

'UI, Ibadan and Nigeria: reflections of a Visiting BNET Fellow

Dr Simon Heap, 26 May 2012

Simon

Dr Simon Heap was born and grew up in Lancashire but now living in Oxford and where he is travelled from this morning.

After being educated at Cambridge and SOAS, Simon got a Leverhulme Trust Study Abroad Studentship to study for his doctorate in History at the University of Ibadan. His topic was 'The liquor trade and the Nigerian economy, 1880-1939'.

Simon's research interests have been the supply, transport, marketing, regulation, manufacture and uses of alcohol in Nigeria, as well as a variety of other subjects such as NGO-business relations, civil society, Central Asia, water and sanitation, birth registration, children and HIV, as well as juvenile delinquency.

Simon has published two ground-breaking articles on juvenile delinquency in Nigeria: 'Jaguda boys' tell the story of pickpocketing in Ibadan, 1930-60', while an article on juvenile delinquent boys on Lagos Island was published in the *Journal of Family History* in 2010.

Simon has been the voluntary editor of the ASUK newsletter since 2004, of which Simon will tell you more.

He recently joined JICA, the Japan International Co-operation Agency, in their London office, where he is Senior Programme Officer.

The Fellowship

I want to thank Alastair Burt and Gary Clark for inviting me, and hopefully I can in my short talk followed by with an interactive Q+A session give you a real sense of what being the Britain-Nigeria Educational Trust's Commonwealth Fellow at the University of Ibadan amounts to.

People rarely say the University of Ibadan, it's 'UI', or just 'School' and it's those two, which I'll say during my talk.

I want primarily share with you my experiences on the fellowship at the UI, but also give you a few reflections on the remarkable city of Ibadan, as well as state of Nigeria in contemporary times.

But first, let me explain about this BNET fellowship. It is a competition open to citizens of the Commonwealth. So a Canadian, an Indian, a Tuvaluan or even a Mozambican could be a fellow. The fellowship is funded with a generous grant from BNET, administered by the Association of Commonwealth Universities and hosted by UI. The three-month fellowship covers airfare, a monthly stipend of \$3,000, and certain other expenses, while UI provides accommodation on campus. The BNET fellowship scheme started last year and it is fully funded for the next five years. So it competed for annually until 2015. In fact, though the total package is worth 10,000 Pounds, I accepted 8,000 Pounds, so that the difference could be put towards an extra year's fellowship.

I have to say that I am a lucky guy. I spotted the initial advertisement as half a line at the bottom of an e-mail message, and pursued it. Indeed, initially I was told that the deadline had passed – it had not, and eventually I was shortlisted along with other candidates from other Commonwealth countries, and that shortlist was sent to the UI authorities for their consideration and decision. I have yet to see the advertisement for 2012, as a lot of people have contacted me for details, but I have been informed that the advert will be out next month.

UI

As the first holder of this new fellowship, I was at UI between 6 September and 7 December 2011. I was based at the Department of History, a place familiar to me, having spent five-and-a-half years studying for my doctorate there as a full-time student in the 1990s, courtesy of a Leverhulme Trust Study Abroad Studentship.

From several weeks before I arrived in early September 2011 to a couple months after I left in early December, 'school' was not on. In September, I thought it was the rainy days of summer and everyone talked of an October resumption, but a combination of bureaucratic and teaching lethargy, and a Boko Haram scare with a note that campus was a target, stopped activities. There was no hyena has escaped from the zoo alarm, which

is the usual ploy to clear UI of human beings! Then there was the one-week of Convocation in November: the annual graduation of students on the birthday of the founding of UI on 16 November 1948 and when students and their families consume tonnes of rice and chicken and drinks. UI still did not begin before Christmas, as there was an ASUU strike threat, which turned into an ASUU strike, which kept undergraduates away from campus.

Not quite all, the prospective First Year students were around. Such is the bad state of education, and possibilities of buying results, that despite having done their exams and completed their JAMB, they have to do a completely separate University Admissions Exam.

