

*Inaugural Lecture Series* 60

**THE ARAB FACTOR**  
**IN**  
**AFRICAN HISTORY**

*By* KOLA FOLAYAN



THE ARAB FACTOR IN AFRICAN HISTORY

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Let me start by discussing briefly some of the basic theories and philosophies underlying my studies and research in history and African history in particular. First, what is history? This fundamental question has remained a controversial one since the days of Herodotus, the father of history; so too are the questions of the nature, method and purpose of history. Here I wish to declare at once my agreement with Hans Meyeroff as follows:

The subject matter of history is human life in its totality and multiplicity. It is the historian's aim to portray the bewildering, unsystematic variety of historical forms — people, nations, cultures, customs, institutions — in their unique, living expressions and in the process of continuous growth and transformation.<sup>1</sup>

The answers to the questions raised above take different forms and vary from one historian to another, and from one generation or period to another. Indeed, it is my suggestion that one's definition of history, of its nature and purpose depends on many factors, such as or for example, the nature of the historian's subject or topic, period or episode under study. It also depends on the historian's socio-cultural milieu which determines the totality of the historian's view of life as a whole. Hence, the major discoveries and advancement in human knowledge at different periods, such as in the humanities, including social sciences, in the sciences, particularly biological sciences, and even in technology — all these have exerted

great influences on the historian's approach to the study of his discipline.

Now, let us turn to another theoretical aspect of the subject of history, namely, philosophy of history. Briefly put, philosophy of history attempts some combination of the epistemological and metaphysical assumptions of philosophy for the understanding and meaning of the historian's empirical data. And just as there are various definitions of history, so have there been various views on the philosophy of history since that phrase was first coined in the 18th century by François Voltaire. There are national philosophies of history, such as for instance, Chinese, Indian and German philosophies of history. There are also individual philosophies of history; for example, the philosophy of African history as enunciated by the Mufti of Bobo-Dyulasso, or that of the German philosopher, Hegel, or that of the Italian, Giovanni Battista Vico.

I may now state my own position or inclination on this issue of philosophy of history. First, trained in a university under the influence of Western tradition of historiography, I have been exposed to the ideas and views of great historians and philosophers — Herodotus and Thucydides, Plato and Aristotle, Eusebius, Isidore, Machiavelli, Jean Bodin, Bacon, Descartes, Locke, Vico, Voltaire, Kant, Hegel, Marx and Toynbee. But secondly, as a teacher and researcher of African history, with major specialisation in North Africa for almost twenty years, I have also come into contact with ideas and views of Muslim historiography, the study of which is regrettably neglected in many of our universities.

This topic certainly deserves some further elaboration before I proceed further. First of all, although Muhammad, the founder of Islam, was not strictly a philosopher, he was fully aware of the historical consciousness of the Arabs as expressed and transmitted through their oral

traditions and poetry. But this historical consciousness was rather limited to a clan or a group. However, as could be seen in the Quran, Muhammad contributed to the broadening of the Arabs' conception of history by tracing its origin not just to the common ancestor of the Arabs alone but by going right back to creation and ending with the Day of Judgement. Muhammad's vision of history was generally theological, much along Judaeo-Christian lines.

However, it was after Muhammad that Muslim historiography properly developed, especially after the foundation of the Arab empire. The emphasis of this historiography was naturally on Islam and Arab conquests, and was characterized largely by the theory of Providence in historical development. Prominent among the early Muslim works was the *Annals* of Al-Tabari. But these works as well as the biographical dictionaries, the encyclopedias and world histories (e.g. by Abu-I-Faraj al Isfahani) show little historical causal connections or explanations.

The real development of a philosophy of history in the then Muslim world was left to Ibn Khaldun, the most significant thinker of the 14th century and the Roger Bacon of Muslim historiography. Born in Tunis, sojourned in Muslim Spain, Ibn Khaldun was appointed later in life as a Professor of Jurisprudence, and then served as Chief Judge in Cairo before he died in 1406.

