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THE PROBLEM WITH THE
PAST

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Preamble

Mr. Vice-chancellor, the Chair of History, which I inaugurate today, is not a new one; here in Ife, the Department of History, being one of the early academic units, has had the privilege of producing five professors before my elevation to that status. Since the first inaugural lecture in 1976, the Ife academic community has had the benefit of listening to various reflections on the philosophy that guides the practice of history as well as on attempts to justify the continuous preoccupation with the past in a world which, since the end of the Second World War in 1945, has been increasingly concerned with unravelling what the future holds in stock for humanity. A reading of the lectures of my distinguished predecessors will indicate attempts to relate the past to the present and to amplify the significance of the historical enterprise. One important argument that comes out is that the historian needs to constantly drum it to the hearing of a seemingly unappreciative audience that he should be reckoned with. Such efforts at appraising the achievements and potentials of the discipline are significant particularly in post-colonial Africa where there has been a strong criticism of the 'liberal arts' and cynicism about their contribution to contemporary development. Today, it is not my intention to return to the issue of the relevance of History *per se*. Rather, I like to discuss what I consider the basic factors responsible for the failure of our study of the past to impact significantly on our understanding of the present and thereby highlight how historical scholarship could enhance an understanding of contemporary phenomena in an increasingly technological world.

Let me hasten to state the principle that informed the choice of my topic and the content of this lecture. My belief is that an inaugural lecture should seek to achieve three things. First, it should state clearly the philosophical underpinnings of the lecturer's practice of his profession. Second, it should generate ideas about how to improve on both the methodology and the dissemination of research findings in the lecturer's discipline. Lastly, an

inaugural lecture should summarize and bring to non-initiates the professor's work which may be tucked away in academic publications possibly well known to his colleagues but otherwise unavailable to the general public. This point I believe is very important, for, having reached the pinnacle of his career, a professor should not only seek to amplify the relevance of his discipline, he should also tell the general public what, over the years, he has been doing with his time, the tax-payers' money and God-given intellect.

An Idea of History

My idea of History is based on the conviction that to understand a people, the first essential step is to understand their past through a reconstruction based on a collation of their beliefs and traditions. To achieve the primary objective of History, which is to provide insight into the background of the working of the contemporary society, it is necessary to direct attention to the past. The roots of the present are in the past; the first duty of a historian to the public is therefore to provide an accurate picture of the society in its pre-contemporary stage and thus to unravel the trends of development.

This responsibility is crucial for the historian of Africa where misinformation about earlier periods has often been taken as knowledge. For, concentration on relatively recent events had resulted in a shallow knowledge about the past of many African peoples and a correspondingly low level of understanding of their pre-colonial cultures. Of significance here is the fact that in various parts of Africa, since the 19th century, local cultures have been steadily vanishing with the successive advance of Islam, Christianity and European civilisation. As a result, our knowledge of the past has continued to shrink and fade due to lack of adequate attention and proper documentation. To bring about a meaningful understanding of African societies, there is a duty for the historian to document extant vestiges of the cultures especially before the current irresistible force of globalisation finally sweeps them away. This brings us to the issue of what constitutes the 'past' and what the historian's attitude towards it should be.

The Historian and His Past

The operative word in any definition of History is the 'past'. Therefore, a suitable working definition of History is 'a narrative based on a scientific reconstruction of past activities of man'. This is not radically different from the commonsensical definition of the term since the 5th century B.C. when Greek thinkers led by Herodotus, came up with the idea of *Historia* as a systematic attempt to inquire into the activities of man in the past.¹ Because of the preoccupation with the past, the development of History as an academic discipline witnessed serious challenges from skeptics who could neither understand how knowledge of what happened in a bygone age could be obtained nor see the significance of such knowledge in their contemporary times. The argument, as summed up by the 17th century French philosopher, René Descartes, was that '...those who study too curiously the actions of antiquity are ignorant of what is done among ourselves today.'²

In Western Europe, not until the turn of the 19th century did History become firmly established as an academic discipline worthy of serious attention.³ By then, the consensus was that the primary concern of History is to bring about an intelligent understanding of the present. E. H. Carr summarises it impressively when he talks of History being a symbiotic relationship between the past and the present.⁴

It is necessary to be aware of the fact that for the historian, the past is not an isolated entity completely cut off from the present. But that rather, there is continuity between the two. Properly practised, History is an attempt to reconstruct this continuity. When the Italian philosopher, Benedetto Croce, says, "the practical requirements which underlie every historical judgment give to all history the character of 'contemporary history'"⁵ what he implies is that whatever account the historian produces has some relevance to the present. Professor Joseph R. Strayer was right with his assessment of History as being:

useful in meeting new situations ... because a full understanding of human behaviour in the past makes it possible to find familiar elements in present problems and thus makes it possible to solve them more intelligently.⁶

The close identification between the historian's past and the present has resulted in an orchestrated campaign for 'contemporary history'.⁷ The argument being that the period with which historians deal should be shifted forward to cover mostly events of the recent past. This is not an entirely new idea. The Greeks and the Romans, in the pursuit of accuracy and objectivity, had concentrated on events on which they could obtain first-hand or eyewitness accounts. Thucydides, one of the foremost writers of the period, actually argued that the only form of historical knowledge possible was what we would nowadays call 'contemporary history'.⁸ Since then, there has been a tendency to overburden History by stressing its functionality and relevance to contemporary issues. Inadvertently, this has meant a concentration of efforts by historians on relatively recent events almost to the exclusion of the study of long-term currents and fundamental changes.

In modern times, the major justification given for Contemporary History derived from the positivist tradition which lays emphasis on written documents and assumes that wherever there is a paucity of such sources, historical reconstruction would be impossible. In our own corner of the globe, the historical enterprise dated to the pre-literate period which in many places lasted till the 19th century. Nevertheless, there was hardly any need struggling to establish that historical knowledge was possible or that an understanding of the past was important in understanding how the society reached the contemporary stage of development. One major achievement of African historiography is that it has illustrated that, in pre-colonial times in spite of the late development of a literate culture, virtually all African societies shared the view that a knowledge of the past was an indisputable component of human knowledge and therefore of high relevance to all activities, be they of an economic, social or political value.⁹

The reluctance to accept that a reconstruction of the pre-literate past of Africa was possible resulted from the imposition of Western ideas of historiography; a position which failed to recognise that there are basic differences in the nature of Western and African historiographies. The type of historical source materials available on each society makes this differentiation necessary. While historians of the Western world have readily available written materials, the historian of Africa cannot afford to make fetish of written documents; rather he has to rely substantially on non-written source materials such as oral traditions and ethnographic data. The once popular excuse that these sources are difficult to work with is no longer tenable. For, since the publication of Jan Vansina's seminal work, *De la tradition oral*, oral sources have gone through several critical grills and the point has been well made that what is required is for the scholar to have the right disposition and the proper methodological approach to make these sources yield essential information.¹⁰ Therefore, there is no need for the historian of Africa, and indeed of any pre-literate society, to shift the frontier of his past forward because of a presumed paucity of source-materials.

