SELECTED ANONYMISED WORK SAMPLE

HISTORICAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Traditional leadership, biography and cultural heritage

RESEARCH & ACADEMIC WRITING

This selected sample is drawn from a historical biography proposal concerning a traditional office-holder in a north-central Nigerian community. Personal names, the specific chieftaincy title and identifiable community references have been generalised.

1. Background to the study

African historical writing has often placed greater emphasis on the experiences of communities and political institutions than on the individuals whose work helped preserve them. Traditional office-holders have frequently served as custodians of local history, customary practices and cultural knowledge. A biographical study of a traditional leader can therefore offer a way to examine both an individual life and the wider society in which that person exercised influence.

This proposed study considers the life and career of a traditional office-holder in a north-central Nigerian community. The subject's experience provides a point of entry into the history of local chieftaincy, the relationship between traditional authority and changing systems of administration, and the ways cultural practices have been maintained through periods of social and political change.

The study places the subject's life within the broader history of the community. It considers the relationship between traditional upbringing, formal education, professional experience and service in a customary leadership role. It also examines the cultural responsibilities associated with the office, including the preservation of material heritage, oral traditions and customary practices.

2. Statement of the problem

The historical experiences of smaller and peripheral communities are not always represented in the same depth as those of larger and better-documented political centres. As a result, some local systems of administration, customary law and cultural practice remain insufficiently documented.

A related gap concerns the individuals who have contributed to the continuity and adaptation of traditional institutions. Institutions do not function independently of the people who occupy their offices. Their decisions, relationships and responses to political change can shape how customary systems operate over time.

The proposed biography addresses this gap by examining the career of a traditional leader whose work is connected to the preservation of local cultural heritage and the continuing role of customary authority. It asks how the office and its holder have responded to colonial administration, post-colonial governance and modern social conditions, and what the available historical evidence can establish about that experience.

3. Aim and significance

The study aims to examine the subject's life, career and traditional leadership in order to contribute to the historical documentation of the community and its cultural heritage.

It may contribute to local history by bringing together documentary and oral evidence about the development of the traditional office and the people associated with it. It may also provide material for further research into customary leadership, community relations and the preservation of cultural knowledge. The study does not assume that one biography can represent the experience of every member of the wider cultural group; its focus remains on the individual, the office and the historical setting in which both developed.

4. Theoretical framework

The proposal adopts a structural-functional perspective to consider how the components of a traditional political system contribute to the continuity and organisation of the wider society. In this approach, the traditional institution is examined as a social structure whose offices and relationships perform functions connected with order, conflict management and the transmission of cultural practices.

The study also draws on Talcott Parsons' AGIL framework: adaptation, goal attainment, integration and pattern maintenance. These concepts provide an organising lens for examining how a traditional institution responds to external change, pursues collective objectives, manages relationships within the community and sustains cultural traditions. The framework will be used as an analytical guide rather than as a substitute for evidence from the historical sources.

5. Methodology

The research adopts a historical method based on the examination and interpretation of primary and secondary sources. Documentary materials may include archival records, private papers, family correspondence and relevant official documents. These materials will be examined for their relevance to the subject's life, professional activities and traditional office.

Oral history is also important to the proposed study. Interviews with knowledgeable community members, traditional office-holders, palace elders and family historians may provide information about local customs, oral traditions and the history of the institution. Oral accounts will be assessed critically and compared with documentary evidence where possible.

Secondary sources, including books, journal articles and relevant historical studies, will be used to establish context and identify areas where the proposed research may contribute. The collected material will be organised chronologically and thematically. Particular attention will be paid to source criticism, corroboration and the distinction between documented evidence and recollection.

The proposal's central contribution is its use of an individual biography to investigate the history of a traditional institution and the cultural practices connected with it.

Editorial note: This portfolio extract preserves the source proposal's historical-biographical focus and structural-functional approach. Specific names and locations have been generalised for confidentiality. Historical claims and source references should be checked against the original evidence before any academic submission.