Reestablishing academic links between Nigeria and Brazil in Times of Covid-19: 
Incorporating the International Society of Third-Sector Research (ISTR) Mentoring Program in the Classroom

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Introduction

In the event of uncertainty in an unforeseeable time of Covid-19 pandemic, many discussions on world issues of socio-economic, cultural, and political activities have taken a new dimension through online debates, seminars, meetings, trainings and even conferences. The Covid-19 pandemic has left no stone unturned as the process of teaching and learning is gradually shifting to virtual platforms as against the conventional face-to-face pedagogy. After exchanging about 45 email conversations between September 2019 to September 2020, on 25 August 2020, I was invited to participate in one of my mentor’s (Professor Leila Bijos) classes of Political Science. This new normal of Covid-19 pandemic necessitated the academic linkage between my mentor and I to take our discussion to online classroom. This did not only mark the first time of our virtual contact since ISTR mentoring program in September 2019, but also established a landmark change in ISTR mentoring program. This is evident with the in-cooperation of ISTR mentoring program in an online class. This invitation initiated an interaction with her graduate students in the class of Political Science and International Relations at the Universidade Federal da Paraiba, João Pessoa, Northeast of Brazil.

Prior to Covid-19 pandemic, Leila Bijos had shown commitment to support my career towards ensuring a fulfilled mentoring relationship as it relates to my aimed benefits in the mentoring program. In that regards we discussed about publishing an article. In the meantime, Leila shared three of her published articles with me. These readings made me more acquainted with the research concepts and trends in Latin American studies. The articles were inclusive of- “Ethics Studies on Racial Discrimination in Latin America”, “Gender, Power, Financial Access, and Development in Latin America: Comparing Brazilian and Bolivian Cases”, and “Deep Decolonization: Latin America and Connected Histories of the Postcolonial World”. These articles were not only insightful, but equally exposed me to her writing style, while enriching my knowledge around themes on ethnicity, gender and racial discrimination from a Latin American perspective. I also learnt the comparative analysis of gender and power relations on the socio-economic, and political issues of women from rural to urban societies of Latin America. The ideas gleaned from the these studies helped me to fine-tune my research paper with the topic “Gender, Equality and Resistance: A Narrative of Nigerian Women Struggle for Liberation, 1914-1960”, and forwarded to Leila for her contribution for onward publication. Thus, the research suits her specialty. This constructive academic engagement ensued a continuum in our mentoring relationship. During the Covid-19 lockdown Leila demonstrated another will to enhance my mentoring benefits by suggesting I join her class online. I did not hesitate to accept the invitation because I knew it will enhance my teaching and learning skills. I also saw it as an opportunity to be exposed to a cross-cultural academic engagement.
During the online classes between 1st and 8th September 2020, I had the opportunity to introduce my doctoral research and shared experience as a Nigerian studying in South Africa while I interact with co-graduate students on diverse socio-economic, cultural, and political issues. The graduate student indicated familiarization with works of Nigerian feminist scholars such as Oyeronke Oyewumi on Africa Gender Studies as an important area of interest. Similarly, the graduate class also expressed interest in understanding the relationship between Nigeria and Brazil in the area of cultural exchanges. I stressed that Nigerian/Brazilian relationship dated back to the trans-Atlantic slave trade era when Nigerian artifacts and slaves were shipped to the new world now modern Brazil to work in the cotton and sugar plantation. Since Brazilian independence in 1822, Nigeria has maintained stable diplomatic relationship with her till the present time. In 2019, during the 197th anniversary of Brazilian independence, the then Consular-General of Brazil to Nigeria commended the initiative of the Ooni (King) of Ife, Osun state, for establishing the Yoruba Mobile Museum. This was established in order to showcase Yoruba ethnic artifacts, not only to Brazilians but to the world. Nigerian and Brazilian relationship has institutionalized inter-cultural activities in many areas. For example, Lagos State University has a centre for Afrobrazilian studies (*Centro dos Estudos brasileiros da Universidade Estadual de Lagos*) also carnival from Brazil is now an annual activity in different parts of Nigeria. These allowed graduate students express interests in learning about and embarking on future research in Africa particularly on Nigeria in order to be well acquainted with the Nigerian people and culture.

**Conclusion**
The above is a concise note of what I learnt from Leila Bijos in the course of our mentoring relationship program between 2019 and 2020. As we look forward to the publication of the highlighted article, I would like to state that Leila also motivated for the sponsorship of my 2020/2021 membership with ISTR. This mentoring initiative enhances my skills and broaden my horizon as it exposes me to a cross-cultural interaction with international students of different academic backgrounds and ideas. It is an academic mode of exchange that needed to be emulated. I use this medium to express my gratitude to ISTR for the opportunity.