Also, it is not necessary to seek a rehabilitation of History through overstressing its utilitarian value in order to carve a role for it. While the historian should not give the impression that he deals with the past only for the sake of itself, he should, nevertheless, ensure that the identity of History as a discipline that seeks primarily to throw light on foregone periods is not lost. As Arthur Marwick points out, "to go all modern, and deny any value to the study of earlier history, is in fact to deny the value of history all together".¹¹

The implication of this is that the aspiration to shift the focus of historical scholarship from the distant to the recent past is misplaced. The consequent restriction on the frontiers of our knowledge of the past has accounted for the decline in the vigour and popularity of History as an academic discipline. The historian's past, whether in the West or in Africa, should be conceived

as a period distant enough to task the effort and imagination of the researcher and allow a reasonable degree of detachment that will afford an objective reconstruction of the evolution of societies and cultures through an interpretive analysis of cultural survivals and oral traditions.

One could even argue that the more distant the historian's focus, the greater the opportunity to contribute to an understanding of long-term development culminating in contemporary phenomena. For development to have an enduring impact in any society, there is need for it to be properly rooted in the peoples' culture which is the totality of their historical experience. In this wise, it is important to see the past as a double-edged sword; an impaired vision of which is a danger to the advancement of society, but a clear understanding of which could complement contemporary efforts to advance the progress of humanity. An understanding of long-term structural changes in the society is crucial in explaining the shaping of the present especially because it provides a solid basis for self-assertion and group solidarity.

Undue glorification of the past often accounts for frequent manipulations and revisions of historical data resulting in all sorts of abuses which reinforce the phobia for the past. But it is important to note that all significant historical accounts tend to provide an insight into the structures and basic trends of development in a society over a period of time. What is often manipulated in a historical reconstruction is not the hard-core data but the interpretation, which, to a large extent reflects the values and interests of the compilers and later analysts. Thus, while it is necessary to acknowledge that verbally transmitted materials perform functions that make them liable to distortions, it is also important to realize that they do document the distant past in a fairly accurate way. In this regard, what is necessary is to distinguish between traditions, which are only slightly adapted to re-establish a past image that has fallen into oblivion and those that are fully invented to justify a contemporary situation.¹² The major difference is that while the former are based on solid historical data, the latter are mere fabrications. When

accounts of the past are corroborated by information from other sources such as anthropological and archaeological data, they should be accepted as reliable in a historical reconstruction.

To illustrate this point further, I shall take the Yorùbá, whose preoccupation with the past is reflected in various verbal art forms and in their continuous attempts to preserve institutions and ideologies of the past in the context of contemporary developments.

The Past and the Yorùbá Present

Since the Reverend Samuel Johnson's book, *The History of the Yorùbás*¹³ appeared in print in 1921, attempts to reconstruct early Yorùbá history have had to take it as a starting point. In fact, the first set of indigenous writings on Yorùbá history was essentially a reaction to his accounts. Even much of what academic scholars have done revolve around the data preserved in the work which has somehow acquired the status of a classic in African historiography. For instance, Johnson's account stimulated various attempts to understand what is of historical value in the two categories of legends about Yorùbá origins: those which depict the Yorùbá as migrating from outside their present homeland in West Africa and those which talk of the creation of the world at Ilé Ifẹ̀.

The earliest established idea on Yorùbá origins was in favour of an origin external to Africa; with the theory that the Yorùbá must have migrated from either the Middle East, Arabia or some other area where they must have come under early Greek or Semitic influence.¹⁴ From the late 1940s, apparently influenced by the pan-Africanist ferment, scholars, among whom Professor S. O. Biòbákú became prominent, shifted the focus to the Nile valley region making Egypt and Meroe the dominant culture-parents of the Yorùbá.¹⁵ Until Nigeria's independence from British colonial rule in 1960, the idea of external origins continued to influence narratives on early Yorùbá history. However, as the 'Hamitic hypothesis' became

discredited, it was jettisoned in favour of an inward looking alternative.¹⁶ Thus, from the 1970s, the attempt to locate the migrations of the Yorùbá within the Niger- Benue confluence valley became increasingly popular. At the same time, serious attention began to be paid to the idea that Yorùbá culture could have developed *in situ* within the geographical zone designated in historic times as Yorùbá land.¹⁷

As pointed out in various critiques, the idea that Yorùbá culture was imported cut-and-dried from some place outside the present ecological zone has been unduly influenced by preconceptions derived from Biblical and Islamic literatures.¹⁸ Also, the postulation of an independent evolutionist construct which conceived of Yorùbá culture developing in isolation almost completely oblivious of developments outside the ecological zone has been based on evidence which is rather tenuous and represent an over-reaction to the diffusionist theory of origin. The last has certainly not been said on the issue, particularly as the idea of an external origin has continued to be of appeal to scholars and as there is currently a debate that Yorùbá culture testifies to massive inputs from the ancient Near Eastern societies established in North Africa.¹⁹

A basic problem with the constructs on Yorùbá origins is the assumption that Yorùbá culture has always been unique in the West African sub-region. The findings and insights of ancillary disciplines such as linguistics, ethnography and archaeology, indicate the contrary. For the early times, the cultural geography of the sub-region was certainly different. A discussion of early Yorùbá history that geographically encompasses, at least, the area circumscribed by the Volta and the Niger up to the Chad basin promises to provide a better understanding of developments.²⁰ Indeed, the ancestral traditions of several of the peoples in the eastern section of West Africa indicate that ethnic boundaries across the sub-region overlapped such that, until relatively recently, it would be practically impossible to define the territorial limits and even cultural characteristics of each of the peoples.