I am delighted to report that it proved a very exciting and mutually stimulating time throughout my stay at UI, though for the entire period of my stay, the University was not in session: no lectures took place, and the only students around campus were postgraduates. This proved fortunate, as mentoring students was a primary focus of my fellowship. Let me start with them.

Working with Students and Staff

I worked with each of the ten doctoral history postgraduates for mutual learning and to build knowledge and skills to improve their capacity to think about history, and unpack what is required to contribute to original historical research, no matter if they were just starting or writing up their work.

Learning for such improvement was done by doing very practical things – reading a proposal, editing a chapter or two or three. I was not there to undermine their actual supervisor. But, ultimately, by giving an outside perspective, by making personal connections, and being a mentor and experienced informant, I wanted my fellowship to provide a boost, encouragement to the study of history among students and staff.

Some Master's students also had material worthy of publication, while others want to pursue their doctorate but were unsure about topics which could be both interesting, able to sustain them for several years in the future as well as possible academic careers. With Nigeria having 108 public and private universities, and even more in the pipeline, and UI recognised as the premier university and more of a postgraduate feeder university for the rest of the country, no wonder a significant proportion of students stay on for their Masters and Doctorates knowing that many vacancies for potential academic posts exist. You might want to return to this matter in your questions.

Whilst in the History Department and at the National Archives at Ibadan (which are conveniently located on UI campus), I was very happy to help students who voluntarily came forward with their work for my comment and advice. This included students other universities: Benin, Ife and Lagos, but also involved pensioners looking for their name in Government Gazettes, so they could reconfirm who they were, what they had done, for how long, and so retain their pension. A sad but necessary process in these days where ghost workers become ghost pensioners claiming money they are not entitled to.

Throughout my fellowship, I became like a journal reviewer or personal editor, but with the advantage of being sat with the student in person so as to build up a rapport and listen to their perspectives, making for a two-way conversation rather than just a formal impersonal report.

For the period of my fellowship I filled and refilled the main History Department noticeboard, as well putting things on the Faculty of Arts noticeboards. This proved an effective and cheap way of getting to more students. For example, encouraged at hearing that Final-Year History undergraduates have to do their long essay on a topic relating to Ibadan, and having written on the city's history, I made a list of twenty possible topics on what they might be chosen for long essays on Ibadan. Having seen the students crowding round that list and talking to me further, I thought up another twenty topics. Subjects for Masters and Ph.D study were also suggested, and caught the eye of several students. While time is limited here, let me relate a few of the individual stories.

1. Jimoh was a doctoral student who was also a teaching assistant. He had spent over a year developing a proposal on a 19th century history topic which he thought was eminently researchable. With virtually no records, it was not. Fortunately I was able to discuss quite openly with him the sheer impossibility of the topic. He enthusiastically embraced several new potential topics, seeing the advantage of using his knowledge of Lagos to aid his study. I left him actively considering examining Lagos through the lifetime writings of Herbert Macaulay for his thesis. Macaulay left copious amounts of records
2. Muritala was in his 3rd year doing his thesis on 'The 'History of Livelihoods in Lagos, 1861-1960', an interesting topic. I read and edited draft two chapters and then gave feedback advice in a two-hour session.

3. Abiodun had completed his doctorate on 'Colonial Taxation in SW Nigeria', and was seeking publications; I read three papers with view to improving them for sending to journals for publication; 2½ hours feedback session.
4. Sylvester gave me his draft proposal on, 'The development of the prisons systems in SW Nigeria, 1872-1960', and then we discussed it, suggesting clearer focus, a possible hypothesis to be tested, methodology, and possible source material.
5. Having read his proposal, I had a productive discussion with David, a second year doctoral student studying the 'History of Nigerian Bar Council, 1960-2010'.
6. Fourth year student Julius had a very exciting thesis on 'Colonial Medicine in Ibadan', and so I read three drafts chapters, edited them, and had a long feedback session.
7. A Master's student, Dayo, was considering staying on to do his doctorate and in early stages of writing a short proposal on the Juvenile Justice System in SW Nigeria, 1960-2010. I gave him suggestions on how to unpack the subject and make the most of this topic.
8. Rosemary was a female Master's student, who was seriously thinking of doing doctoral work, but did not know what topic would prove fruitful, and so we discussed about the history of the interaction between man and wildlife in Nigeria.

