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CLIO AND NATION-BUILDING IN AFRICA

by

PROF. A. ADU BOAHEN

Department of History

University of Ghana, Legon

An Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University of Ghana, Legon, on Thursday, 28th November, 1974

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MR. VICE-CHANCELLOR, it was not without some trepidation that I agreed to read an historical essay before you today. In reality, an inaugural lecture is an essay on the Professor's reflections on, or more often still, his justification for, his subject. The trepidation was due to the fact that I have never before had to read an essay before you. It is true I did dabble in classical studies during the first two years of my undergraduate course in this University, and this was only because it was then compulsory for all Arts students. But, fortunately, this was before you joined the Department of Classics. I did have numerous encounters with you after your arrival and, indeed, as you have never stopped reminding me, but for your timely and vociferous intervention, I would have been expelled from this University altogether in my final year for being allegedly obstreperous. But, to repeat, never during all the twenty years or so of association with you, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, have I read an essay before you, let alone in the presence of such an intimidating and formidable public audience.

Moreover, as the controversial Regius Professor of History at Oxford, H. R. Trevor-Roper, pointed out under similar circumstances, even at the best of times, an inaugural lecture is a risky undertaking: "When I recall the fate of Nicolas Cop", Trevor-Roper went on, "who had to flee for his life after his inaugural lecture at the University of Paris, or of Ernest Renan, who was suspended permanently from his chair after the lecture with which he had fondly believed himself to be inaugurating a long tenure of it, or even of my own predecessor Sir Charles Firth who suffered a twenty years' boycott through his incautious utterance on such an occasion . . . I confess I feel some sympathy with those sage, non-committal professors who, observing that there is no statutory obligation to deliver this customary oration, slid without a squeak into their chairs." I must confess for my part that I had planned to do just that as, indeed, two out of three of my predecessors had done. My change of plan can be attributed partly to subtle but persistent pressure, partly to the fact that from the records so far none of the things described by Trevor-Roper has happened to any Professor who has given an inaugural lecture in this University, and partly to the special nature of the occasion, this being the time of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the University. I must also confess to

a certain overriding sense of the opportuneness of the subject which I have chosen to treat.

One thing I am not going to do in this lecture, Sir, is to sally out in elaborate defence of History. That surely is unnecessary. I will simply quote one great scholar on this subject, "*Nescire autem quid antea quam natus sis acciderit id est semper esse puerum. Quid enim est aetas hominis nisi memoria verum veterum cum superioribus contexitur*—To be unacquainted with events which took place before you were born is to be always a child: for where is human life if the memory fails to connect past events with those before . . . " These, of course, are the words of that great lawyer and scholar, Cicero. In any case, the study of History gives one the power denied, according to Dean Inge, even to the Almighty God, namely, the power of altering the past. No, instead of rising in defence of my discipline, I have rather chosen to discuss a subject under the title Clio and Nation-building in Africa which is of greater topicality and relevance to our African situation today than it probably ever will be.

From all the questions that have been addressed to me, it seems obvious that the title of my lecture seems mysterious to many people. I am glad it does for, after all, this is the inaugural lecture of a Professor, and in the estimation of a majority of Ghanaians, professors are father mysterious beings. However, to those who are classical scholars, a regrettably vanishing species of *homo sapiens* in Ghana, the title should pose no problems. But for those who are not classical scholars like myself, may I resolve this mystery. The Greeks in their wisdom decided to assign muses to all the then known disciplines and Clio, one of the nine daughters of Zeus and Mmemosyne, goddess of memory, a fact with which you, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, are not unfamiliar both in academic and practical terms, was made the muse of History. Why the Greeks made goddesses rather than gods the patrons of learning is not clear to me. However, since I do believe in the equality of the sexes — despite what my wife thinks — it really does not matter. But I chose to use Clio rather than History in this context partly, Sir, to impress you, but mainly because I want to look at History not only as a discipline but also in its personalised form, as it were. I would like then to investigate what Clio can teach us about the whole crucial but delicate problem of nation-building and secondly how History,

particularly African History, can be written and taught in Africa to achieve this end.

However, before plunging into the subject, we better define what we mean by nation-building. This is simply the process of weaving together in a coherent national pattern, and of developing a sense of community and identity among, the diverse and plural populations inhabiting a particular state or country. It is evident from History that this process seriously began in Europe only after the Middle Ages, that is after the fourteenth century though very much earlier in Africa.

Throughout the Middle Ages, society in Europe was religiously, culturally and politically very universalistic. There were no nations or states or national religions then but only the Empire and the Papacy. The language of the literate was everywhere Latin. There was a multiplicity — indeed a babel — of dialects and some few vernacular languages but these were only spoken, not written. There were nothing like national literatures, and social and economic organisation was throughout feudal. As A. F. Pollard has pointed out, "Even the wars of the Middle Ages were not national. The greatest were the Crusades, then there were the wars between Empire and Papacy and lowest of all were the feudal strife of vassal against vassal or vassal against his lord. There is really no national war before the Hundred Years War between England and France." It was from about the time of the Wars of the Roses that the universalism of the Middle Ages began to break down and the evolution of a number of nations, defined in the European sense, as groups of peoples bound together by common languages, cultures and political institutions, began to emerge. This process was very slow. As late as the end of the eighteenth century, there were in Europe only about 10 nations — Portugal, Spain, France, England, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Russia and Prussia. Italy was by then a mere geographical expression, Germany was split into numerous rival principalities, and Austria and Turkey were still sprawling empires. It was in the nineteenth century that Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary and Greece emerged while Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland and Finland did not become nation states until as recently as after the First World War.