Ibn Khaldun's major work is a history of the world but it is the *Muqaddimah* (that is, An Introduction to History) that is the most useful and relevant to the topic of my lecture. In this work, Ibn Khaldun demonstrated his full grasp of the fundamental principles of human and cultural development. He rationalised history and reflected on its methods and purpose. He saw history and treated it as the science of human civilization and of the development of society, thereby establishing a 'new science' like that of Gambatista Vico later in the 18th century. For Ibn Khal-

dun historical development has unity and continuity. Ibn Khaldun developed a theory of the rise, evolution and fall of civilizations; he emphasized the effect of climatic, geographical and economic factors on human beings, and rested his theory on a dynamic thesis. His examples and illustrations were drawn mainly from three sources, namely, the history of the peoples of North Africa, the emergence of Arab power, and thirdly, the controlling influences on those peoples affected by Arab conquests. Finally, Ibn Khaldun's observation on the dependence of people's usages and institutions on means of subsistence has some Marxist flavouring. Thus, in many respects, Ibn Khaldun's theories anticipated many of those of the Western philosophers of history from Vico to Marx.

These brief reflections on the subject matter and philosophy of history, and on Muslim historiography, with special emphasis on Ibn Khaldun's epoch-making contribution to the subject are necessary here as they constitute some of the theoretical foundations of my studies and are therefore relevant to this lecture.

## II ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF ARAB PRESENCE IN AFRICA

In providing a brief historical survey of the origin and development of Arab presence at different periods and in different zones or regions of Africa, the first region for consideration is North Africa made up of Egypt to the East and the whole of the Maghrib to the West. Obviously the main impulse for African invasion by the Arabs in the 7th century was primarily the urge to spread their new faith, Islam, although there was also the other issue of economic considerations such as search for fertile land, booty or mineral resources. The first phase began with the Arab conquest of Egypt in about 640. This conquest

was followed later by islamization which continued to make progress as a result of the following two main factors — the immigration of more Arabs from Arabia and their colonization of Egypt, a process that was accelerated as a result of the official support given to the movement by the Caliph Hashim; and secondly, the adoption of Arabic as the official language for government administration and commerce.

As for the Maghrib, Arab military penetration into the area followed the conquest of Egypt and spread from Libya, through Ifriqiya or Tunisia, to Algeria, and on to Morocco; and thereafter to the Iberian peninsula. The Arab conquest of the Maghrib took about 70 years and entailed series of Berber resistance and revolts generally presented in the Arabic texts as apostasies. Islamization was therefore slow initially and only made progress later as a result of some factors to be examined subsequently in this lecture.

This same Maghrib did experience a second wave of Arab invasion on a very large scale, from the middle of the 11th century, this time from the region of upper Egypt. From here, at Fatimid instigation, several thousands of Bedouin Arabs of the Banu Hilali and Banu Sulayman, with their wives, children and belongings, descended and continued to spread like swarms of locusts over the Maghrib for over three centuries. This was the so-called Hilali invasion the causes and effects of which have constituted a subject of veritable controversy among Maghrib historians including Ibn Sharaf, Ibn Khaldun, George Marcais, Gautier, etc., a controversy that still rages on. The details of the controversy are not for our consideration in this lecture; the important point to note is that the Hilali invasion, more than any other factor, revolutionized the process of Arabization of the Maghrib through the wide-

spread of Arabic language, and secondly, through more intimate social interactions between the invading Bedouin Arabs and the rural Berber populations.

The next region is the Nilotic Sudan. Here Arab penetration into the states of al-Muqurra and Alwa occurred in 7th century and further Arab immigration continued steadily for some six centuries. This immigration was particularly intensified in the 9th century as a result of the Arab 'gold rush' to the Red Sea Hills region, a process which led to Arab colonization of the Beja country. By the 14th century al-Muqurra fell under the control of the Juhyana Arabs and later in the 16th century the Arabs captured Alwa to complete their conquest of the Nilotic Sudan. The whole process from the 7th to the 16th century was accompanied by a high degree of Arabization.

We may now look at the situation in North-East Africa. The Arabs first captured the port of Massawa and the Dahlak islands in the 7th century. Secondly, for the next six or seven centuries the coastal ports were occupied by Arab traders who then gradually replaced the Egyptians, Greeks and Jews in the commercial traffic of the Red Sea. Thirdly, from about the 12th century there developed some Muslim states from Zaila port southwards into the Shoa region where there emerged a sultanate under the Makhzumi dynasty. This and the other states of Ifat, Hobat, Jidaya, and so on, were commercial in nature, with concentration in trade in slaves, ivory and gold. However, their commercial activities also served to promote islamization.