Now the History Department is the place where the Ibadan School of History developed in the 1960s and 70s, summarised in that excellent series of 15-18 books. Today, overall, the standard of historical scholarship is good, but there seems a reluctance at undergraduate and Master's level to try new topics outside the department's noted past expertise on ethnicity, chieftaincy and elites. Statistical data and analysis was noticeably absent, even for economic history studies like that on taxation. By the way, my favourite bumper sticker remains 'No event, no history'. Nigeria has plenty of events!

I sought out and interacted with staff in many other departments, notably Library and Archives Studies, Social Work, Sociology and Archaeology and Anthropology.

The History Department is not a diverse body: all nine lecturers and ten doctoral students were male. Yet females were a significant minority among the Master's students and made up nearly half the undergraduate body.

UI's Undergraduate History Course is a broad and fascinating mix: from 'Nigeria inter-group relations', 'North Africa, 1500-1800', and 'Economic History of West Africa since 1800' [a course I used to teach when I was a student there]; but also courses like 'Latin America, 1492-1825', 'USA from Colony to Nationhood', and 'Europe's Diplomatic Scene, 1870-1919'. There are two Historiography courses, but the need for a Methodology Course seems pressing, as well as considering the value of a History of Ibadan first year course, given the fact that the student's do a final year long essay on Ibadan. That's an innovation I really appreciate – doing something on your doorstep which you can see, visit and research locally.

Research and workshops

I was allowed to devote one-quarter of my fellowship time to my own specific current research interests, involving work in the National Archives housed on the UI campus, as well as fieldwork trips to Lagos (twice), Ife, Osogbo (twice) and Abeokuta. The trips gleaned very useful primary data, as well as hard-to-find secondary literature.

Most of my original doctoral thesis, 'The Liquor Trade and the Nigerian economy, 1880-1939' has been published, and I am looking more into the juvenile delinquency history as well as the larger question of the historical archives of the country, of which I return to in this talk.

I am a philatelist, with a major collection on 'The Nigerias' (Lagos, Oil River, Niger Coast Protectorate, Southern and Northern Nigeria and Nigeria). I researched enough philatelic stories were to keep me in print for the next five years through the West Africa Study Circle's award winning magazine, *Cameo*.

I participated in a Writing Workshop held at Osun State University in early September. This was organised by the African Studies Association of the UK (ASAUK). Thirty students from around the country came with their best essays to learn about publication in Africanist journals, as well as to peer-review each other's papers. In October, I also attended the two-day Historical Society of Nigeria's Congress, also at the same venue. By the way, I agree with the view that: Osun State University is the most political university, but not in the way you would imagine: with six geopolitical zones, so campus spread across those zones. The 'main campus' was an impressive lecture hall and admin block and that was it – miles from Osogbo, with little accommodation and few facilities.

Public Lectures, Seminars and Book Donation

Due to the university being on “summer break”, my intended public lectures never materialised. This was disappointing because such occasions allow the senior university authorities and general public to attend. Nonetheless, two very well attended two-hour seminars took place instead at the Faculty of Arts. The first on 24 November was on ‘Ogogoro: a booming business in 1930’s Nigeria’, and the second a week later on ‘Jaguda: pickpockets picking pockets in Ibadan, 1930s-1950s’.

After completion of my second seminar, 50 publications bought with BNET money were donated to the History Department library. By talking to students, the librarian, and seeing what was missing in terms of important classic texts and recently published books, I concentrated on the following subject areas: Ibadan, Nigeria, Africa and Historiography to the History Department Library.

Archives

In my original fellowship proposal I said that I wanted to ‘publishing an updated article for use by local and foreign scholars looking at the possibility of archival work’ based on three guides to the three main archives I had done for the journal ‘History in Africa’ back in the 1990s. But I then found an excellent vehicle to do so in an even more extensive and sustainable way through the Internet.

