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A Spectator Cannot Stand in One Position to Appreciate the Beauty of the Masquerade Dance—Igbo Proverb

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Welcome to the second issue of volume four of the *Journal of West African History*. I have entitled this introduction, “A Spectator Cannot Stand in One Position to Appreciate the Beauty of the Masquerade Dance,” because all five articles in this issue speak in various ways to the realism of that Igbo proverb—things are not always as they appear; there is not only one way to look at things; and depending on which side of the masquerade dance one finds oneself, the viewing and appreciation of the dance will be skewed towards that perspective. Put in scholarly terms, the articles in this issue, in one way or the other, speak to the fact that interpretations of historical evidence differ from scholar to scholar, reader to reader, and spectator to spectator, depending upon the vantage point from which the individual is viewing the evidence—viewing the quintessential masquerade dance. Thus, the articles in this issue invite us as readers (or spectators of the masquerade dance) to (re)consider what might be accepted as fact or canon, encouraging us to take a second and third look, and broaden our perspective, so that we can view the masquerade dance in front of us from various standpoints. It is only when we do this that we can truly aspire to appreciate the dance in all of its complexities and beauty.

The masquerade dance in this issue opens with Nathan Carpenter’s “Ransom as Political Strategy: Captivity beyond Commercial Transaction on the Upper Guinea Coast in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries.” In this fascinating piece, Carpenter (re)considers the functioning of ransoming outside the conventional trans-Atlantic slave economic framework. He invites readers to view the dance before them differently, and to consider ransom-taking as a political, and to a lesser extent, cultural and religious strategy that allows alliances

to be built and maintained. For Carpenter, ransoming should be understood as a mechanism to “assert, maintain, or regain authority.” His analysis is presented against the backdrop of persistent political and social dislocation in the mid-nineteenth-century Guinea Bissauan village of Gamamudo. In particular, he gives us a case study of Fanta Biaye, a wealthy Guinea Bissauan woman, her son Falli Mané, and her nine female slaves who were caught up in a ransom hostage exchange, the roots of which could be found in a political rivalry. The leader who captured her, Sellou Coyada, was the head of the Kaabu state, which had been a powerful kingdom during the Atlantic slave era but had collapsed in the 1860s. Coyada had earlier given two female relatives, including Sangui Bia, a woman who was likely his niece, to an influential but enemy sovereign, Musa Molo, who himself was of slave origin. Coyada had done this in order to establish a military alliance with the powerful leader. As Carpenter reveals, that gift, perhaps in marriage, of his female relatives to Molo in the mid-nineteenth century Upper Guinea Coast fit neatly with the construction of marriage as being at the heart of political statecraft. However, as the article reveals, the alliance was short-lived, and Coyada tried unsuccessfully to secure the return of his relatives. Hence, in capturing Fanta Biaye and her entourage of women slaves, Coyada was hoping to use them as leverage, not only to regain his family members, but also to reassert his “authority in an indigenous political landscape,” which reveals how important women were in the forging alliances in the mid-nineteenth-century Upper Guinea Coast—a perspective that allows us as readers to view the masquerade dance of ransoming holistically.

The second movement of the masquerade dance is Kalala Ngalamulume’s “The ‘Devès Affair’ in Saint-Louis-du-Senegal: A Critical Assessment of the Sources, 1902–1910.” In this provocative piece, Ngalamulume provides a reinterpretation of the events leading to the removal of Justin Devès, mayor of St. Louis, Senegal, from his position in 1910. Ngalamulume argues that the evidence—including irregularities in Devès’s financial management, corrupt relations with indigenous peoples surrounding the municipality, unlawful hiring, a lack of financial discipline, interference in French *indigène* policy, and the accusation that Devès intended to reinstate the slave trade—that Lieutenant-Governor Jules Peuvergne used against Devès was “highly suspect.” Some of his doubts about the reliability and validity of the evidence used to support Devès’s supposed malfeasance are because it was collected years earlier by a colonial inspector who not only over-relied on dated and inconclusive memories of individuals, but also did not immediately write this testimony down. Pointing to the similarities in testimonies presented, Ngalamulume argues that the evidence was likely fabricated and that witnesses were spoon-fed information by members of Peuvergne’s administration. Moreover, Ngalamulume maintains that Governor Peuvergne’s removal of

Devès was actually about a personal vendetta—Justin Devès had been a thorn in the side of Governor Peuvergne and his predecessors, and the latter's attempt to destroy Devès's political, economic, social, and ideological power base was pay-back. Utilizing a treasure trove of primary evidence, including a list of persons who gave testimony as well as their depositions, letters, and the Peuvergne report, Ngalamulume takes readers through the varied movements of this particular masquerade dance, analyzing each movement, while inviting his readers/spectators to critically (re)examine questions relating to Devès's tenure as mayor—all part of his attempt to present the totality of the masquerade dance called the Devès Affair.