As for East Africa, the 8th century marked the beginning of Arab settlements, initially of Shii refugees from Oman on the Arabian coast of the Persian Gulf. Then there followed settlements of Sunni Muslims from Shiraz on the Persian side of the Gulf. These Sunni Muslims were

probably responsible for the establishment of towns on the Somali coast, for the development of the gold trade in the region of Zambezi and for the foundation of Kilwa, the entrepot of gold from the Monomotapa. All these were to give rise to the so-called Shirazi civilization of East Africa of the 13th century, the century when the coastal region of East Africa was incorporated within the Muslim world and the same century that could possibly be described as the fermentation period of the subsequent Swahili culture of East Africa.

Let us now round up this brief historical survey of Arab – Islamic presence in Africa by turning to West Africa, that is, Western and Central Sudan. The first important observation to make here is that there was no Arab presence, physically speaking, as is the case, for instance, with the Maghrib, the Nilotic Sudan or East Africa. Rather, Arab presence was introduced in an indirect form through the Berbers – the Luwata, the Zanata and particularly the Sanhaja – who had been islamized. The Berbers were also important for their active participation, since antiquity, in the trade linking Mediterranean Africa with West Africa, through a network of trans-Saharan routes from the region of Sijilmasa, south of Morocco, all along eastwards to Tripoli in Libya, and terminating in a number of towns in the Sahilian region from Awdaghast in the west of Bilma to the east. An important point of interest here is that these trans-Saharan trade routes also served as channels of islamization of West Africa through the agency of the Berbers.

Of all the states of West Africa where the presence of Islam first attracted sufficient attention, the ancient Soninke empire of Ghana which boasted of a separate Muslim quarters with about twelve mosques was most significant. Ghana collapsed in the 11th century but was followed later between the 13th and 16th centuries by the

emergence of the imperial powers of Mali and Songhay some of whose rulers adopted Islam as a court religion and attracted recognition of the Muslim world partly by means of elaborate pilgrimages to Mecca, with that of Mansa Musa of Mali being the most celebrated. But, besides Western Sudan, Islam also penetrated Central Sudan where it apparently reached Borno and Hausaland in the 11th and 14th centuries respectively.

### III THE IMPACT OF ARABO-ISLAMIC FACTOR ON AFRICAN HISTORY

With the above historical survey, though in outline, of Arab presence in Africa as background, let us now turn to the next major part of this lecture, namely, the impact of Arab or Arabo-Islamic factor on African history. Before going further into this theme, the following initial remark needs to be made: That, although the idea of the holistic approach to African historical study has its own attraction and even some justification, the need for some form of systematization, at least for purposes of easy reference, supports the sub-division of African history into some of its important aspects such as the religious, political, economic, educational, and so on. We begin with the religious aspect.

As for the religious history of Africa, the early works or studies tended to concentrate on the implanting of Christianity and its consequences for Africa. This situation was due to a number of factors of which the following may be mentioned. One, Christianity in its modern phase of expansion was a phenomenon of the nineteenth century, and with its association with the advent of colonialism, it attracted the interest of early African historians. Secondly,

historical research or writing on Christianity has been aided by the availability of copious archival materials both in Europe and Africa, unlike Islam whose sources are scattered in several places and hands and whose study has to face the linguistic problem of Arabic.

However, this situation has rather improved with the existence of a number of local and regional studies of Islam in areas of law and theology, sociology or even as part of political histories. Among the few to be mentioned here, because of problem of space and time, are the works of Trimmingham, Fisher, Munwick and several others in British European, American and Russian universities (e.g. School of Oriental and African Studies of University of London); then the works of A. Smith, Marray Last R. Adeleye, G. Gbadamosi, S. Balogun and others of the University of Ibadan; also those of the Departments of Arabic and Islamic Studies of the Universities in Zaria, Kano, and recently in Sokoto and Maiduguri.

With this development in the increasing output of works on Islam, any serious historian concerned with the religious history of Africa cannot but take into account the Islamic factor. And one of the important themes in that exercise is consideration of the factors responsible for the expansion and growth of Islam in that continent. The factors are many but attention may be drawn here just to the following. One, expansion of Islam was facilitated by the agency of itinerant traders in many parts of Africa, such as we have seen in the case of West Africa. Two, in the Nilotic Sudan, Islamic expansion was largely the work of immigrant teachers and the so-called holy men among whom Ghullam Allah b. Aid from Yemen was the most popular. Three, one very important factor of Islamic expansion came through the periodic occurrences of religious movements when Islam, after a period of critical

appraisal and sense of decay, resulted in the urge for reformism or revitalism. The idea was that Islam could then divest itself of all forms of accretions and pollutions such as Saint worship, polytheism, sycretism, anthropomorphism, and so on, and thereafter Islam would then achieve some religious purification and renaissance. Such occasions of religious reformism, however, were usually accompanied by great waves of Islamic expansion and consolidation.