Furthermore, the summary of African pre-history to date suggests that since as early as the Neolithic period, migrations within and from outside the area mentioned played important roles in cultural development.²¹ Specifically, populations ancestral to the inhabitants of present-day West African forest region are believed to have moved out of the Saharan-Sahel belt. There is also evidence to support a postulation that small groups of inhabitants were already in the forest region by the first millennium B.C. In addition, linguistic studies indicate the antiquity of several of the languages spoken in West Africa, demonstrating that most of the language-groups between the Volta and the Niger were related.²² When these indications are taken in conjunction with the outline of ethnography that emphasises similarities in the basic social and political structures, it is not wide off the track to suggest that the peoples living within the region from the area between the Volta and the Niger up to the basin of the Chad should be seen as originally belonging to one cultural bloc.²³

In Nigeria, the similarities between the *Bori* cult of the Hausa, the *Gunnu* cult of the Nupe and the *Egúngún* of the Yorùbá as well as between the art works of Nok, Igbo-Ukwu, Ifẹ and Benin are so striking to suggest that it is within this cultural continuum that we have to seek the immediate origins of many of the ethnic groups in the eastern part of West Africa. There is so much similarity in cultural elements like the institution of divine kingship, the pre-modern worldviews, the religious festivals and the geomantic divination system in different parts of the country to buttress this suggestion. If we take this along with the oral traditions of ancestral relations, fluidity of populations in pre-historic times and continuous migrations over long distances in historic times, we should be able to visualize a process of gradual evolution over a long period of time involving successive inputs from outside the region rather than the spontaneous emergence of a fully developed culture as implied by current scholarship. Indeed, following Professor I. A. Akínjógbin's work, the idea that what we know today as the Yorùbá developed from successive layers of settler

populations became attractive. In this regard, the Yorùbá traditions, which talk of the act of divine creation, are seen as recollections of ancient aboriginal inhabitants while the traditions of migrations could be identified as recollections of different waves of migrations both from outside and within West Africa. Based on this, one can picture early Yorùbá land as being originally made up of scattered communities, presumably contemporaneous with similar settlements in other areas of the Volta-Niger-Chad region.

While it is logical to avoid rigidity in the categorization of ethnic groups for this early period, it is not difficult to comprehend the gradual evolution of different cultural groups based on geographical factors and peculiar historical circumstances. For the Yorùbá, the focus of our reconstruction of the origins must be Ilé Ifẹ̀. When the legends are divested of their religious underpinnings, as they should be in a historical reconstruction, the significance of Ilé Ifẹ̀ will be understood to have derived from the fact that it was the nucleus where a group of people developed the consciousness of possessing certain characteristics that distinguished them from their neighbours within our hypothetical cultural bloc. It is this consciousness that has been encapsulated in the Yorùbá traditions and belief of Ilé Ifẹ̀ as a primeval settlement.²⁴

Even if the details of the idea of ancient Ifẹ̀ are still conjectural, two elements could be regarded as central. The first, as suggested by the earliest recorded concept of Ifẹ̀, was religion.²⁵ Notwithstanding the existence of local pantheons in different parts of Yorùbá land, one is often faced with mythologies that in various ways are enough to support the thesis that, from very early times, Ilé Ifẹ̀ occupied a central place in the Yorùbá religious system. This is why, in talking about Yorùbá origins, it is not possible to by-pass Ilé Ifẹ̀; just as attempts to understand the construction and development of Yorùbá ethnicity must give a central place to the Ifẹ̀ factor.

The second element was the dynastic principle as reflected in the strong desire to identify with Ilé Ifẹ̀ as the springhead of political authority in pre-

colonial Yorùbá land. One cannot escape reaching this conclusion when one studies the establishment of the kingdoms. According to the established representation of the events, the most comprehensive of which is Professor Robert Smith's collation, Odùduwà supposedly created the first Yorùbá dynastic kingdom at Ilé Ifẹ̀.²⁶ Subsequently, various dynastic groups moved out of Ifẹ̀; each with a mandate to establish a kingdom symbolised by a crown with beaded fringes (*adé ilẹ̀kẹ̀*) received from Odùduwà. Notwithstanding that this tradition cannot be taken as historical fact, it will be rather presumptuous to argue that it is a recent invention and/or that it is of little significance in understanding the Yorùbá past. The main Odùduwà tradition exhibits such a reasonable degree of inner logic and consistency and is backed up by credible anthropological data, such as royal arts and court rituals, which indicate that it documents some historical experiences of the remote past.²⁷ Further, the similarity in the structure of Yorùbá states as reflected in the political systems and kingship rituals give support to the idea that the networking of states implied in the traditions has a historical basis. What the tradition presents is a comprehensive construct of the events that precipitated major changes in our hypothetical cultural amalgam.

This is why my studies have been based on the thesis that we should distinguish different phases in the state consolidation process in Yorùbá land. Indeed, for an intelligible understanding of the political culture, there seems to be no better alternative. One of these phases was the development of the city-state structure in which there was a close link between religion and rulership. The complex chieftaincy structure and the intricate palace organization of various Yorùbá kingdoms confirm that there was a strong association between religious rituals and political authority. In essence, the ideas of the dynastic principle of rulership and 'sacred kingship', which are the salient aspects of Yorùbá political culture, must have developed together.

On the strength of the accounts, and archaeological as well as ethnographic data, we must again give Ilé Ifẹ̀ the unique acknowledgement of being the

place where these ideas first developed their specific shape. Nevertheless, we should be able to accept the early, perhaps contemporaneous emergence of a few other centres three of which, at the present state of our knowledge, we are pretty certain about. These were Òwu, Benin and Òyó. Probably established in that chronological order, these were the 'Primary States' in what, for want of a better term we may now call the Yorùbá culture-area.

Not much is known about Òwu before it was destroyed during the 19th century wars. However, what we know about the other two 'Primary States' will support a proposition that they became centres from which other states were formed: Benin for eastern Yorùbá land and Òyó for the west.

In my study of the Yorùbá of Bénin and Togo Republics, I have pointed out that the claims of the Kétu, Šábẹ and indeed all Yorùbá-speaking people west of the Ògùn River of belonging to the house of Odùduwà are meaningful only through their association with Òyó.²⁸ In spite of the insistence of local pretentious scholars in quest for roots on taking the tradition at its face value, the more one takes an academic look at the accounts, the more convinced one is that it was from Òyó that most of these states were established. Later study of eastern Yorùbá kingdoms in present-day Ondó and Èkitì states of Nigeria reinforces this line of interpretation and makes it incontrovertible that in eastern Yorùbá land, Benin played a role similar to that played by Òyó in the west.

Both Òyó and Benin successfully exploited the cultural substratum between the Volta and the Niger creating, as it were, two centres which became imperial forces that eclipsed Ilé Ifẹ particularly from the 16th century onward.³⁰ For instance, taking advantage of the local environment and trade connections with Hausa land and the coast, Òyó was able to develop a framework which achieved the integration of a large area of Yorùbá land and beyond through an effective utilization of the cult of Šango and a skillful manipulation of the Ifẹ-derived Odùduwà tradition. I am inclined to

believe that Benin adopted the same Odùduwà -derived tradition to ameliorate its imperialism over a large area of eastern Yorùbá land as far as the Ijẹṣà, Ijẹbú and Àwóri countries.²⁹

It is not surprising then that much of what we know with clarity about the Yorùbá past derives largely from information on Òyó and, to some extent, Benin. By accident of documentation, the prominence given in particular to Òyó in Yorùbá historiography overshadows that given to all the other sub-groups put together. Though this lopsided view of the Yorùbá past has given us the opportunity of catching a glimpse of the development of Yorùbá culture, it has beclouded our view of the two related issues of Yorùbá origins and the significance of Ilé Ifẹ.

