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**EVOLUTION OF AFRICAN
HISTORIOGRAPHY:
AN OVERVIEW**

By O. Omosini

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EVOLUTION OF AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY: AN OVERVIEW

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Professor of History



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INTRODUCTION

This Inaugural Lecture has come unavoidably late since my appointment as Professor of History over nine years ago! The delay in delivering it is not deliberate. It is partly the product of the erstwhile practice of backdating Professorial appointments and partly the result of fortuitous circumstances which require a brief explanation. By the time I received the letter of my appointment in November 1983, I had already begun a two-year pioneering work at the Ondo State University where I was privileged to serve as foundation Professor of History and Dean, Faculty of Arts. And shortly after my return to Ife, I was appointed Head, Department of History from 1986 to 1989.

During this period, the Department was involved in a spate of scholarly activities; over and above our normal teaching, research and public service duties. For example, the Department hosted the Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria and organised the National Conference on the Centenary of the Kiriji Peace Treaty in 1986. This was followed by the International Conference on "Federalism in a Changing World" in 1987. It was in the same year that Council commissioned the Department to prepare a book on the history of this University in its first 25 years to coincide with the Silver Jubilee Celebrations. This book, which I jointly edited with Dr. Biodun Adediran, was completed and published in 1989.¹ The task of preparing a definitive historical account within such a short period and in the absence of properly organised University archives was an arduous one. No less so was the problem of coordinating the works of twenty-two contributors spread across all Faculties and Departments of the University. Let me seize this opportunity to thank all my colleagues in the Department and others who rose up gallantly to the challenges of the period.

It was partly to recover from the administrative as well as academic strains of the period that I was granted a sabbatical leave which I spent at the Ogun State University, Ago Iwoye, during the 1989-1990 Session. Thus the period since my appointment as Professor in October, 1981 has been one of challenging mobility coupled with fruitful academic experiences and contributions. At long last, I am now privileged to address this distinguished audience on a topic which has occupied my mind for a long time. That is "The Evolution of African Historiography". I am aware that the topic is of considerable interest

to students of history who will no doubt benefit from further exposure to concepts and philosophical issues; to our colleagues in the Social Sciences in their commendable endeavours to expand their conceptual models and, I hope, to the academic community at large.

BASIC DEFINITIONS

The study of man's relationship to his environment over time from the emergence of the first *homo sapiens* has presented interested minds with a residue of challenges; reconstruction of human activities in the period before writing, making up for damaged and lost archives, collation and interpretation of extant material and other related problems. These problems are considered historiographical and they involve the application of techniques and principles developed in the confrontation of them including ones evolved for the study of preliterate societies or prehistory. Suffice it to say that oral tradition and the disciplines of archaeology and ethnography are instruments of historiography. Historiography is thus conceived as the "... discipline dealing with the methods of writing history and the techniques of historical investigation".¹

Three elements are identifiable in the above definition. In the first place, it posits that historiography consists of disciplines. Apart from archaeology and anthropology, others like linguistics, numismatics, paleontology, diplomatics, logic and others have served useful purposes for historiography. Secondly, the above definition claims that these disciplines are concerned with the method of writing history. This is a reference to approaches, theories, models and genre — for example, systems model, panegyric literature, dialectical materialism, to mention a few. Finally, these disciplines deal with the techniques of historical investigation. In the process of his investigation, the historian asks questions about man, his culture, his relations with fellow men and his world view. Interviews are carried out both orally and by fielding questionnaires on people who either were participants in the historical drama at stake or who claim some knowledge based on handed down tradition. In surmounting the enormous problems arising from the questions about man and his development over time, the historian has appealed to other disciplines, contriving their specialised foci to historical advantage.

But the conception of other commentators has introduced an element of controversy to the meaning of historiography, thereby reinforcing

the view that virtually every social academic discipline defies a universally-accepted definition. Acknowledging a sure existence of relationships and occasional overlaps between them, one source denies that historiography is the same as philosophy of history, or the exercise of historical thought and imagination, or the criticism of historical writing, or the history of history writing. Yet, this same source finds it necessary to employ the terms "historiography", "the rhetoric of history" and "history writing" as interchangeable.³ However, the term "historiography" is operationalised as "the craft of writing history and/or the yield of such writing considered in the rhetorical aspect".⁴ This reference to "rhetorical aspect" presupposes that history has, in addition to its method, a language.

The reference to "craft" compels another consideration — a consideration of its nature: art or science? The solution to this problem must be located within the discrepancy existing between arts and the sciences. For those to whom history writing requires artistic imagination and other aesthetic considerations like the classical Greeks in their conception of biography writing, *biographia*, the option is clear. But for others to whom historiography means not only analysis but also a systematic endeavour causal in approach, universal in application and dictated by a regime of empirical elements, a science is supposed. The foregoing categorisation is expressed more succinctly by one scholar:

When considering historical story-telling, the rhetoric of the fictive story offers a useful model; when considering historical analysis, the rhetoric of the sciences in which the subject is less compatible with universal generalisation of physics might be appropriate.⁵

But this source warns that historiographers should not see the existence of these dimensions as a clear-cut choice as the two modes are not mutually exclusive.⁶ The contention is that, depending on the nature of the event or phenomenon under consideration, a historical work may only be predominantly analytical or predominantly narrative.