"Pickpockets, Pilot Boys and Prostitutes: The Construction of Juvenile Delinquency in the Gold Coast [Colonial Ghana], c. 1929–57," is the third movement in the sequence of the masquerade dance. In this complex dance phase, we view Stacey Hynd's construction of juvenile delinquency as a point of entry into understanding the colonial anxieties surrounding urbanization, industrialization, and the emergence of "detribalized" Africans in the British Gold Coast. The article expands our understanding of the ways in which the British colonial state, and to a lesser extent, everyday Africans in the Gold Coast, constructed, understood, and dealt with the problem of juvenile delinquency. One of her main concerns is to uncover the impact of juvenile delinquency on the state. The author links juvenile delinquency to a general crisis in the Gold Coast, arguing that new forms and levels of delinquency emerged, including theft, immoral offenses (particularly pilot boy pimping, and prostitution by young women), intelligent offenders and proto-criminals, and care and protection cases. This categorization runs counter to the reasoned fears of juvenile delinquency in other parts of West Africa, where gangs and violence were upheld as the *raison d'être* of juvenile delinquency. Thus, Hynd's article is an analysis, nay, invitation, to readers/spectators to embark on a more holistic viewing of the masquerade dance of juvenile delinquency, and the result will be a true appreciation of the message of the dance. With each sequence of the dance, Hynd unpacks childhood delinquency, as well as its role in the child and youth accumulation of income, concentrating on female delinquency. As far as the colonials were concerned, Hynd argues, juvenile delinquency was both a symptom and a cause of a range of social ills and dysfunction; it was a marker of social tensions within African urban communities. The colonial government imagined delinquent children in the Gold Coast as potential sites of social infection; the analytical subjects through which they could enact their aspirations for modernization. Hynd's article also highlights colonial officials' fear that "semi-educated" delinquents could possibly agitate towards nationalism.

The fourth movement of the masquerade dance is Kevin S. Fridy's "A Freezing Moment in Ghana's Party System: How Two Thorns in Nkrumah's Side Framed

Elections in the Fourth Republic.” In this elaborate movement, Fridy utilizes a rich database of election results, voting behavior, census data, and maps to present the watershed moments (what he calls the “freezing moments”) in the Gold Coast’s—and subsequently Ghana’s—late colonial and early independence eras, when the ethno-political and socioeconomic coalitions that govern contemporary Ghanaian politics were shaped. He underscores these “freezing moments” in his analyses of the patterns and evolution of behavior along ethnic lines in Ghanaian politics (e.g., the National Democratic Congress reigns in the Volta Region, the New Patriotic Party controls the Asante Region). In particular, Fridy points to the year 1966, and the military coup that ousted President Kwame Nkrumah, as the “moment” that ushered in Ghana’s contemporary party system. “A Freezing Moment in Ghana’s Party System” is as much an exploration of the myriad ways in which Ghana’s main ethnic groups (the Asante and the Ewé), who were, according to Fridy, neither “natural or primordial foes,” tapped into a range of social cleavages to mobilize themselves into important political forces. Encouraging his readers/spectators to view the masquerade dance in its entirety, Fridy’s analysis highlights how the regional support and dynamics these political parties enjoyed played out in Ghanaian politics at the national/federal level. Moreover, Fridy underscores the influence of the Ewé, who he visualizes as “free agents,” who neither supported Nkrumahism nor trusted Asante politicians. At the end of this masquerade dance sequence, Fridy concludes that the Asante and Ewé formed themselves into two politicized ethnic identities who managed to contest, negotiate, and debate themselves, all within established boundaries of a democratic polity called Ghana.

The masquerade dance of this issue comes to a close with Beverly Mack’s “Fodiology: African American Heritage Connections to West African Islam.” In this transnational, “time-travel” piece, Mack centers twentieth-century Pittsburgh Islam, particularly the life and times of the Qadiriyya Light of the Age (LOA) African American Islamic community, which, she argues, espouses many of the egalitarian and charitable practices of earlier West African Islamic communities, and yet maintains its uniqueness regarding its membership and adherence to orthodox Qadiriyya Sufi practices. “Fodiology” establishes a connection between the LOA and the West African Qadiriyya Islam professed by Shehu Usman ‘dan Fodio (1754–1817), and his daughter, quadrilingual poet, scholar, and teacher, Nana Asma’u (1793–1864), both of the Sokoto Caliphate. The African American members of LOA, Beverly Mack argues, use tenets of this West African Qadiriyya Islam, especially its religious and cultural traditions, and the teachings of Usman Dan Fodio and his daughter, Asma’u, especially espoused in *The Collected Works of Nana Asma’u*, as a site through which to recover and (re)construct their African heritage of scholarship, poetry, service, ethics, attire, and artistry. The members

evolve and embrace Fodiology through their insistence on egalitarianism; equity; their pursuit of “equitable treatment of women [as] fundamental precepts of Islam, clearly set forth in the Quran”; their support of women’s “autonomy in educating women”; their focus on education; learning the language of the Qur’an, Arabic; and their use of northern Nigerian calligraphy, including the Hausa/Fulani “knot of the North.” They embrace and evolve Fodiology through their charitable giving and community welfare work and service. Moreover, they embrace Fodiology when they don indigenous Nigerian attire, reject Western capitalism, and affirm Afrocentricity. Thus, in many ways, the LOA is restorative. They aspire, to (re)create and restore the masquerade dance of their ancestors; thereby (re)creating “the ideal social context of the Sokoto caliphate and live by its values.”

It is with great pleasure that I invite you to view and appreciate the masquerade dance of the second issue of the fourth volume of the *Journal of West African History*.