African history is replete with the outbreaks of these Islamic reformist or revivalist movements. For example, there were the Almoravid and Almohad movements of the 11th and 13th centuries which resulted in the widespread of Islam among the Saharan Berbers, and through these to some of the peoples of West Africa. Also, further reformist Islamic movements occurred in an extensive area of West Africa from the middle of the 18th to the 19th centuries – the jihads of Ibrahim Musa in Futa Jalon, Sulaiman Bal in Futa Toro, and al-hajj Umar in Guinea, Senegal and Mali. Nearer home was the famous jihad of 1804 in Northern Nigeria by Shehu Usman b. Muhammad Fudi b. Uthman b. Salih (simply as Dan Fodio) Furthermore, in other parts of Africa there were the jihads of Muhammad Abdallah Hassan in Somalia, the Mahdiyya in Nilotic Sudan, and the Sanusiya movement in Libya. More examples could be cited but the significant point to stress is the great contribution of these reformist movements to the expansion and growth of Islam. The cumulative effect of all these factors and periods of Islamic expansionism has helped to make the population of Muslim Africa very impressive. The most reliable figures so far available put Muslim Africa at 100 million, and 70 million for Christians. The largest Muslim concentrations are in Egypt and the Maghrib, with a total population of 50 million while the remaining 50

million are in tropical Africa, with Somalia, 100% Muslim, Gambia 90%, Niger, Senegal 85%, and Mali, Chad and Sudan 60% each. Finally, Northern Nigeria is two-thirds Muslim.

In addition to its importance in the religious aspect of African history, Arab-Islamic factor, is also significant in African political history. Indeed, Islam is not just a religion, it is also a political culture and it exercised some great influence on political developments in Africa. One consequence of Arab and Islamic presence in North Africa was the emergence between the 11th and 13th centuries of some Berber and Arab states and dynasties such as the Kharijite principalities in the Maghrib, the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt and the extensive imperial structures resulting from the Almoravid and Almohad movements of the Arabized Berbers. Secondly, it was the Arab factor, expressed in the need to defend Islam, that indirectly introduced Ottoman hegemony into the Maghrib, with the exception of Morocco, in the 16th century. One by-product of this situation was the establishment of military oligarchies in Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. Following this was the fact that with the attenuation of Ottoman power in the Maghrib there emerged local dynasties of which the Husainids of Tunisia and the Qaramanlis of Libya were the most notable. In our pioneer work on Libya, we have analytically and critically examined the forces at work in the whole process of state formation by the Qaramanlis and thereby provided an illuminating case study of a Turko-Muslim government in North Africa on the eve of European colonialism.

Arab-Islamic factor also contributed to African political history through the Islamic reformist movements already discussed above. These movements gave rise to political structures such as the Sokoto Caliphate in Northern Nige-



ria, the Mahdist State in Nilotic Sudan and the Sanusi state in Libya. As theocracies, these political structures or formations had Islam as their main ideology, regarded Islam as the basis of all power and authority which should be exercised according to the Islamic fundamental law of the Sharia.

Still on political history, there was the important contribution of the Sufi tariqa, that is, Muslim mystical confraternities, to be considered. These religious brotherhoods such as the Qadiriya, the Tijaniya, the Shamaniya etc. served as a formidable nucleus of African resistance movements against European imperialism and colonialism in different parts of Africa. For example, the long delay of the first phase of French conquest of Algeria was largely due to the influence of the Qadiriya order. Let us take one more illustration, this time from Libya. As I have shown elsewhere, the Sanusiya order provided the backbone for Libyan resistance, first against the French, and later against the Italians from 1911 to 1942. Indeed, the political significance of the Sanusiya consists more than this long military resistance – and it was the longest in Africa! The Sanusiya has stood for Libyan nationalism as the effendiya class has stood for Egyptian or Maghribi nationalism. That helps to explain why the Sanusiya provided the basis for Libyan monarchy until the coup of 1969.