For instance, there has been a continuous controversy about the point in time when the Yorùbá emerged as the composite ethnic group we know today. On the balance of evidence from the well-documented 19th century, the sub-groups exhibited a high degree of mutual distrust and hostility, which have often been interpreted as an amplification of basic sub-ethnic differences that had existed all along. The height of this was reached with a century-long series of fratricidal wars. Thus, it has been postulated that the development of a pan-Yorùbá identity was relatively recent. It has also been argued that it is anachronistic to call all the sub-groups by a common name. These established views should be recognized as interpretations of the evidence available up to date. It is more productive to distinguish between interpretations and facts. That there was no common name does not mean that there was no common culture or set of traditions. Cultural unity does not necessarily preclude intra-group hostilities; and even though there were wars in Yorùbá land, it is not contradictory to talk of an ethnic consciousness in the pre- 19th century period.³¹

Although there is no record yet that the Yorùbá themselves made efforts to express this consciousness, their neighbours certainly did; referring to them by various terms such as 'Olùkùmi', 'Ànàgó', and 'Akú' which are

indicative of an ethnic differentiation of the people inhabiting the area now known as Yorùbá land. We do know for certain that as the 19th century wars raged on, there was a demographic upheaval with people moving from one area to the other showing little respect for whatever sub-ethnic boundaries there might have existed. Moreover, the manner in which alliances were conducted among the different warring groups indicates that the sub-groups were not as parochial as is now assumed. In fact, evidence from early European travelers and Christian missionaries in Sierra Leone and in what later became southwestern Nigeria give the impression that, in the pre-19th century period, there were many nexus of social and economic relationships which substantially reduced whatever differences there might have existed among the different Yorùbá subgroups.

Also, the frantic attempts to look for workable alternatives to monarchical rule in the 19th century should be interpreted as an indication that the Yorùbá society is a dynamic one, which sees the past as relevant to the shaping of contemporary realities. One would be right to regard the variety of new constitutional arrangements such as the military dictatorship at Ijáyè, the republican framework at Ìbàdàn, the federal structure developed at Abéòkúta, and the confederation of states known as the Èkitiparapò as revolutionary. But, it is also significant to point out that none of the constitutional initiatives was able to last long. One by one, they were either jettisoned by the Yorùbá themselves or dismantled by the British in preference for the monarchical system based on the tradition of descent from Odùdùwa and/or dynastic migrations from Ilé Ifè.

Otherwise, how does one explain the assumption, since the colonial period, of kingly status by rulers of several settlements in Western Nigeria with all sorts of honorific titles and artfully designed head wears which many claimed to have received from no less a person than Odùdùwa himself. This phenomenon is adequately illustrated by the case of Ìbàdàn which, in the middle of the 19th century, showed a remarkable disdain for monarchical traditions and developed to become one of the most successful republics

in pre-colonial Africa. During the colonial period, with the tacit encouragement of the British, there was a gradual erosion of the Ibadan republican system until finally, the Odùdùwa tradition was adopted with its ruler claiming a status that, in the 1970s, qualified him for a crown supposedly originally obtained from Ilé Ifè.

Indeed, the beaded crown became an ideological concept and a justification for the exercise of regal authority in the Yorùbá culture area. It was this that resulted in a network of traditions deriving various Yorùbá kingdoms from Ilé Ifè. In traditional politics, 'antiquity' and religious pre-eminence are important requirements for political legitimacy; and the closer a ruler is to the dynastic progenitor, the more prestigious he is. Thus, the frontiers of controversy as to which traditional rulers in Yorùbá land have the right to the beaded crown have always been extended by the socio-political situation at a given time. In many cases, the debates on the issue are a twist of history, reflecting the gap in our knowledge of the past.

The fact is that in various localities, the Odùdùwa tradition not only purports to document historical experiences, it more often than not, reflects contemporary realities and even projections into the future. These issues have generated much curiosity and lively debates in scholarly circles, leading to the argument that the Odùdùwa tradition is mere political propaganda.³² Evident overstressing of the tradition, particularly by enthusiastic 'local chroniclers', gives some weight to such suggestion; but this does not negate the fact that the Odùdùwa tradition is a legitimate window on the Yorùbá past.

This is the reason why the tradition has remained vibrant and continues to generate intense controversies in contemporary political discourse. For instance, there have been serious chieftaincy tussles and communal conflicts arising from controversies not just as to which of the hundreds of kings (*oba*) in modern Yorùbá land were originally entitled to the beaded crown but essentially as to the order of precedence among them.³³ Just to take one case, we may refer to the contest for supremacy among frontline

traditional rulers such as the one between the *Oṣoni* of Ifè and the *Aláàfin* of Ọyó. Even during the colonial period, there had been a prolonged controversy between the two rulers. The British tried to resolve the crisis by adopting an arrangement in which they depicted the *Oṣoni* as the spiritual head and the *Aláàfin* as the political leader of Yorùbá land. The consequence was an attempt to bring together the various sub-groups in a single political framework, a typology that became popular when literate indigenes began to reduce into writing the histories of their respective localities. As in various parts of Nigeria, the local chronicles were not just the product of an awareness of the past; they also reflected awareness that this past was important for each community as a means of prestige and recognition in the context of the emergent political framework. However, the colonial panacea failed to resolve the crisis and no attempt since then has come near to getting a satisfactory solution. This is because, contrary to the assumptions in all the attempts to resolve the crisis, the Yorùbá were not, in pre-colonial times, organised into a single political unit. In fact, during the colonial period, the claims of the *Oṣoni* to being the 'father king' of the Yorùbá were often refuted and up to the beginning of the 20th century, many non-Ọyó would almost certainly pick up a cudgel at the suggestion that the *Aláàfin* was their political leader. As such, in the pre-colonial period, a basis did not exist for the type of controversy currently raging in many parts of the Yorùbá country over which king should be superior to the other.