This was due to the Archives Wiki run by the American Historical Association, which is a free global website with guides for all the archives of the world. Early on in my fellowship in September 2011, I rushed to the National Archives of Nigeria page: http://archiveswiki.historians.org/index.php/National_Archives_of_Nigeria. It was completely empty. Over the following weeks, I got all my three 12-15 page guides typed up, and I coded and uploaded them to the website. I got archivists in Calabar, Abeokuta and Kaduna to add data.

The results have been excellent. By the time I finished my fellowship in December 2011 the webpage had over 2,000 hits and I am proud and excited to tell you that the total number of hits stands at 9,300 and rising. It is so gratifying to know that through the BNET Fellowship I had made a lasting resource that Nigerians and non-Nigerians can use, at any time, for free. As Professor Will Hanley, one the Wiki Archives editors, wrote, “Simon, thanks so much for your fantastic work on the National Archives of Nigeria page. This is the sort of generous information sharing that will make a real difference to other researchers.”

ASAUK

I am the long-standing editor of the African Studies Association of the UK (ASAUK) quarterly newsletter, which goes to 1,500 members around the world, and is then posted at www.asauk.net During my fellowship I publicised ASAUK through conversations and adverts and a dozen new ASAUK members were recruited. I spent time establishing a more systematic way for UI conferences to be included in the newsletter and that the newsletter’s fellowships, scholarships and other matters of interest to students and lecturers be regularly and properly publicised on campus.

Campus life

I like talking with students. Why do they study? What is their extracurricular activity? For the religious there is plenty to do, for the rest it is not so easy. University societies are few and far between: the Kegites Club, a male club centred on drinking palm wine, being a notable exception. Otherwise, students fall back on their own hall of residence or may aspire to the student union. The Theatre Arts Department provides some excellent plays, one of which called ‘Beautiful Nigeria’ ran through the last hundred years of Nigeria’s history in a dramatic and musical way. The student newspapers full of gossip and jokes from 20 years ago are sadly no more. A good part of that change is Facebook. Ranks of students in cyber cafes checking their Facebook page was noticeable.

One part of campus north of the Student Union Building (SUB) is the typing pool. An indication of how your life straddles technological innovation. In my student days, it was all typewriters and cyclostyle sheets and foolscap paper. I got my first laptop while at UI, bought off a visiting professor – using a software system which has long been consigned to museums; it was a glorified typewriter, and that is what I wanted having put my entire data for my thesis on 10,000 index card – specially made at the UI printing press. Back to more recent times, where the typing pool is a mass of desktops, a few laptops, and photocopy machines, and enough wire to go round the earth three time, as well as a small field of generators when the juice from the wires stopped, as well as customers armed with datasticks, called locally Flash. What remains the same is the hustle and bustle of business, papers being typed, CV being touched up, theses being printed, and paper, paper, paper.

In an environment where electronic media and computers and electricity are rare, the absence of students carrying and reading books was very evident. I love books – in fact my house mate Prof. Paula from Chicago had a Kindle, and she even downloaded books and newspapers from the internet, but I still find paper books the way to read. UI is blessed with an excellent bookshop, and Ibadan has Booksellers an even better emporium of books. Other like Odusote, which used to be a favoured destination when I was a student, was a

shadow of itself. Of course, booksellers on the street – so called ‘bend down bookshops’ provided good places to get second-hand books. Ibadan remains the publishing capital of the country, as a walk down Magazine Road reminds you, and it was good to see locally produced versions of international best sellers sold at a local price. For example, John Iliffe’s, *Africans: History of a Continent* was printed in Nigeria and sold at under four pounds each. Rereading Professor Kenneth Mellanby’s book on UI foundation you really do get a sense of exploration, risk, a plan, a comradeship, a birth, the planting of a seed. Today’s campus is a beautiful place!

Ibadan

Founded in 1829 as a war camp following the collapse of the Oyo kingdom, Ibadan quickly became the largest Yoruba city-state during the period up to its incorporation into the British Empire in 1893. Urbanisation followed a war camp pattern, rather than the traditional Yoruba city plan as there was no king’s palace at its centre and, with wars raging in Yorubaland, the inhabitants built a 17.6 kilometre city wall around Ibadan, enclosing an urban and farmed area of 2,240 hectares. Ibadan grew to be the largest city in Africa by the late nineteenth century, and still held that title until the 1950s. It is a very large city at around 3.5 million people, putting it somewhere in the top 150 largest places on earth.