The mention of Egyptian or Maghribi nationalism brings to mind another aspect of the important contribution of Arab-Islamic factor to African political history in the realm of ideas and ideologies. The nationalist writings and preachings of scholars and political thinkers of the Islamic world got transmitted through Egypt. One such influence was that of the political activist and revolutionary thinker, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani who preached the doctrine of Pan-Islamism against European encroachments in all parts of

the Muslim world. His writings and those of his Egyptian disciple, Muhammad Abdul, greatly contributed to the political climate which enhanced Egyptian nationalism as expressed by Saad Zaghlul and others who were the precursors of Abdul Nasser. Furthermore, traces of such ideological influences could also be found in the actions of many of the Maghribi nationalists – e.g. al-Fasi (Morocco). Ferhat Abbas (Algeria). Habib Abu Ragiba (or Bourgiba-Tunisia) and even Muammar al-Qadhafi of Libya. Finally, there is the theme of Arab factor in contemporary African politics and international relations (e.g. OAU, attitude to Israel, etc) but this really is a subject for the future historian.

We may now examine the economic aspect of Arab factor in African history. It is necessary to start with a reminder that apart from religious impulse, Arab invasion of Africa also had some economic motives as indicated earlier in this lecture. So, following the conquest which made both Egypt and the Maghrib theoretically provinces of the Arab Empire, these two areas had to send food crops, tributes, revenue, soldiers and slaves to the Caliph in Damascus. This was surely a form of imperial exploitation which continued until the time Arab domination weakened.

However, one of the early consequences of the Arab conquest was the organisation of the trade through the Sahara into the Sahilian region of West Africa. The effect was that the trans-Saharan trade received considerable stimulus and intensification in the 9th and continued thereafter right to late 19th century despite the dislocating effect of the Atlantic trade introduced by the Europeans in the 15th century. But the Sahilian termini of the trans-Saharan trade routes gradually assumed the nature of entrepôt as the routes now penetrated southwards into the Guinea forest region. In one of my studies I have

discussed the trade traffic between Tripoli in Libya through Fezzan, the Chad region, Hausaland, then Old Oyo and finally through Egbadoland to Badagry on the coast.

The growth of the trans-Saharan trade helped to contribute to the economic prosperity of the flourishing centres of commerce in West Africa, especially between the 13th and 16th centuries. Articles of import and export were numerous – horses, textiles, books, etc for slaves, grains, ivory, gold, and so on. However, two of the export articles – gold and slaves – deserve some further comments. There was much export of gold from West Africa between the 11th and 13th centuries to supply the Muslim world with raw material for its gold coinage, and secondly, to supply Europe the same because of the change from silver to gold coins in about mid-13th century. All this meant that much of African gold was drained away through the trans-Saharan trade already stimulated by the Arab factor. Also, the slave trade which was greatly intensified as a result of Arab presence in the Maghrib continued, though with varying fluctuations right down to the 20th century. As of yet it has not been possible to have an accurate or definitive assessment of the volume of this trade despite the works of Mauny, Lewicki, Adu Boahen and my own contribution in respect of the annual trans-Saharan slave traffic passing through Tripoli in Libya to Constantinople and the rest of the Ottoman empire in the 19th century.

Besides the trade between the Maghrib and West Africa, Arab factor also contributed to the development of East African external trade. With the Indian Ocean trade passing under the control of the Islamic world, East Africa entered a period of commercial prosperity in the 13th century and there flourished many urbanized Islamic communities on the coast. Luxury goods were imported from places like China. And although there was the rude

Portuguese intervention in the 15th century, economic recovery had occurred by the 18th century. All this was further consolidated in the 19th century with Sayid Said moving the headquarters of the Abusid dynasty from Oman to Zanzibar which became thereafter the base of an Omani commercial empire in East Africa. Zanzibar was also noted for its successful plantation industry in cloves which supplied about 75% of the world's demand by the 1850s. Also, Zanzibar became a gigantic entrepôt through which the interior of East Africa obtained cloths, guns and ammunition from India, Europe and America. From the same Zanzibar networks of trade routes radiated inland to fetch slaves and ivory from the interior of East Africa. This particular situation led to the following consequences: the establishment of some form of Arab political influence in some parts of the interior; Arab commercial penetration of the then Congo region; and the establishment of Arab plantation agriculture which contributed to the prosperity of the so-called 'Arab provinces' in the interior of Africa.