But, since the early 20th century, the political configuration of Yorùbá land has changed, making the debate as to the ranking of Yorùbá kings significant. First, these kings were brought to interact with each other, as they had never done before. Second, and more important, the colonial situation inspired a greater and more widespread aspiration for unity among the various Yorùbá sub-groups. When Western educated elite came to the forefront of modern politics, a major preoccupation, therefore, was to strive for political and cultural unity in Yorùbá land within the newly created multi-ethnic nation that became known as Nigeria. This was the principal

struggle of the *Egbé Ọmọ Odùduwà* formed in 1948.³⁴ With the politically far-sighted Ọbáfèmi Awólówọ in the vanguard, and the enlightened culture-conscious Adésọjì Adèrèmi as *Oṣoni*, the Odùduwà tradition came in handy in the attempt to present a holistic account for the different Yorùbá sub-groups. As the indisputable reference point in the pre-colonial period, Ilé Ifè became widely acceptable as the nucleus of the Yorùbá world. This gave the ruler of Ilé Ifè some advantage, particularly as, in spite of raging military and political struggles, some kind of paramount influence had always been recognized in the *Oṣoni*.

The Odùduwà tradition has not only remained a basis for the aspiration for Yorùbá unity, it has also become the ideological justification for political thinking and actions in Western Nigeria in spite of the emergence of the *Egbé Ọmọ Ọlọfin* formed to counter the political manipulations of the *Egbé Ọmọ Odùduwà* in the early 1960s.

What has been the focus of attention in successive interpretations of Yorùbá traditions is an attempt to use knowledge of the past as an integrative factor. The extant Yorùbá saying, *òpitàn kíl fọ 'lú* (no historian works towards the disintegration of a town) underscores the Yorùbá understanding of the role which history should play in the society. It should therefore not be surprising that the Odùduwà tradition recorded a spectacular success in the mobilisation of the Yorùbá.³⁵ The formation of such groups as *Afèniṣere*, and even the Oòduà Peoples Congress which are currently prominent on the political scene of Nigeria, could be understood along this line; an aspiration for unity based on a people's perception of their history and what role the past should play in the context of contemporary politics as well as in shaping their future.

Indeed, the basic problem with the past has always been that until there is a crisis, nobody cares to pay serious attention to the business of acquiring a historical perspective of contemporary phenomena. This is what accounts for various misinterpretations, which often get passed as facts and

inadvertently impose a barrier on our understanding of past realities and frustrate efforts to move forward. One can mention in contemporary times, the *Ifẹ/Modákékẹ* conflict, the *Àfọnjá* dynasty issue in *Ìlọrin*, the intra-community disputes in *Òwò Adó Èkiti* and *Abéòkúta* and even the crisis within the *Afẹnifẹre*. It goes without saying that the gravity of political problems in different parts of Yorùbá land is always a function of the level of understanding of the Yorùbá past by the gladiators in each case. As several Commissions of Inquiry since 1957 have pointed out, the same is true for virtually all Nigerian peoples.³⁶

The implications of an impaired knowledge of the past could hardly be lost; but rather than continue to lament on these, it is more productive to highlight possible solutions to the problem.

A Question of Commitment and Approach

The level of understanding of any aspect of the past depends on the historian having a correct perspective as to what the salient features of the reconstructable past are, how he approaches them and how much access the public has to his work. This does not necessarily have to involve a shift in the temporal frontiers of the discipline. The historian can respond positively to changing demands on his discipline by a constant update of his conception of the nature and practice of History. At the present moment, this presupposes a new orientation and a higher level of commitment to the study of the pre-contemporary society.

First, the historian should be prepared to go beyond the orthodox practice of data collection and verification and move towards selective problem investigation that, in addition to giving credible information about the past, will make meaningful contributions to contemporary debates possible. This implies that the historian must re-package his data in such a way that will make it clear that History is not an attempt to revive the past, but an effort to provide an insight into the cultural roots of a society, and use the benefit

of hindsight to inform contemporary thinking and activities. To do this, the focus of the historian's reconstruction should shift from the sequence of events *per se* to an analysis of the underlying institutions, structures and conceptions of the society. This is the essence of the culture-history approach.

Second, the historian must be prepared to enhance his practice by making use of tools that, from time to time, other disciplines are able to offer. There is much to be said, in particular, for collaboration between History and disciplines in the Social Sciences. Since the closing decades of the 20th century, the trend has been towards a breakdown of the barriers that used to compartmentalize the disciplines of the humanities. For the historian, this has meant the increasing adoption of the theories, concepts and techniques of the Social Sciences in the mould of what C. Wright Mills calls 'The Sociological Imagination'.³⁷ In practical terms, this translates to an intellectual attitude that emphasizes a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of the past. For the historian of pre-literate societies, there is a compelling need to adopt anthropology as a basic tool and embark on field research himself. In African historical study, the rapprochement between Anthropology and History has led to an appreciable advancement; and one cannot but recall with nostalgia, the optimism whipped up by the government-sponsored history research projects in Nigeria in the late 1950s and early 1960s.³⁸

Third, the change in the historian's conception and practice of his discipline must be reflected in a viable training programme for succeeding generations of historians. For over four decades now, the teaching curricula in most African universities have been an over-reaction to the euro-centric conception of history. This has led to concentration on the history of Africa almost to the total exclusion of the histories of other parts of the world. The shift of emphasis was a legitimate dimension to the nationalist struggle and the pre-Africanist movement. But African History has matured beyond the level of demonstrating that Africa had a pre-European history that

could be reconstructed, to one of obtaining a clear understanding of the different stages of the institutional development in the pre-colonial period.

It is also true that in our programmes we should emphasize the history of African peoples. This will obviously put us on a firm ground and enable us counter effectively such issues as racism, neo-colonialism and now globalisation. However, if we seek to have a good comprehension of the world in which we live, there are some aspects of world history that should not be ignored. Indeed, the historian in any part of the globe must be prepared to imbibe the idea of world history in order to broaden his intellectual horizon.³⁹ Strengthening the non-African history components of our programme will inform our students of key developments in different parts of the world over time. It will also equip them to grasp the realities of the changing world wherever life may lead them to be.

Furthermore, in the 21st century, the concern of the historian has to widen from plainly political or economic topics to include themes, which in the middle of the 20th century would have appeared to the orthodox historian as esoteric or simply mundane. The struggle to relate achievements in science and technology to the progress of humanity necessitates a historical perspective of the science disciplines. As the pressure of specific problems intensifies – one may think of environmental problems like deforestation and pollution, medical issues like HIV/AIDS and infant and maternal mortality, social menace such as drug peddling, child trafficking and cultism or ethical issues involved in genetic engineering relating to cloning and the production of new foods – the historical approach will be of relevance in understanding the link between cultural perception, informed actions and possible social resistance to intervention strategies. Therefore, the appreciation of History as an academic discipline that provides basic background knowledge for proper understanding of contemporary issues is bound to increase. In anticipation of this, there is need for our teaching and research programmes to be comprehensive and to reflect the overall trend in academic scholarship.