With the foregoing in perspective, it becomes more understandable why it is difficult to offer, or uncritically uphold, any cast-iron definition on historiography. Without any intention on prescriptiveness, historiography has a lot to do with, and is indeed inextricable from, the writing of history, the practice of methodology and the study of the practice of the methodology of history. As Lewis Gottschalk has stated, historiography constitutes "in their entirety the writings of history, or

historians". Significantly, he also recognises the important fact that it does not just deal with written history alone but also includes spoken history.⁷

The significant role of historiography for historians cannot be over-emphasised. It is a most essential component in the training of historians just as the history of technology is a vital guide for proper comprehension of the subject. Arthur Marwick has stressed the necessity of the study of historiography because:

Seeing where our predecessors were entrapped by the fallacies of their own age, we are that little better equipped to avert the fallacies of our own age.⁸

He went on to caution that "only the ignorant or the very lazy among historians refuse to read the works of their illustrious predecessors."⁹

HISTORIOGRAPHY IN HISTORICAL EPOCHS

Although historiography was established as an academic discipline only in the nineteenth century,¹¹ historical consciousness had existed right from classical times. Time will not permit us to do a comprehensive assessment of developments in historiography all through the ages. We can only identify these ages as the classical, the medieval, the Renaissance and the modern period from the nineteenth century till date. Although each epoch is characterised by peculiar trends and postulations in history writing, a general statement is still possible. The historiography of every age reflected its major concern and embraced the world view known to the corresponding people. In the classical period, historiography focused attention on kings and their exploits. In the Medieval epoch, it was God and His Divine designs. During the Renaissance, humanism became the major issue. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, racialism, imperialism, colonialism and nationalism dominated the historiographical terrain.

The major postulates of nineteenth century century historiography deserve a closer look not least because it was the period when professional historians began to conceive their task.¹⁰ Historiography at this time was mainly practised by academicians.¹¹ It has also been said above that the nineteenth century historiography was characterised by nationalism. Guvstavson observes that historians at that time became the "high priests of nationalism".¹²

Gottfried Von Herder developed the concept of national character.¹³ According to him, it is neither geography nor climate that distin-

guishes one civilisation from the other, but the nature and character of individuals constituting a society. Von Herder, regarded as the father of ethnography, condemned the emulation of French language and literature by Germans of his day which to him, could only bring German society to degeneracy.¹⁴ Likewise, Ernest Montz Arndt, in his memoirs published in 1840, regretted that Germans were mixing their language with "scraps of French".¹⁵

Up to this time, the nineteenth century, the controversy as to whether history is analysis or downright narrative continued. Otto Von Ranke discountenanced subject prepossessions and the making of moral judgement in history, arguing that history should aspire to show only exactly what happened.¹⁶

Another German, a professor of Philosophy at the University of Berlin, Hegel, declares that the subject of his lectures were not general deductions drawn from history, illustrated by particular examples therefrom, "but the nature and philosophy of history".¹⁷ Hegel, like Ranke, chastised German historians for occupying themselves with how history ought to be written¹⁸ but went out of his way to allege "misrepresentations which are current and continuously recur about the aims, interests and methods of history".¹⁹

Perhaps the most important development in Western historiography was Marxism. This phenomenon which as E.H. Carr observes "made all earlier history seem old-fashioned",²⁰ deserves a close examination. Marxism's approach is "dialectical materialism" or "materialist conception of history". By this material content, Marxism is positivist — that knowledge regarding matters of fact is based upon observable phenomena.

Another important plank on the Marxist platform is the dialectics which presupposes change. In this, Marx was influenced by Hegel, the difference being only that the Hegelian dialectics was hinged on abstract, intangible ideas. Every idea or thing has elements, thesis, and its opposite, anti-thesis, and the resulting contradiction leads to a synthesis (thesis vs. antithesis = synthesis).

The changes in human development according to Marxism, occurred in stages towards a specific goal. Marx's all time historiographical schema consists in the following order: primitive communalism, slave-holding society, feudalism, capitalism and finally communism.²⁴ This progressive change from one stage to the other is said to be brought about by economic forces in society and the contradictions

inherent in each socio-economic formation. This is historical materialism.

Let us now address the implications of Marxism to historiography. Before the advent of Marxism, human development was studied in its unique and compartmentalised forms. Marxism has demonstrated that history can be studied and understood through the application of general laws – a quality hitherto attributed only to the physical sciences. Paradigms and models are today regular features of historical writing. Dialectical materialism enunciates that events and phenomena are interconnected.