The consequence of Arab factor on the educational aspect of African history may now be considered. An important preliminary comment is that this theme has been much neglected in the history of the development of education in Africa. And yet Islamic education was an important factor in pre-colonial Africa and before the introduction of Western form of education. Islamization was accompanied by a great development in Islamic education, learning and scholarship. With the spread of Islam there rose gradually many centres and colleges of Islamic education in different parts of Africa. Many of the products of these institutions began to provide service in the conduct of administration and commerce where literacy in Arabic, the then lingua franca, was highly valuable. However, beyond this level of utilitarian aspect of education,

there also developed at different times in different parts what could be described as the tertiary level of Islamic education, coupled with high learning and scholarship in such famous centres as Qarawiyn in the Maghrib and Al-Azhar in Egypt.

As for West Africa, centres of Islamic learning developed in places like Birnin Gazargamu, Kano, Katsina, Jenne and Timbuktu. In Timbuktu in particular there rose into prominence in the 15th century the Sankore University Mosque for studies in linguistic sciences, religious sciences, jurisprudence, logic, astrology, etc. Some of the most popularly studied work included those of al-Maghili of Tlemcen, and those of Al-Sayuti of Egypt. However, one of the leading families of scholars, (*ulama*) was the Manufa family of Agit and the most prolific writer in that family was the famous Ahmad Baba with over 45 publications on different subjects.

Another great centre of Islamic learning was Libya where the Sanusiya headquarters of Jaghub became a great Islamic University centre in the 19th century. Jaghub had a virile student population and boasted of a library of about 8,000 volumes. This Oxford in the Sahara — for Jaghub was actually a University town — had a rich curriculum including religious studies, hadith, languages, Fiqh, logic and history. In addition there were courses in agriculture, some form of elementary building technology and even military tactics. At Jaghub, leadership in scholarship was provided by Head of the Sanusiya, the Grand Sanusi, who was also noted for high academic productivity, with over 40 titles to his credit. Some of his works in theology, law, history and mathematics got published in the late 1930s and 1960s. Other examples of schools of learning could be cited in other parts of Africa but the few briefly discussed above should provide some idea of the

importance of Arab-Islamic factor in the promotion of education, learning and scholarship in pre-colonial Africa.

Now, to conclude this lecture, let us briefly examine Arab-Islamic factor in African historiography. First, there is the question of historical sources. The basic and important sources for African history from the 8th to the 15th century, and even up to the 19th in some cases are Arabic sources. These include travellers' reports, geographical works, historical accounts, biographical dictionaries, encyclopedias, cosmographies, lexicographies, heresiographies, hagiographies, and so on. And, among the early writers were al-Khuwarizmi, al-Yaqubi, al-Masudi, al-Bakri, Ibn Battuta, al-Idris, and al-Hassan b. Muhummad al-Wazzan al-Zayyati (known to Europe as Leo Africanus.)

But some of these Arabic sources and early writers present some problems for the African historian. For example, many of the Arab geographers kept on copying from Ptolemy's *Geography* and from one another; they also sometimes added some information just from their own imagination. There was therefore no proper demarcation of sources and the issue of plagiarism was treated with comfortable laxity or levity. Another source of confusion was the inadequacy of Arabic orthography in rendering non-Arabic words, hence the difficulty in the identification of toponyms and anthroponyms or even of articles of trade.

One other problem connected with the early Arabic sources and writers concerns the issue of historical objectivity. It is now agreed among modern historians that historical objectivity cannot be expressed in any absolute terms, but there is a reasonable level of relative objectivity expected of any historian that wants his work to be treated with some respect. In respect of the Arabic sources there is need for a note of caution. These sources, that is, up to about the 15th century, often show lack of under-

standing for anything not Islamic and reveal much partiality or bias for everything Muslim or Arab. This partiality towards some kind of Arabo-Islamic superiority complex could be seen in the tendency to derive all effective beginnings of state formation or government, the rise of dynasties, and prestigious genealogies from Arab origin. Examples could be cited from stories or legends of origins of the founders of the Sefawa dynasty of Kanem Borno, that of Bayejida of Hausaland and even the Oduduwa dynasty of the Yoruba.

However, for these problems the African historian can now adopt a number of solutions two of which may just be mentioned here in passing; one, the need to use only those Arabic sources with more careful translations and critical editions and annotations; and two, the need to know as much as possible all circumstances surrounding the documents e.g. origin or location, method of production, and then the attitude, life experience and purpose of the authors.