In 1900 the first European-owned commercial house opened in Ibadan. A year later, Ibadan became the hinterland terminus for the Lagos Railway, passing flat land to the west of the old city wall where a station was built outside the Iddo (Lagos) Gate. Other European-owned firms followed. The pegging out of the boundaries of these plots was such a novelty in Yoruba eyes that the district was named Gbagi (‘to peg’).

The natural features of Ibadan tended to keep the two halves of the city distinctly apart. Architectural features showed the comparison, with rusted corrugated iron roofs colouring the landscape uniformly brown in the original part in contrast to the cosmopolitan, white-washed, modern section of the city.

Missionaries introduced corrugated iron roofing to Ibadan in 1854. Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka called Ibadan a ‘hastily welded scrap-iron hive’, while poet John Pepper Clark described the city as a ‘running splash of rust and gold - flung and scattered among seven hills like broken china in the sun’ [W. Soyinka, *Ibadan*, 87; J. P. Clark, *A Reed in the Tide* (London, 1965), 11].

Founded on segregation, the heterogeneous suburbs of Ibadan quickly crystallised out into their own distinct characteristics. Having written on the pickpockets of Ekotedo, I made time to explore that suburb. It was no coincidence that the Salvation Army set up its Ibadan headquarters on what became Salvation Army Road. I interviewed staff of the Salvation Army, attended one of their services, and then visited and photographed all the religious sites along Salvation Army Road. I met the slightly fierce Bale (or Chief) of Ekotedo, who was holding a free eye clinic for local people. He warmed up, and even gave me his draft submission re Ibadan chieftaincy, which I read and edited with interest. Ibadan chieftaincy is a unique, even idiosyncratic, system. Each area having Bales, then two ladders of civil and military chiefs, and you climb the ladder on the death of those further up. The Chief Bale – the Olubadan – is the head, but while such elderly men are revered, their political power to effect change is limited. The women have a simpler system, with the Iyalode as their head.

Ibadan is made up of suburbs: UI, Moniya, Ojoo, Sango, Bodija (both old and new), Eleyele, Sabo, Mokola, Adamasingba, Dugbe, Aleshinloye, Ekotedo, Lebanon Street, Iyanganku, Apata, Oke Bola, Oke Ado, Mobile, Ring Road, Agodi, Gate, Iwo Road, Ife Road, Bere, Mapo, Amunigun, Agbeni, Anfani, O’jaba, Molete and Challenge. The suburbs of Ibadan and the public transport system that allows you visit such areas in an efficient (and exciting manner). Minivans called damfos: some swish and relatively new, but the majority old and basic, with revamped windows, panel beaten sides, and some extraordinary ways to get engines started. Of course, you know why they are called damfos? You would be a **damn fool** not to use them. The teamwork of driver and conductor to be admired; I always wanted to be the driver, being too large to be a conductor. Dealing with the often vexed question of fares and then managing to get everyone’s correct amount of change are skilled aspects of the job. An interesting development in 2011 compared to 15-20 years earlier was the number of one man operations, saving on labour costs, a driver calling out for passengers (and there is always passengers in Nigeria!), driving, taking money, giving change, and getting to the destination in one piece despite the poor roads, tricky driving, policemen and women, and the fumes. If any smell makes me know I am back in Nigeria it’s the smell of petrol fumes coming out of a damfo’s engine.

I made a conscious effort to visit as much of the city of Ibadan. With the other residents of the house, there were regular all-day Saturday trips to suburbs, particular targets – a historical monument or new place at which to eat. I was assisted by an extraordinary find in the Oyo State Library: ‘A Guide Map of Ibadan’ of 1968 by UI Geography Lecturer J. A. Majasan. I compiled my own short guide to Ibadan compiled and uploaded significant amounts of information from there on the Google map of Ibadan.