Hitherto, also, politics was regarded as the main preoccupation of history. Marxist economic causation has decisively challenged that. Little wonder, then, that the rise of Marxism helped to shift emphasis to economic history. Marxism has also helped shift historical focus to the working class whereas, previously, history had reckoned almost exclusively with rulers, heroes, and great historical personages.

Marxism has, however, left a residue of problems. Marx's idea of historical inevitability tends to overlook human indeterminism. Again, the route of human development as prescribed by Marxism does not apply to all societies. This has created problems in the interpretation of African and Asian histories. One fact, however, stands out. Marxism has revolutionised the social sciences.

One should emphasise that nineteenth century historiography was not affected only by Hegel, Herder, Ranke and Marx; others like Darwin, Spencer, Robert Knox, Buckle and August Comte, also made their mark in unleashing new forces of racialism, colonialism and imperialism which have spilled over into the twentieth century.

European historiography in the nineteenth century was notoriously ethnocentric. Otherwise distinguished academics and scholars could not resist the temptation of nationalism and racialism which were, by and large, the by-products of the stupendous growth of industrialism. The unprecedented level of technological development and wealth had created a superiority complex not only among statesmen who soon embarked on the imperial cause but also among scholars who were anxious to justify the theory of European superiority vis-a-vis other races of Asia and Africa.²¹

The period, therefore, witnessed the vulgarisation of science in the hands of Social Darwinian theorists and anthropologists who supplied the much-needed intellectual justification for the imposition of European rule on the so-called "weaker" races of the world.

The idea was then vigorously canvassed that the so-called "natives" of the colonies could not have had a history that was worthy of the name. The underlying historiographical assumption behind this false notion was that there could be no history without the technique of writing. Since the "Dark Continent" of Africa had not developed the technique of writing, it was argued, Africa could not have had a history.

This negative assumption based on a mistaken notion of what constitutes history, was reflected throughout the nineteenth century and throughout the entire colonial period.

For example, Hegel the leading German positivist philosopher, blazed the negative trail by his infamous assertion that Africans were "capable of neither development nor education".²² According to him, Africans were clearly out of human historical stage as "the history of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning". Africa, he continued, "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".²³

Other European writers that suffered Hegel's myopic view of African history expressed them no less vigorously mainly to justify the myth of white superiority which soon became one of the excuses for colonial imposition.

The resultant colonialism gave a new impetus to Eurocentric historiography as colonialists sought to defend their enterprise often on supercilious grounds: that non-European peoples needed the patronage of European powers to come into world history and civilisation. This Eurocentric mentality has affected many scholars like Hegel, Newton, Coupland, Seligman (of the Hamitic thesis fame), Margery Perham, Hugh Trevor-Roper and a host of others whose notorious views are so well-known to all and sundry that they need not be repeated here.

The fall-out of the Eurocentricism in historiography inevitably produced reactions in form of Afrocentricism which contributed in no small way to a revitalisation of African historiography from the late nineteenth century onwards and ushered in the modern phase of its development. These reactions reached a crescendo in the era of nationalism and decolonisation.

AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Having thus examined historiography from a rather universal viewpoint, one is inevitably faced with the question: Is there any brand of historiography that is specifically African? The answer to this question is of course in the affirmative despite the spirited denials by the apostles of nineteenth century European historiography. One question that arises from the above is how the history of Africa was written, or simply how Africans practise history writing. If we choose the first, i.e., how the history of Africa is written, we are confronted with a diversity of approaches, at best historiographies, ranging from Seligman's discredited Hamitic hypothesis to Amilcar Cabral's class analysis.²⁴

On the other hand, if we choose to associate African historiography exclusively with how Africans write history, we are again faced with a diversity which could be described with the sharp contrast between Olaudah Equiano's *Diary* and the UNESCO-sponsored *General History of Africa*. There are instances also where writers of African origin have addressed European and American histories with great distinction. As a matter of fact, the only semblance of homogeneity in the African historiographical terrain may have existed in the long era before the advent of European culture when oral traditions with almost identical characteristics and modes of transmission, prevailed. Even then, certain written records have been attributed to that era in parts of Africa.

For example, the Egyptian hieroglyphics, Meroitic script, Amheric in Ethiopia, Vai writing in present-day Liberia and Sierra Leone and the *Nsibidi* script of Cross River Basin of Nigeria, were all used to record human activities.

Curiously enough, the divergent forms of recording the past (as we have highlighted above) have been recognised by contemporary historians merely as "traditions". If tradition is anything that is "widely practised or understood in a society and (which) must have been handed down for at least a few generations",²⁵ then some of the written traditions in African historiography do not qualify to be labelled as such. Whether we choose to call these forms "traditions" or "historiography(ies)" will, in the final analysis, depend on our conception of the historiographical discipline. In other words, there is an ambiguity to which the seeming amorphous conception of the term "historiography" has given rise. Within the framework of an "African historiography" to which our title has disciplined us, we shall now

consider the following themes: Ora¹ historiography, Islamic Contributions and the Modern Written Phase.

ORAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

The terms "Oral historiography" and "Oral tradition" have often been used as synonyms by contemporary writers. Since this should not be so, a clarification is necessary at least to indicate their application in this discussion. Oral tradition refers to past human actions reported through speech and handed down from generation to generation. Oral historiography, on the other hand, is the reconstruction of human history based on Oral tradition. Ora¹ tradition sufficed for keeping the records of past human actions for all societies before writing was developed. In Europe, Oral historiography prevailed until the "scientific revolution split philosophy into its component parts."²⁶ In Africa where pervasive written documentation had not been the norm, written forms have been juxtaposed an Oral forms.²⁷ Oral tradition which forms the bedrock of Oral historiography is, therefore, central to the writing of African history. We shall now discuss the methods of Oral historiography and attempt to situate oral tradition in African historiography.

Much of oral historiography involves primary data collection. It is, therefore, mainly based on field work. In this enterprise, the researcher is confronted with oral data in their basic forms of transmission.²⁸ Before moving into the field, the researcher tries to obtain whatever information he can on the society which he is about to work on. In the field proper, his approach is question — asking (interviewing). These interviews are recorded in either of the following ways: writing, tape-recording, film or video-recording and photographing. The major handicap of writing is that in many cases, the researcher is not at ease with the local language, especially its orthography. Tape-recording provides only sound and the historian may misplace references to material objects. Equally true is that tape-recording cannot capture dramatic and melodramatic antics of informants and narrators. Photographs are useful but it demands the good memory of the researcher to relate the objects to what he has been told in the field. Generally, motion photography (film or video) is preferred in the sense that it replays the scenes of the interview and captures those dramatic and melodramatic acts that sometimes accompany traditions. But it

has the important disadvantage of filming only those places the camera lens is directed to.

After field work, the researcher transcribes his oral data. This involves verbatim writing down of oral accounts in the original lan-

Having discussed, albeit briefly, some of the methods of oral historiography, it is worthwhile to appraise this historiographical approach in the light of prevailing controversies. Some historians, especially the Eurocentric "builders of civilisation" have sharply criticised oral tradition, the very bastion of oral historiography and African history. Their manners of criticism have differed but their theme remains the same. How can one evaluate Robert Lowie's assertion, for instance, that "I cannot attach to oral traditions any historical value whatsoever under any conditions whatsoever",²⁹ or Hegel's

Here (in the European World) we deal with people who knew who they were and what they wanted. Observed and observable reality is a more solid foundation for history than the transience of myths and epics. Once a people has achieved firm individuality such forms (oral tradition) cease to be its historical essence?³⁰

The reasons adduced by critics of oral tradition include weakness of human memory and inaccurate chronology hence the term "dateless history". They also allege that oral tradition is normally inclined to the political structure in which it operates, hence gives validity to the establishment of the day and a charter to the rights and privileges which it claims.

These defects of Oral tradition, from the perspective of most African historians, seem to be exaggerated. In considering these criticisms, therefore, care should be taken to sift actual shortcomings from bias. Indeed, the weakness of human memory is notable. But then oral tradition does not depend on the ability of a single person to remember. Hence any alteration made on it would depend on the general structure of the people in question and these peoples have evolved mechanisms for preserving traditions.

The most common mechanism is the frequency with which these traditions are rendered in literary forms, for example, initiation ceremonies; masquerade displays; praise names and praise songs; rituals; coronations and funerals. These carry historical information

and replenish a people's memory as regularly and as periodically as they occur.

Furthermore, certain families and sections take a special interest in ensuring that their forebears and the events in which they had participated are not left out of reckoning. Since there is a possibility, indeed a tendency, for people to "drift", severe sanctions are exacted on whoever selfishly misinterprets, or shows lack of expertise in traditions.³⁷ In some cases, sanctions are believed to be applied not by man, but by the gods. There are also sanctions of public opinion, but in other cases, punishment could be as severe as the death penalty.

Apart from African communities having law against falsification, they have specialist oral historians. It takes a long time, for instance, for one to specialise in the *Ifa* divination poetry and become a *Babalawo* or *Arokin* court historian, in Yorubaland. The same applies to the making of the *griot* in Senegambia or the *Alakun* of Idoma. The services of these specialist historians are complemented by the existence and activities of secret societies such as the *Ogboni* of Yorubaland, the *Ekpe/Mboko* of the Aro and Ibibio communities of Eastern Nigeria, and the masquerade groups like the *Onyekuru* and *Ajikwu* in Igboland who keep custody of particular traditions.