Fourth, the modern historian must give serious thought to the way by which he gets his work to the public. The dissemination of historical information has often not been adequate. This has contributed in no small measure to the poor knowledge of the past by the public. For the public to appreciate the importance of historical knowledge, the scholar must design ways and means by which the results of his studies will reach a wider audience than his professional colleagues and members of the academic community. As this issue is crucial, it is necessary to suggest a number of ways it could be done.

The first obvious step is a general historical education through the dissemination of research findings in the usual form of publications, seminars and workshops. Scholarly debates are valid academic exercises, but there is also an obligation to inform the public and non-initiates. Thus, there is the need to develop a culture of book writing, presenting basic data exhumed through research, not just to students but also to the general reader. This will involve the production of comprehensive accounts that will synthesize the micro-histories that may result from original research and allow the public to acquire a wider perspective of historical development in a given community. In this way, the problem of dullness of the past that often results from concentration on narrow topics – as is common with all works of original research – can be overcome in due course.

A second step of equal importance is the use of the popular media that, in the technological age should be seen by the historian as an indispensable means of reaching a wide audience.⁴⁰ Literature could be of immense assistance here. To convey impressions of the past, poets, playwrights and novelists have long used *faction* – the blend of facts and imagination. In different African countries today, several literary writers, through imaginative reconstructions of the past, vividly bring out the ideas that historians aspire to express. When one reads the plays of Wọlé Sọyínká, Ọlá Rótímí and Adébáyọ Fálétí, one can not but be struck by the clear picture of what they believe to be the Yorùbá past. A look at Chinua

Achebe's novels or Mazizi Kunene's brilliantly rendered English version of the Zulu epic, *Emperor Shaka the Great*, convinces one that a large amount of historical data could reach the public through literary works. And, any time one watches Akínwùmí Ìsòlá's home video *Saworo Ide*, one is tempted to ask if that piece has not conveyed more information and ideas about neo-colonialism than all the theses and academic books ever written on the topic.

If in these ways, information about the past could be effectively made available to the public almost effortlessly, then there is much to be said for literature putting itself in the service of History. One is inclined to argue that for the historian seeking to reach a wide audience, the border between facts and fiction should be thin. But it is the sacred duty of the historian to ensure that the picture of the past presented to the public is accurate and not mere glorification as common with historical literary pieces. There is nothing wrong with the idea of historians themselves transmitting as much historical knowledge as possible by writing literary pieces themselves! However, it is without prejudice to time-tested historical techniques that involve rigorous analysis of data in order to obtain an objective reconstruction. Without forsaking his commitment to facts, as emphasized by Leopold von Ranké and the positivists⁴¹, the historian could, and should acquire an appreciable level of literary skill to get his message across. In the global age, the historian should not shy away from embracing the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which has made the wide dissemination of information easy and fast through electronic means.

Of equal importance is the need for increased awareness about the usefulness of the knowledge of the past by the general public. The need for consistent support for research into the past cannot be over-emphasised. Government, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, private companies and enthusiastic individuals should be prepared to provide funds for historical research on a continuous basis. In particular, the study of local communities should be encouraged. We can imagine the

amount of materials that will be at our disposal if the 774 Local Governments in Nigeria come up with micro-histories even if only in the fashion of the *Intelligence Reports* or 'Local Chronicles' of the colonial era. In this regard, the establishment of a Bureau of History by each state of the Federation will be a worthwhile venture.⁴² Such bureau should function primarily as centres of academic research into the history and culture of local communities. They could also be made centres for an enlightenment campaign that will work towards the realization of some of the noble intentions of mobilisation outfits such as Mass Mobilization for Economic Recovery, Self-Reliance and Social Justice (MAMSER), War Against Indiscipline (WAI) and the National Orientation Agency (NOA), which, in spite of heavy financial investments, have little to show in terms of real achievement.

Finally, there is need to address the truncated nature of historical education in post-colonial Africa. For a society wishing to contribute to the progress of humanity, it is imperative to attain a desirable level of the trend of its development through continuous historical education of the citizenry. For Nigeria, one visualizes a programme of education in which, at the end of the Junior Secondary School, a child would have acquired basic information to enable him understand the outline history of his local community. He should have been able to build up the self-confidence to decide the role he wants to play in the development of the nation. At the end of the High School, the Nigerian child should have acquired enough knowledge that would enable him understand the historical evolution of his country as well as appreciate its position in the wider world. Subsequently, well-planned historical education packages should be integrated into higher education programmes to reinforce the youths' confidence in their ability to play important roles in national development. In this way, giant strides would

have been taken towards the eradication of inadequate understanding of contemporary developments that often result from ignorance about and misrepresentation of the past.

Conclusion

Mr. Vice-chancellor, there is quite a lot to be said about the challenge before the historian in solving the problems which result from improper appreciation of historical knowledge. But in our culture, a young man does not say everything about the past in the presence of the elders. However, I believe it is apposite to consider what place should be accorded in this university to the study of History.

While we should subscribe to the principle that our students must be aware of advancement in the world of science and technology in order to fit into the new age, we have an obligation to make them appreciate their historical background and make them proud of their African identity in the global community. In this regard, I must draw your attention to a 1986 observation of the Senate of this University thus:

Widespread ignorance among Nigerian groups about each other and about themselves will be removed by instituting a compulsory first year course in the social organisation, customs, culture and history of our various peoples.⁴³

Apparently, this was in recognition of the significance of knowledge of the past to the rationality of the African and I like to suggest that the noble intention of Senate be actualised through the resuscitation of the compulsory undergraduate course in *African History and Culture*, which was canceled some years ago.

The guiding principle of this university is *For Learning and Culture*. We should enable our students, and indeed all those who in one capacity or the other have the privilege of passing through our gates, to go beyond the

façade of the present and recognise that behind it lies the vast fields of our cultural heritage. The university will definitely be meeting the expectation of its founding fathers if, in its attempt to extend the proverbial frontiers of knowledge, it succeeds in contributing to recording and exposing the many facets of our vanishing past. This indeed is the 'Great Commission' for the Obáfémi Awólówò University in the 21st century.

Thank You.

Notes

*I wish to express my gratitude to the staff of the University Library and the *Ìwàlẹ̀wà* Haus of the University of Bayreuth, Germany for a congenial atmosphere for library research and to Professor Dierk Lange of the Department of History for very stimulating discussions during the preparation of the final draft of this lecture.