The early external Arabic sources came to an end in the 15th century and the 16th and 17th centuries witnessed the emergence of a new Muslim historiography in Africa. This was represented by the Timbuktu school of historians who used internal sources for the production of two famous local chronicles. The first was the *Tarikh al-Fattash* begun by Mahmud Ka'ti and completed by Ibn Mukhtar, while the second was *Tarikh al-Sudan* by Abd al-Rahman al-Sa'di. These two works are significant for their methodology. They combine documentation of contemporary events with evidence drawn from oral traditions. Furthermore, the authors of the oral traditions were questioned for the authenticity of their sources, and the coverage of inquiry was extensive while different versions of the same traditions were carefully compared and contrasted. Also, the writers of the chronicles derived

evidence from linguistic data and from existing socio-political systems. Thus, the Timbuktu historians anticipated in their works many aspects of the methodology of present day African historians.

Furthermore, evidence of the approach of the Timbuktu historians could be found in later works such as Muhammad Bello's *Infaq al-Maysur* and the *Gonja Chronicle*. Moreover, the *Kilwa Chronicle* of East Africa and the *Kano Chronicle* of Hausaland are in fact largely made up of collections of oral traditions written in Arabic.

African historiography apparently continued steadily and unobtrusively its course of development along the lines of the new tradition of Muslim historiography begun in Timbuktu despite some rather unsavoury development in 19th century Europe. This development was the enthronement and worship of the theory of race as the primary and only causative factor in all human and cultural developments. It was a theory widely spread among many eminent scientists and even some philosophers. For example, the British anatomist, Dr. Robert Knox saw race as everything on which all else depended.

And so, for peoples of the so-called inferior race there was no possibility of any invention or development. The German philosopher, Hegel, put the Negroes outside humanity as well as history. To him: "The history of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning." To him also Africa "is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit . . . . (It) is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature . . ." <sup>2</sup>

This European theory of race and its implication of sterility of development and the absence of any form of African history continued to dominate Europeans' views

about Africa right down to the colonial era, and even beyond in some cases. And so, in the 1930s, Professor Seligman postulated the obnoxious Hamitic hypothesis which states that ". . . . the civilizations of Africa are the civilizations of the Hamites." Seligman's Hamites are made up of the white race which by broad definition came to include the Arabs.

The effect was that the early African historians in their spirited assertion of the existence of historical evolution and development in pre-colonial Africa vehemently rejected the Hamitic hypothesis and its implication for African history and civilizations. However, the rejection of the Hamitic hypothesis in as it relates to the Arabs meant somehow the rejection or at least denial of Arab and Islamic contributions to developments in pre-colonial Africa. But, in all fairness to the Arabs, they did not claim, as the Hamitic hypothesis seems to imply, to be the only cause-agents of all historical or cultural developments in Africa; their main guilt or offence, as we have already pointed above, was the subjective partiality or bias towards all that was Arab or Muslim in Africa.

However, the advancement of the study of African history, especially from the 1960s, has been accompanied by the establishment and growth of centres of African studies in many parts of Africa (e.g. Universities of Ibadan, Ghana) Britain, America, Europe and Russia. Also, this development of serious academic studies of the African past has made possible, among many other things, the discovery of more abundant Arabic sources, with better translations, editions and annotations, particularly for the benefit of the African historians interested in Islam or Muslim Africa in particular. The overall result of all this situation has made it possible for the African historians concerned to achieve a more balanced assessment of the role of the Arabs and Islam in Africa.

In conclusion therefore, I wish to state as follows: we reaffirm the rejection, in its totality, the view that Africa had no history before the colonial era; secondly, we reassert firmly that historical developments and civilizations in pre-colonial Africa were the products of the African genius and that, however, the Arabs made important and valuable contributions to African historical development. And finally, we submit that although the Arab factor is not the primary or the only causative factor, it is certainly one of the most important, pervasive, dynamic and significant factors that shaped and have continued to shape African history.

## NOTES/REFERENCES

### Notes

1. H. Meyeroff: *The Philosophy of History in Our Time* (New York, 1959) p. 10.
2. G. W. F. Hegel: *The Philosophy of History* (Dover Publications, New York, 1959) pp. 93 – 95.

### Selected References

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