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Editor's Preface

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Editor's Preface

The *Journal of Retracing Africa* (JORA) is pleased to release its third volume. This volume builds on the foundation of excellence and intellectual rigor evident in the two previous volumes. JORA has remained committed to its mission to deconstruct misconceived, mistaken, and missing narratives on Africa and Africans by providing a holistic appreciation of the African experience. The articles and book reviews published in this volume honor that commitment. They highlight the often overlooked or misunderstood social and economic issues surrounding colonial and contemporary Africa. The implications and ramifications of Africa's encounters with the West, especially since the 19th century will continue to engage the attention of Africanists. By focusing on the exploitation of child labor for profit in colonial Kenya, the corporatization of the Nigerian railway to satisfy mostly British selfish economic interests, and the powerful corporate financial interest undermining meaningful regulation of tobacco usage in Nigeria, our authors provide a lens to better understand the roots of some of the challenges facing the continent.

In ““God Was With Us”: Child Labor in Colonial Kenya, 1922–1950s,”” Samson Ndanyi examines one of the saddest chapters in European colonial enterprise in Africa—the exploitation of child labor for profit.¹ Broadening the definition of a child to include those who were mentally disabled or incapable of living independent of their parents, and engaging rich primary sources mostly from the Kenya National Archives (Nairobi) and the National Archives (Kew, United Kingdom), the author reconstructs the often ignored labor practices in colonial Kenya. Ndanyi shows that labor employers and recruiters, often with the tacit support or silence of colonial authorities and against the consent of the parents, exploited loopholes in labor laws to recruit, underpay, and exploit underage children using different dubious standards. The author employs documented cases of multiple kidnapping of Kenyan children for labor to challenge the Eurocentric theory that African families freely sent their children to work due to their poor conditions. As Ndanyi argues, the “frequent changes in labor laws made it easier for labor recruiters and employers to manipulate the system by recruiting younger children for work thus drawing them into the orbit of an alien labor force that often interfered with their childhood.”² By showing how Kenyan colonial children were exposed to unimaginable risks without providing adequate wages, housing, and feeding, this articles provides a glimpse into the unending story of colonial abuses

¹Samson K. Ndanyi, ““God Was With Us”: Child Labor in Colonial Kenya, 1922-1950s,” *Journal of Retracing Africa* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 1-20.

²Ibid., 1.

and the symbiotic relationship between the state and the business class in colonial Africa.

The politics of infrastructural development in colonial Africa continues to attract scholarly consideration. In "Prelude to the Establishment of the Nigerian Railway Corporation, 1949-1955," Tokunbo Ayoola uses archival records to show how colonial self-seeking economic interests dictated the post-war railway reform in colonial Nigeria.³ Eager to recover from the devastating economic effects of the Second World War, the British colonial government sought to invest in social and economic projects in Africa as an instrument of consolidating colonial control and continued exploitation of their colonies. The author shows that although "Nigerian political leaders, railway workers, colonial and imperial officials, and European merchants in West Africa" resolved to reorganize the Nigerian Railway (NR) into a corporation, "NR's transformation was geared towards serving Britain's overall economic interest."⁴ Through thoughtful analysis of vast primary sources on the subject, the author argues that "the primary reasons why the British colonial government established the corporation was to assist foreign interests in Nigeria by distancing itself from the direct management of labor relations between the Nigerian colonial state and the militant trade unions in the Nigerian Railway and other commercially oriented government departments."⁵ As the author insists, "by placing the day-to-day management of these departments beyond the immediate reach of ambitious Nigerian nationalists who were anxious to quickly take over the control of the colonial state, the colonial government undermined the ability of local elite to build their weak economic base."⁶ This article therefore provides an insight into the intricate power contestation between the colonial administrators and educated African nationalists in Nigeria.

Tobacco usage has remained a public health concern to governments around the world. Efforts to regulate its use have remained challenging. Benjamin Anaemene addresses the politics dictating official regulation of tobacco use in Nigeria in his article titled "From Inaction to Action: The World Health Organisation and Tobacco Control Policies in Nigeria Since 1970."⁷ Engaging various sources including those produced by the World Health Organization, the author shows that although there was a movement from a period of inaction in the 1970s to one

³Tokunbo A. Ayoola, "Prelude to the Establishment of the Nigerian Railway Corporation, 1949-1955," *Journal of Retracing Africa* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 21-42.

⁴Ibid., 42.

⁵Ibid., 21.

⁶Ibid., 21.

⁷Benjamin Uchenna Anaemene, "From Inaction to Action: The World Health Organisation and Tobacco Control Policies in Nigeria Since 1970," *Journal of Retracing Africa* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 43-58.

of increased attention to the problem since the 1990s with well-meaning strategies adopted by the Nigerian government, no meaningful progress has been made to combat the menace of tobacco use in Nigeria. Part of the reason for the slow progress in regulating tobacco in Nigeria, according to the author, is that “the political economy of tobacco poses difficult regulatory and governance challenges due to several factors notably: the liberalization of global trade rules; the powerful influence of and enormous wealth of tobacco multinationals as shown in their aggressive marketing strategies in developing countries including Nigeria; the economic dependence of some developing world economies on tobacco farming; and the complexity of harmonizing cigarette taxes, policies, and advertisements within domestic jurisdiction and multilaterally.”⁸

In this volume, the book reviewers brought their expertise to assess fifteen books with fascinating themes that widen our readers' understanding of the complexities of African peoples and societies during the colonial and post-colonial period. They cover themes such sexuality in colonial Nigeria, Africa's future prospects, food and water security, the politics of colonial education in Senegal and South Africa, African environment, slave port, party politics in Africa, the Chinese in Africa, modern healthcare policies in Africa, oil in Africa, Hollywood in Africa, power and decolonization in Africa, urbanization in Africa, and Belgium colonialism in Congo. The book reviews, together with the articles, will no doubt expand your understanding on some of the often ignored issues in the unfinished African story.

This journal has continued to enjoy the commitment of its editorial staff who worked tirelessly to ensure timely release of its issues. With their support, JORA will continue to meet the expectations of its authors and readers. I am greatly indebted to JORA's graduate assistant, Alexandra Szarabajko, who is graduating this fall for her two years of exemplary and professional devotion to the journal. We wish her well in all her endeavors. I am also immensely appreciative for the unwavering support of the Berkeley Electronic Press, ECU's College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences, Libraries, and the African & African-American Studies program. Many thanks to the manuscript reviewers whose valuable comments enriched the quality of the essays. Finally, I thank our authors and book reviewers for trusting us with their manuscripts. We will continue to count on them in the years and decades ahead.

Ogechi E. Anyanwu
Editor-in-Chief.

⁸Ibid., 58.