1. On Herodotus, see Lucian Boia, (ed.), *Great Historians from Antiquity to 1800*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1987, pp. 189-91; Michael Grant, *Greek Historians: Information and Misinformation*, London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 5-7.
2. René Descartes, *Discourse on Methods*, (1637), quoted in, R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, (1946). Revised Edition by Jan Van Der Dussen, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 49.
3. On the development of Western historiography, see R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*; A. Marwick, *The Nature of History*, London: Macmillan, 1984.
4. E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* (Second edition by R. W. Davies), London: Macmillan, 1989, p. 49; cf. A. Marwick, 'In Pursuit of the Past', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 16 November 1984.
5. Benedetto Croce, *History As Liberty*, (English translation, 1941), quoted in E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* p. 15 fn. 1.
6. J. R. Strayer, 'The Historian's Concept of Public Opinion' in M. Komarovsky, (ed) *Common Frontiers of the Social Sciences*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973, p. 264.
7. See for instance, G. Baraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History*, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967.
8. See for instance note 3 above.
9. See for instance, J. Ki-zerbo, *General History of Africa I: Methodology and African Prehistory*, London & Paris: Heinemann & UNESCO, 1981, especially chapters 1-3.
10. Since 1965 when the English translation appeared as *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, (Translated by H. M. Wright), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, there have been several works dealing with oral traditions as historical source-materials. See for example, Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, and his *Living with Africa*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994; D. Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Quest for a Chimera?* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974; and his *Oral Historiography*, London: Longman, 1982; and R. Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices*, London & New York: Routledge, 1992.
11. A. Marwick, *The Nature of History*, p. 281.
12. Since the publication of E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, the literature on this phenomenon has become vast, see for example, B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983; D. Golan, *Inventing Shaka: Using History in the Construction of Zulu Nationalism*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994; C. Lent and P. Nugent, *Ethnicity in Ghana: The Limits of Invention*, London: Macmillan, 2000 and T. Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa' in T. Ranger and O. Vaughan, (eds), *Legitimacy and the State in 20th Century Africa: Essays in Honour of A. H. M. Kirk-Greene*, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1993, pp. 62-111.
13. S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbás*, Lagos: C. M.S, 1921
14. See discussions in J. A. Atanda, 'The Historian and the Problem of

- Origins of Nigerian Peoples' *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, (henceforth *JHSN*), 10,1, 1980, pp.63-77.
15. S. O. Biobaku, *The Origin of the Yorùbás*, (The Lugard Lectures), Lagos: Government Printer, 1956.
 16. E. R. Sanders, 'The Hamitic Hypothesis; Its Origin and Function in Time Perspective', *Journal of African History* (henceforth *JAH*), 10, 4, pp.521-532; see also, P. S. Zachernuk, 'Of Origins and Colonial Order: Southern Nigerian Historians and the 'Hamitic Hypothesis' c. 1870-1970', *JAH*, 35,4,1994, pp. 427-455.
 17. Making use of deductions from ancillary studies, the most prominent proponent of this idea was Professor Adé Qbáyemí, see for instance his 'The Yorùbá and Edo-speaking Peoples and their Neighbours Before 1600', in J. F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowder, (eds), *A History of West Africa*, vol. I, London: Longman, 1985, pp. 255- 322; and his 'Ancient Ifè: Another Historical Re-interpretation', *JHSN*, 9,4, 1979, pp.151-186.
 18. See for instance, R. C. C. Law, 'Traditional History', in S. O. Biobaku, (ed), *Sources of Yorùbá History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973, pp. 25- 32.
 19. There is currently on going a re-examination of these traditions along this line. See for instance, Dierk Lange, 'Das hebräische Erbe der Yorùbá II' (The Hebrew Heritage of the Yorùbá), *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 149, 1999, pp.79-144; also his 'Der Ursprung des Bosen: Neue Evidenzen aus Kanaan, Israel und Afrika', (The Origin of Evil: New Evidences from Canaan, Israel and Africa) in: H. Ritter & J. Schlumberger, (eds.), *Das Böse in der Geschichte* (forthcoming); cf. M. Bernal, *The Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilisation*. 2 vols. New Brunswick, 1991.
 20. Cf. The Eastern Atlantic Culture Province which in H. Baumann and D. Westermann, *Les peuples et civilisations de l'Afrique*, Paris: Payot, 1957, p. 92, covers the area between the Volta and the Niger. Historically, it seems logical to extend the region to the Chad basin; see also, P. Mercier, *Cartes ethno-démographique de l'ouest Africain*, Feuilles n° 5, Dakar: 1954.
 21. F.J. D. Clarke, *The Prehistory of Africa*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1970; B. Fagan and R. Oliver, *Africa in the Iron Age: c. 500 BC to 1400 AD*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999 (Reprint).
 22. J. H. Greenberg, *The Languages of Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970; D. Dalby, 'Reflections on the Classification of African Languages' *African Language Studies*, XI, 1970, pp. 147-171; A. Adetugbo, 'The Yorùbá Language in Yorùbá History', in S. O. Biobaku, (ed), *Sources of Yorùbá History*, pp. 176-204.
 23. Cf. H. Baumann and D. Westermann, *Les Peuples et Civilisations de L'Afrique*; G. P. Murdock, *Africa and Its Culture History*, New York: Mc-Grawhill, 1969.
 24. Cf. R. Horton, 'Ancient Ifè: A Reassessment', *JHSN*, 9,4, 1979, pp. 69-150; see also, various contributions in I. A. Akinjogbin, (ed.), *The Cradle of a Race: Ifè from the Beginning to 1980*, Port Harcourt: Sunray Publishers, 1992.
 25. See for instance, T. Hodgkin, *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology*, Second Edition, London: Oxford University Press, 1975, pp.124-125, cf. A. F. C. Ryder, 'A Reconsideration of Ifè-Benin Relationship', *JAH*, 4,1, 1965, pp. 25-37.
 26. R. S. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yorùbá*, (first published, 1969), 3rd edition, London: James Currey, 1988.
 27. A. Adediran, 'A Descriptive Analysis of Ifè Palace Organisation', *The African Historian*, VIII, 1976, pp. 3-30; cf. Frank Willet, *Ifè in the History of West African Sculpture*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967;

Origins of Nigerian Peoples' *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, (henceforth *JHSN*), 10,1, 1980, pp.63-77.

