Dumuje, *Research Student, SOAS*

Respondent: Olayemi Akinwumi PhD, AvHF, FHSN, MNAL, *Professor of History, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academics)*
Nasarawa State University, Nigeria

Date: 12 August 2020

1. Do you feel the study of History in Nigeria is currently moving in the right direction?

With History back in the Curriculum, I strongly believe that before long, it will take its rightful place in our educational set up.

2. Has there been a systemic suppression of History studies by Nigerian Governments? If so, why?

The removal of History from the Curriculum was a deliberate attempt by the Government to suppress it in our institutions. It has to do with the fear of the discipline and the practitioners. Those who removed History believed that History lecturers are too radical and “are teaching what they were not supposed to teach” thereby negatively influencing the students against the Governments.

3. Have Nigerian military governments’ attitudes to the subject and study of History differed from those of civilian governments?

The military governments in Nigeria, especially after the fall of the Second Republic were not interested in education and were not bothered about the History in the Curriculum. The process of taking History back to the Curriculum was started by the Civilian administration of President Goodluck Jonathan.

4. Do you know of any particular antipathy that the Abacha regime might have had towards the study of History?

No but tertiary institutions in most part of his regime were under lock.

5. Is there any evidence that the Abacha regime sought to suppress the study of History any more than any other regimes?

No evidence. He was only concerned with his survival and anybody who attempted to threaten his administration was dealt with.

- 6. Was there to your knowledge ever any explicit strategy/policy by the Abacha regime to discourage engagement with the country's History - whether within institutions or elsewhere?**

No

- 7. What do you feel the future holds for the Nigerian nation regarding History scholarship?**

The future is bright if History is made compulsory at all levels of our education. Knowledge of History will resolve the intergroup crisis in the country. Indeed, the knowledge of our history will discourage the agitation for the breakup of the country.

- 8. Would you like to add anything else?**

The practitioners too should start a serious campaign to promote history and educate the masses about the value of it.

Thank you