Archaeological sources have attested to the authenticity of oral accounts. For example, artefacts recovered from archaeological excavations in the Niger Delta have confirmed the oral traditions of the peoples of the area.³¹

But, perhaps, the most important aspect of preservation of oral tradition in Africa is the fact that here everybody sees tradition as crucial to his or her place in society and lays claim to its knowledge.³² This general concern for, and commitment to, tradition guarantees a measure of sanctity.

Again, even if, as critics claim, at the turn of every regime and dynasty, there is a concerted effort to blend oral tradition, it does not automatically follow that it changes totally because the elements of the preceding dynasties or regimes (as the case may be) would preserve it in one form or the other. In other words, tradition can still be maintained even if it appears unfavourable to a power elite. One reason for this is that power is often shared: A power elite may include elements from other rival lineages who cling to their traditional posts as a result of the monopoly they had established earlier on in the history of the people.

It is here noteworthy that, irrespective of political structure, there is some neutrality existing in oral literary societies which keeps and reinforces traditions for a long time.

ISLAMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Precolonial African historiography was not totally devoid of a written tradition. Thanks to the contributions of some Islamic/Arab scholars, African historiography was greatly enriched as lots of oral traditions, particularly in the Horn of Africa, East Africa and the Sudan belt of sub-Saharan Africa, were documented in Arabic.

Beginning with the processes of Islamisation and Arabisation of North Africa, Islamic scholarship soon spread to East Africa and Southward to the Sudanese kingdoms, states and empires via the trans-Saharan trade routes. A number of gifted Arab travellers and Islamised North Africans pioneered this process by giving vivid accounts of the religious, political and socio-economic formations of many African kingdoms and Empires between the tenth and seventeenth centuries. Such writers include al-Masudi (10th century), al-Bakri (11th century), al-Idrissi (12th century), Ibn Said (13th century) and Ibn Battuta (14th century).

It is pertinent to mention here the epochal contributions of the fourteenth century North African scholar, Ibn Khaldun, who is generally regarded as the greatest of all Islamic historiographers. His two classic works, the *Muqaddimah*: (An Introduction to History), in 3 volumes, and *Prolegomena* constitute perhaps the greatest works ever done on historiography.³³ In these two works, Ibn Khaldun formulated a philosophy which, in an unprecedented manner, probes into "the forces that work and shape civilisations".³⁴ And on a mundane level, Ibn Khaldun made mention of the political developments of Kanem-Borno in the early stages of its evolution.

The contributions of the Timbuktu School of historians deserve special mention in the development of the written phase of African historiography. The historians of this school, Mohammed Kati, Ibn Mukhtar and Al Said made a most effective use of oral traditions, linguistic data and other internal sources to produce the famous *Tarikh* chronicles. The influence of this school was also evident in the works of Ibn Fartua, Idris Alooma's biographer, Mohammed Bello (philosopher of the Fulani jihad) and the nineteenth century *Chronicles* of Hausaland and Fula- all preserved in Arabic for posterity.³⁵

In spite of its worthy contributions to the development of African historiography, Islamic historiography was, by and large, autarchic: it was limited to the influence of Islam while Islamic religious impact and economic life "were singled out and given undue emphasis".³⁶ Consequently, only Islamised areas of Africa attracted the attention of Arabo-Islamic writers.

THE MODERN WRITTEN PHASE

The modern written phase of African historiography did not spring out from a vacuum. It grew out of the foundations of earlier phases. From the very beginnings through the advent of Europeans, written history did not reckon with the activities of Africans. The closest were the accounts of Islamic scholars and the occasional European traveller or missionary who wrote, more often than not, about the activities of Europeans in Africa.

Starting from about the 1890s, however, a new breed of educated Africans, literate in the Roman script, embarked on the writing of African history. These literate Africans were, in many cases, missionaries who availed themselves of oral traditional sources to reconstruct the histories of their peoples.

As I have analysed elsewhere,³⁶ any consideration of the development of modern African historiography must distinguish between the amateur, non-professional historiography of the period before 1950 and the academic historiography of the post- 1950 era. Prominent among the first group – the amateur, largely missionary, historians were Rev. C. C. Reindorf of Ghana, Rev. Samuel Johnson, Jacob Egharevba both of Nigeria, Sir Apolo Kagwa of Uganda and J.H. Soga of Nguni in South Africa. This group took to history writing, in the main, for patriotic reasons and not to earn higher degrees or secure academic appointments. My study on Reindorf reveals the extent to which this group of amateur historians conceived their task. Reindorf, for instance, had clear-cut views on the nature and purpose of history, authorship, the necessity to comprehend the African political, social and cultural milieu, methodology and the scientific use of oral traditions as well as other source materials. Not the least important was his rather dramatic projection of the African perspective of history – all of which are refreshingly modern. The pitfalls of Reindorf and his class are also highlighted in that study, notably their unacceptable views on causation, the hand of God as an historical explanation and their am-

bivalence towards European imperialism and culture³⁸ which deficiencies earned some of them Ayandele's castigation as 'deluded hybrids'³⁹.