15. S. O. Biobaku, *The Origin of the Yorùbás*, (The Lugard Lectures), Lagos: Government Printer, 1956.
16. E. R. Sanders, 'The Hamitic Hypothesis; Its Origin and Function in Time Perspective', *Journal of African History* (henceforth *JAH*), 10, 4, pp.521-532; see also, P. S. Zachernuk, 'Of Origins and Colonial Order: Southern Nigerian Historians and the 'Hamitic Hypothesis' c. 1870-1970', *JAH*, 35,4,1994, pp. 427-455.
17. Making use of deductions from ancillary studies, the most prominent proponent of this idea was Professor Adé Qbáyemí, see for instance his 'The Yorùbá and Edo-speaking Peoples and their Neighbours Before 1600', in J. F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowder, (eds), *A History of West Africa*, vol. I, London: Longman, 1985, pp. 255- 322; and his 'Ancient Ifè: Another Historical Re-interpretation', *JHSN*, 9,4, 1979, pp.151-186.
18. See for instance, R. C. C. Law, 'Traditional History', in S. O. Biobaku, (ed), *Sources of Yorùbá History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973, pp. 25- 32.
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20. Cf. The Eastern Atlantic Culture Province which in H. Baumann and D. Westermann, *Les peuples et civilisations de l'Afrique*, Paris: Payot, 1957, p. 92, covers the area between the Volta and the Niger. Historically, it seems logical to extend the region to the Chad basin; see also, P. Mercier, *Cartes ethno-démographique de l'ouest africain*, Feuilles n° 5, Dakar: 1954.
21. F.J. D. Clarke, *The Prehistory of Africa*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1970; B. Fagan and R. Oliver, *Africa in the Iron Age: c. 500 BC to 1400 AD*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999 (Reprint).
22. J. H. Greenberg, *The Languages of Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970; D. Dalby, 'Reflections on the Classification of African Languages' *African Language Studies*, XI, 1970, pp. 147-171; A. Adetugbo, 'The Yorùbá Language in Yorùbá History', in S. O. Biobaku, (ed), *Sources of Yorùbá History*, pp. 176-204.
23. Cf. H. Baumann and D. Westermann, *Les Peuples et Civilisations de L'Afrique*; G. P. Murdock, *Africa and Its Culture History*, New York: Mc-Grawhill, 1969.
24. Cf. R. Horton, 'Ancient Ifè: A Reassessment', *JHSN*, 9,4, 1979, pp. 69-150; see also, various contributions in I. A. Akinjogbin, (ed.), *The Cradle of a Race: Ifè from the Beginning to 1980*, Port Harcourt: Sunray Publishers, 1992.
25. See for instance, T. Hodgkin, *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology*, Second Edition, London: Oxford University Press, 1975, pp.124-125, cf. A. F. C. Ryder, 'A Reconsideration of Ifè-Benin Relationship', *JAH*, 4,1, 1965, pp. 25-37.
26. R. S. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yorùbá*, (first published, 1969), 3rd edition, London: James Currey, 1988.
27. A. Adediran, 'A Descriptive Analysis of Ifè Palace Organisation', *The African Historian*, VIII, 1976, pp. 3-30; cf. Frank Willet, *Ifè in the History of West African Sculpture*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967;

- Suzanne P. Blier, *The Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998.
28. Biodun Adediran, *The Frontier States of Western Yorùbá Land c. 1600-1889: State Formation and Political Growth in an Ethnic Frontier Zone*, Ibadan: IFRA, 1994.
 29. Biodun Adediran, 'In Search of Identity?: The Eastern Yorùbá and the Odùduwà Traditions', *ODU: Journal of West African Studies*, 36, 1989, pp. 114-136; also, 'Pleasant Imperialism: Conjectures on Benin Hegemony in Eastern Yorùbáland', *African Notes*, Ibadan, vol. xv nos. 1&2, 1991, pp. 85-95.
 30. See, R. C. Law, *The Òyó Empire, c1600 - 1836*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1977; also, A. Asiwaju & R. Law. 'From the Volta to the Niger' in A. Ajayi & M. Crowder, (eds.), *A History of West Africa*, vol. I, pp 255 -322.
 31. An interesting and more plausible approach to the issue will be to adopt Fredrik Barth's thesis that lays emphasis on 'boundary construction' as the crucial construction for ethnic identification. See, F. Barth, (ed), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969, pp.10-38. See also, 'Biodun Adediran, "Yoruba Ethnic Groups, or a A Yoruba Ethnic Group" *Africa* Sao Paulo, 7, 1984, pp 57-70
 32. See for instance, R. C. C. Law, 'The Heritage of Odùduwà: Traditional History and Political Propaganda among the Yorùbá', *JAH*, 14,2, 1973, pp. 207-222; also his 'How Many Times Does History Repeat Itself? Some Problems in the Traditional History of Òyó' *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 18,1, 1985, pp.33-51; A. I. Asiwaju, 'Political Motivation and Oral Historical Traditions in Africa: The Case of the Yorùbá Beaded Crown, 1900-1960', *Africa*, 46,2, 1976, pp. 113-127.
 33. Since the colonial period, there have been several chieftaincy review commissions to deal with this problem. The current on-going dispute among some *oba* in Ògùn State and controversy in Òyó State as to which rulers should have 'prescribing' or 'consenting' jurisdiction over certain chieftaincy titles reflect the fact that the problem is very much alive. See for instance, E. A. Kényò, *Iwe Awon Oba Alade Yorubá*, Lagos, 1955(?). From the mid-1950s, Kényò compiled lists of Yorùbá rulers entitled to the beaded crown with a pendant to always review the figure upwards.
 34. See S. O. Arifalo, *The Egbé Omo Odùduwà : A Study in Ethnic Nationalism (1945 - 1965)*, Akure: Stebak Books, 2001. In the mid-1960s, the formation of a rival organization, the *Egbé Omo Olófin*, was informed by essentially the same set of traditions.
 35. Even the 1965 'Mystery Gun Man' made his appeal for mass anti-government uprising in the name of Odùduwà! See Kayode Eso, *The Mystery Gun Man*, Ibadan: Spectrum, 1996, p. Xv.
 36. See for instance, Colonial Office, *Nigeria: Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Fears of the Minorities and Means of Allaying Them*. (The Willink Report), London: HMSO, 1958.
 37. C. W. Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, London: Oxford University Press, 1959. (1968 Reprint).
 38. These were the Yorùbá History Research Scheme and the Benin History Research Scheme. Similar government -sponsored research projects in post-colonial Nigeria include, the Northern Nigeria Research Scheme (1966), Eastern Nigerian Research Scheme (1966), Rivers State Research Scheme (1971), Benue Valley Research Project (1974) and Cross Valley History Project (1978).
 39. Cf. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, New York & London: Oxford University Press, 1954; W. H. McNeil, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community*, Chicago: The University of

- Chicago Press, 1991. See also, B. Mazlish and R. Buultjens, *Conceptualizing Global History*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.
40. Cf. J. Ingham *et al*, *History*, New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1985, pp. 77-86.
41. On von Ranké and positivism see, G. G. Iggers and J. M. Powell, *Leopold von Ranké and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990.
42. Apparently, taking a cue from the example of the Arewa House established in Kaduna for the collection and archiving of Arabic and Hausa documents, most states in Northern Nigeria established History Bureau for similar purposes; the best examples of these are those of Sokoto and Kano.
43. University of Ifè, *Digest of Senate Decisions*, June 1983 – June 1989 Ilé Ifè: Obáfémi Awólówò University Press, 1990, pp.146 –147.