Mapo Hall on Mapo Hill is the seven columned former colonial building dominates of Ibadan's seven hills. Built at a cost of £24,000 between 1925 and 1929, its construction was led by Taffy Jones. Freshly rendered and painted, and with a new roof, it's a popular spot for Saturday weddings and formal events. Stroll around the solid colonial architecture and climb the narrow stairwell to the roof, where you can enjoy spectacular panoramic views of Ibadan, a city that stretches to the far horizon and beyond. One my favourite stores is that in around 1935, to celebrate the jubilee of George V, the colonial authorities wanted to drive a wide road down from Mapo Hall westwards down into the old part of town, but the locals did not want the road because an important chief laid buried in the affected area. The colonialist pressed ahead, and when the gravesite was dug through there was no grave and body, and the locals said the old chief must have approved of the road and so had got out of the way in good time!

Remembering the Olubadan was created in the summer of 1936, it was good to visit Bower Tower, opened on 16 December 1936. The Olubadan's palace opened in the 1930s and Mapo Hill Post Office opened on 7 June 1937. Nearby is Bere Native Court opened 19 June 1937. The mid-1930s were a busy time in the construction of symbols of Ibadan's new authority. With a National Museum of Unity situated west of Aleshinloye Market, all these are fascinating tourist attractions, but no tourists.

Nigeria

I am coming to the end of my talk, but let me give you 5 Naira's worth of my views on the country.

Though I had read about Africa as child, taking out an encyclopaedia on the continent out from my local library for months and months, it was when I heard noted Cambridge Professor John Dunn say that Nigeria was 'The most political and most capitalist place on earth' that things got serious.

I think you have to take the country for what it is, less griping for what's wrong, which is only worth doing when you have a cold sweating Star beer or big stout in front of you. Nigeria is dynamic, interesting, raw, colourful, unpredictable, occasionally mind-numbing but never dull and often brain-expanding. Nigeria teaches you amazing life skills: like patience. Ever sat in an office reception waiting for the *oga* who is not on seat to turn up and sign your form, hour after hour of patient waiting, and then you are so happy to see them you praise them and confess it was all your fault.

In 2011, my Fact of the Year award went to the calculation that Nigeria had the same electricity capacity as Bradford in West Yorkshire. Nigeria is the world's biggest market for private generators. Having been to places where you might have considered electric power to be possibly problematic – Nicaragua, Tajikistan, Togo, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Tuvalu – to name some candidates – nowhere on Earth is electric power so feeble and erratic, and ultimately costly to the individual citizen, to family safety, to the environment, and most of all, the economic prosperity of the country. When I read Nigeria's growth rate, like many places in Africa, is bounding ahead, I despair at the economists and their statistics – growth without development is not what countries need. It needs radical change, building the infrastructure, having the industries, the services, supplying your local population, exporting to the world, living within your means, sustainably. While oil and gas money provides the money to invest now for the future, I don't see that investment and diversification of the economy. What I do see is the building property – the betrayal of the masses (Marx) and not much else.

Nigerians get governments they don't deserve, who live off natural resources which they control, 'building a democracy without democrats' and never revealing a political philosophy which goes beyond the trite slogans you hear on the NTA News.

Over the next decades, later this century Nigeria will have the third largest population on Earth after India (1st) and China (2nd), with half-a-billion Nigerians, maybe more, inhabiting a country where the oil and gas money will have gone. Maybe only then, will the most political and capitalist nation on earth show the rest of us what it is really made of.

Conclusion

Words are not enough to express my profound gratitude and appreciation to those who have helped make this BNET Fellowship a very enjoyable and rewarding period of my life. As someone who straddles both academic and NGO worlds, the fellowship has given me excellent insights and renewed confidence into both worlds at UI, Ibadan and Nigeria.

I hope I have given you a feel for what the BNET Fellowship is about. You can do a lot in 3 months. Though I had a head start in being an alumnus of UI, I remain confident of the tremendous value such an initiative will be to the future BNET fellows and UI. It will be fascinating to see how subsequent fellows fare.