Their contributions were supplemented by works from writers like Africanus Horton, A.B.C. Sibthorpe and Sir Arthur Lewis of Sierra Leone, John Mensah Sarbah of Ghana and Otunba Payne of Lagos and many others.⁴⁶ There were, in addition, the numerous local histories and chronicles of towns, cities and states which flourished in response to both local and external stimuli.

The second category, i.e. modern academic historiography, was essentially a phenomenon of the post-World War II nationalism and decolonisation process in Africa. It has been dominated by Western-trained academic historians who practise the writing and teaching of history as a professional pursuit.

K. O. Dike and J.F.A. Ajayi were prominent in the evolution of the modern academic phase and *ipso facto* well qualified to comment on the historiographical terrain they met. In explaining the interlude of polemics; by Africans, often politicians, which separated their age from earlier phases, these academic historians hold that, for long, the works of their untrained predecessors (Reindorf, Johnson, *et al*) and information in missionary and government records had escaped the attention of historians. They were instead stumbled upon by anthropologists who were then not interested in history.⁴⁰

David Henige⁴¹ holds the view that two developments gave stimulus to the modern written academic phase. These were Trevor-Roper's trenchant denial of African history and Jan Vansina's intellectual backing for oral historiography. More fundamental to these developments, in our view, was the emergence of a new generation of historians of African origin trained in western traditions, but who had developed a zeal to correct the naive reconstructions of their untrained predecessors and at the same time strike a blow at the biases of Eurocentric colonial historiography.

With the establishment of new Universities in Ibadan, Legon and Makerere in 1948, the stage was set for the flowering of the modern academic phase of African historiography. Many African research students and academics insisted on working on African history projects. Divested of the obsession with written documents, they employed oral tradition as a major source material for the reconstruction of African history. Kenneth Dike, who has been described as the 'father of modern African historiography',⁴² pioneered this new trend

to prove that Africa had a rich history that was as worthy of authentic scholarly investigation as had been European history. His research efforts culminated in the publication in 1956 of his *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta* intended as an "introduction to the economic and political history of Nigeria". This pioneering work was followed in 1957 by S. A. Biobaku's *The Egba and Their Neighbours* which was a succinct analysis of power politics among the Yoruba people based on similar sources as Dike's.

Other seminal studies came out in quick succession from Ajayi, Anene, Akinjogbin, Alagoa, Tamuno, Awe, Ayandele, Afigbo, Ikime, Oloruntimehin *et al* (Nigeria), Danquah, Boahen, Fynn, Agbodeka (Ghana), Cheikh Anta Diop (Senegal), Ogot, Temu, Kiwanuka and Swai (East Africa) and others too numerous to mention here. Most of these scholars made use of oral tradition along with other sources. This has given rise to inter-disciplinary methodology, one of the fundamental features of modern African academic historiography.

A comprehensive citation of all the historical works published on African from Dike to Kemi Rotimi and Funso Afolayan⁴³ cannot be accomplished here nor is it even desirable to do so.⁴⁴ The historical abstracts attest to the richness and diversity of these works. Suffice it only for us to comment briefly on their character and features. Apart from the commitment to unravelling the African past, the systematic use of oral traditions along with other sources handled in a thoroughly "scientific" manner, there is the deliberate attempt on the part of African historians to interpret their findings more as genuinely African dramas than as mere accounts of European agencies within a passive African environment. These features have contributed in no small way to the Africanisation of African history.

Let us now briefly examine the perspectives which contemporary African historians have adopted in their works. Three perspectives are easily identifiable. These include the spatial, temporal and ideational perspectives.

The spatial framework entails the study and understanding of history in geographic quanta. This results from the historian's attempt to streamline his task. Thus we have East, North, Southern, West and Central African histories with titles in the mould of 'History of West Africa', 'History of East Africa', etc.

The temporal framework involves tracing different human activities in phases (periodisation). Events and issues are discussed from time perspectives and this approach distinguishes History from orthodox

Geography, Sociology, Economics and Law. In the study of African history, the most commonly employed sub-divisions are prehistoric, precolonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Let us note, however, that rigidity in the application of the temporal approach can lead to compartmentalisation of human experience to unique and seemingly isolated forms, in essence to fragmentation of knowledge.

The ideational perspective involves the writing and understanding of history through specific references to ideas, values or ideas. Thus we have such titles as "Racial and Communal Tensions", "The Democratic Experience", "History and Development",⁴⁵ among others.

There is also the effort of the neo-Marxist scholars whose approach is holistic and materialistic; for example Walter Rodney's book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* and the many works of Yusuff Bala Usman and Segun Osoba on the Nigerian situation.

African history has come a long way with numerous studies on the political, economic, social, cultural, intellectual and contemporary developmental problems. Women studies have not been neglected. And there have been lively debates and hot controversies among scholars on ideological and other issues.⁴⁶ Apart from historians of African origin, committed foreigners have been deeply involved in researches on African history. These include Abdullahi Smith, Basil Davidson, Jan Vansina, Thomas Hodgkin, David Henige, John Fage, Roland Oliver, Michael Crowder, Ivor Wilks, David Kimble, C. Fyfe, Robert Smith, Yves Person, Meillassoux, Terence Ranger, John Flint, W.B. Webster among others. African history had thus gained its well-deserved international recognition.

NIGERIAN CONTRIBUTIONS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

Let us move towards a conclusion of our discussion by highlighting as briefly as possible, the fall-outs of the stupendous growth of modern African historiography in Nigeria which apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to other African countries from around 1950 to date.

The establishment of the University College at Ibadan provided a launching pad for Nigerian academic historians like the late Kenneth Dike and others to champion and propagate the cause of modern African historiography through the writing of African history based on rigorous research findings and elaborate interdisciplinary methodol-

as a valid source for historical reconstruction.

Curriculum restructuring was also actively championed at the then University College, Ibadan, which by 1950, only offered courses in British History, European History and the History of Colonisation in Africa by Alien Races and none on African History.⁴⁷ In English Studies, racially-oriented books the *Heart of Darkness* and *Mister Johnson*⁴⁸ were used side by side with Shakespeare. By 1966 when Dike relinquished his post as Vice-Chancellor of an autonomous University of Ibadan, course offerings on African history had become predominant. Other Universities like Ife, Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello and Benin deliberately emphasised African history courses with Ife having the distinction of introducing the compulsory student Original Essays which have remained to date a mine of information of African and World history.

To promote research in African history, Dike and his colleagues played an active role in the establishment of the Nigerian National Archives as a repository for governmental, missionary and private documents. Hand in hand with this was the establishment of Institutes of African Studies in most Nigerian Universities to promote inter-disciplinary research on Africa. More importantly, specific Research Schemes were embarked upon: for example the Yoruba History Scheme, Benin History Project, Eastern Nigeria History Project, the Northern Nigeria History Project, the Lagos History Project and the Rivers State History Project.⁴⁹

To facilitate the publication of research findings, the Historical Society of Nigeria, founded in 1955 as the first professional academic Society in Nigeria, established the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* in 1956 and later the *Tarikh* magazine which have projected African research findings and numerous data throughout the academic world. The Society also published in 1980 the *Groundwork of Nigerian History* which has collated under one cover research findings on various aspects of Nigerian history including the political, economic, social and cultural fields.⁵⁰

It is no exaggeration to state that the Ibadan, Ife, Lagos, Nsukka, Benin, Ahmadu Bello, Port Harcourt and Jos Schools of History have played an historic role in the development of modern African historiography. Their products are to be found in positions of academic leadership in other Nigerian, African and Western Universities. In collective terms, they produced intellectual ambassadors whose impact

on African history, Black studies and other scholarly endeavours since the 1950s cannot be denied.⁵¹

We must, however, guard against complacency and not pretend that all is well with the historical and other academic disciplines in present-day Nigeria. We are all aware of the familiar crippling problems that face students, staff and management of all Nigerian Universities. These range from chronic underfunding, poor infrastructure, shortage of teaching and research materials to the increasing use of the iron fist to undermine academic freedom and traditions. An atmosphere of demoralisation now pervades the entire University system which, to all intents and purposes, appears targeted for destruction. Meaningful research has become well-nigh impossible while numerous competent and serious studies have no hope of being published in the foreseeable future. Instant military memorabilia of all kinds and junk journalism seem to have obeyed the law of nature by filling the gaping vacuum!

With all humility and a profound sense of responsibility, I wish to join all patriots in calling on our policy makers to arrest the glaring deterioration in the Nigerian academic environment not just by providing adequate funding for research, teaching and publication of scholarly works, but also by restoring, without delay, the glorious traditions of academia which are now disappearing like the dissolving mirages of the Sahara desert. Let us all learn from the lessons of history in order to avoid a reoccurrence of intellectual, cultural and political slavery. A nation that does not understand its past cannot comprehend its present nor properly chart its future.

REFERENCES

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1. See Olufemi Omosini and Biodun Adediran (eds.) *Great Ife: A History of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 1962 - 1987* (O.A.U. Press, Ile-Ife, 1989).
2. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 8 (Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc. London), p. 65.
3. D. L. Sills (ed.) *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, vols. 5 and 6, (The Macmillan Company and the Free Press, New York, 1968), p. 368.

4. *Ibid.*
5. *Op. cit.*, p. 379.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Lewis Gottschalk, *Understanding History* (New York, 1969), p. 205.
8. Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History* (London, ;1970), p. 21.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (vol. 8), p. 945.
11. *Ibid.* (vol. 14), p. 877.
12. A. Guvstavson, *The Mansion of History* (New York, 1976).
13. See Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Hutchinson, London, 1976), pp. 58-61.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. A Guvstavson, *op. cit.* p. 263.
17. G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History*, translated by R. Hartman, (The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1953), p. 3.
18. *Op. cit.* p. 6.
19. *Op. cit.*, p. 10.
20. E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (Penguin Books, London, 1980) pp. 91 - 3; 114-17.
21. See P. D. Curtin, "Scientific" Racism and the British Theory of Empire", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* vol. 2, No.1 1, Dec. 1960. pp. 40-51.
22. Quoted in Fage, "The Development of African Historiography", in Kizerbo (ed.) *General History of Africa I: Methodology and African Prehistory* (UNESCO, 1981), p. 30.
23. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (Dover Publications, New York, 1959), pp. 93 - 5; quoted in Kola Folayan, *The Arab Factor in African History* (University of Ife Press, 1984), p. 19.
24. Seligman represents the orthodox anthropologist of Victorian convictions. In his *Races of Africa*, (Butterworth, London, 1930), he attributes the major achievements made by Africans to some alien "Hamitic" race.
Cabral was, on the other hand, a radical and revolutionary Marxist African leader. In his book, *Unity and Struggle* (Heinemann, London, 1980), he attempts a systematisation of Guinea-Bissau's resistance to Portuguese colonialism.

25. See David Henige, *Oral Historiography* (Longman, London, 1982). p. 2.
26. See Dike and Ajayi, "African Historiography", in David Sills (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (vols. 5 and 6). In that article, the authors used the term "oral tradition" throughout.
27. We do not subscribe to G. I. Jones' assertion that, in this unavoidable circumstance, only "a hypothetical reconstruction" is feasible. See his *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers* (O.U.P., 1963), Introduction.
28. These forms of transmission fall into two broad categories — fixed text and free text. The former is preserved in the exact words and must be rehearsed verbatim. It includes titles, slogans, incantations, proverbs, riddles and praise names. The latter, which is the more common form, reckons with the content of message of a particular tradition, e.g. folk tale, myths and legends.
29. See David Henige, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
30. See G.W.F. Hegel, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
31. E. J. Alagoa, *A History of the Niger Delta* (Ibadan University Press, 1972).
32. Note, however, that *not* all popular versions are reliable. See, for instance, the numerous claims of peoples whose founders allegedly came "from the sky" or "from the sea"!
33. Dike and Ajayi, *op. cit.*, p. 397.
34. See Ella Marmura, *Introduction to Islamic Civilisation*, edited by R. M. Savory (C.U.P., 1976), pp. 68-69.
35. See Kola Folayan, *op. cit.*, pp. 18 - 19.
36. See Franz Rosenthal, "Islamic Historiography" in David Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (vols. 5 and 6), p. 412.
37. Olufemi Omosini, "Carl Christian Reindorf: His Contributions To, And Place in the Development of Modern West African Historiography", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, vol. 10, No. 2, June 1980, pp. 71-86.
38. *Op. cit.*, pp. 81-81.
39. E. A. Ayandele, "Deluded Hybrids" in his *Educated Elite in the Nigerian Society*, (Ibadan University Press, 1974), pp. 9 - 54.
40. D. Dike and Ajayi, *op. cit.*, pp. 397 - 398.
41. D. Henige, *op. cit.*, pp. 20 - 21.

42. See. C. Ifemesia, "Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike, 1917 - 1983: A Funeral Oration", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, XII, Nos. 3 and 4, December 1984 — June 1985, p. 5; See also J. F. Ajayi, "Towards a More Enduring Sense of History: A Tribute to K. O. Dike", *Ibid.*, pp. 1-3.
43. The two most recent recipients of the Ph.D. degree in the Department of History, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife.
44. In addition to the historical abstracts, See L. Kapteijns, *African Historiography by Africans, 1955 - 1973. The Nigerian Case.*
45. The latter is the theme of the 36th Annual Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria scheduled for April/May 1991 at the Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.
46. See for example, A. E. Afigbo, *The Poverty of African Historiography*, (Lagos, 1976).
47. J. F. Ajayi, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
48. Works by Joseph Conrad and Joyce Carry respectively.
49. More recently, at the national level, there is the massive "Nigeria Since Independence History Project" which has already yielded ten volumes of interdisciplinary publications. See *Nigeria Since Independence*, vols. 1 - X, (Heinemann Educational Books, Ibadan, 1990).
Topics covered include: The Society, Economy, Education, Government and Public Policy, Politics and Constitutions, The Civil War Years, Culture, Public Administration, Religion and International Relations.
50. Obaro Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, (Heinemann, Ibadan, 1980); also vide note 49.
51. S. A. Akintoye, "Nigerian Contributions to Black Studies", *Nigeria Magazine*, 115 - 116, 1975.