How then did these states emerge? These nations were the products of a number of factors. The first and most important

factor was the ambition of particular dynasties or monarchies. The foundation of the French nation was laid by the Capetian dynasty which expanded from the small region of Ile de France; Spain was the creation of the Castilian monarchy from the northern fringes of Spain, Russia of the Muscovite dynasty and England of the Saxon and the Norman kings. All these dynasties expanded their territories through purchase, marriage and above all conquest. The forging of the peoples of these states into nations and the development of national consciousness were greatly facilitated by the growth of national languages and national churches. It should be particularly noted that what became the national languages in many of these countries were formerly mere dialects which gained predominance over the other dialects mainly for political reasons. The modern French language was the dialect of the region of Paris the home of Capetians, while English was the dialect of London.

The second way in which the nation-states of Europe arose was through the union of groups of people sharing a common language and culture accomplished usually through war under the leadership of one government or one leader. Two typical examples are Germany and Italy. As it is well-known, the unification into one German nation of the German people who were culturally homogeneous but politically fragmented was achieved through 'blood and iron' by Bismarck. Similarly, the Italian peoples were constituted into the modern nation-state of Italy largely by Mazzini, Cavour and Garibaldi. It should be pointed out that in these two examples, it was the nation that made the state whereas in the case of the former group, that is Britain, France, Spain and Russia, it was rather the state that made the nation.

The third factor that underlay nation-building in Europe was the struggle for independence by groups within a larger political group or empire. A classic example is the Dutch nation which came into existence as a result of the successful bid for independence by the United Provinces of the Netherlands against Spain towards the end of the sixteenth century.

In Eastern Europe and the Middle East, however, it would appear that language has played a far more decisive role in the emergence of the present nation-states than political factors. Certainly, the Balkan peoples who under Turkish domination were united by the Christian religion later split into Greeks, Serbs, Roumanians and

Bulgarians simply along linguistic lines. Turkish nationalism arose from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire around the Turkish language a process which was brought to its maturity by the policies of Mustapha Kema, the Ataturk. Finally, there is no doubt that it was the Arabic language that gave birth to the modern Arab nation. It is because of the language rather than the Moslem religion that Egyptians, Iraquis, Arabians and Moroccans think of themselves as forming a single nation. Similarly, the Slovak nation arose in the northern part of the kingdom of Hungary around the Slovak language and literature which were developed from a number of Slav dialects by a few poets and prose writers.

The last example I would like to cite of an interesting and very relevant case of nation-building is that of the United States of America. Though composed of a great medley of races and ethnic groups, America is now developed into a nation *par excellence* i.e. into a people having a distinctive sense of community, a common culture and *even* a common language. This has been made possible by a number of factors. Among them were the American Constitution whose federal nature allowed for the relatively easy incorporation of the new states that subsequently emerged, the Civil War which saved the federation from disintegration, the dynamism and devotion of a number of very great and very talented leaders, the vastness and the great resources of the sparsely populated land and last and probably the most potent of all, the establishment of universal compulsory education at the very initial stages. Thus, as in the case of England and France, it was the American State that created the American nation.

It should be emphasized that the process of nation-building had been at work in our own continent much earlier than in Europe and certainly the United States. While no nation-states emerged in Europe until the fourteenth century, many nation-states had already developed in Africa. Although northern and eastern Africa were before the fourteenth century part of the Islamic empire rather similar to the conditions in Europe at the time, in the inland regions of the continent, right from the eighth or ninth century, the rulers of Ghana and the Sefuwa dynasty of Kanem-Bornu were busily carving up nation-states for themselves. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw similar attempts by the great Mansa Musa of Mali and Askia Mohammed of Songhai in the area of the Niger bend.

The period also saw the formation of the Mole-Dagbane states of Mamprusi, Dagomba, Nanumba and Mossi in the Volta basin and the Akan states of Bono-Manso in the area of the meeting point of the forest and the savanna zones in Ghana and further west the great Edo Kingdom of Benin. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries similarly occured the rapid growth of the Hausa cluster of states, the rise of the Asante nation under the inspired leadership of Osei Tutu and Opoku Ware, of the Gonja kingdom led by that great conquerror Jakpa, the emergence of the Fon state of Dahomey thanks to the work of Wegbaja, Akaba and Agaja and the Yoruba state of Oyo in Southern Nigeria.

During the nineteenth century until 1880, some African nationalist leaders even went on to form not just nation-states but even large empires. The first two decades of that century saw not only the expansion of the Asante Empire to cover an area even larger than modern Ghana but also the emergence of the Fulani empire in Northern Nigeria, while the subsequent decades saw the empires first of Al Haji Omar and then that of Samori Ture.

It is equally interesting that most of these states emerged out of circumstances not dissimilar to those of Europe and America. All of them were founded by specific dynasties. The Asante, Oyo and Fulani states may be interpreted as an attempt to unite the Akan, the Yoruba and Fulani peoples respectively. The Fulani Empire could also in a way be described as the product of the War of Independence of the Fulani against the Hausa rulers comparable to that of the United Provinces of the Netherlands against Spain. Al Haji Omar and Samori Ture can in many respects be compared with their contemporaries Bismarck, Cavour and Garibaldi.

The fundamental difference between the developments in Africa and those in Europe is that while in Europe the pre-1880 nation-states by and large remained intact, in Africa, with the sole exception of Ethiopia and Liberia, not one of the earlier states maintained its territorial or political sovereignty. Mainly as a result of a phenomenon that has come to be known as the Scramble for Africa, the pre-existing states were wiped out and a completely new set of states were carved up by the European powers between 1880 and 1900 in pursuit of their selfish economic and political ends without much regard to the pre-existing conditions and boundaries, political or geographical, ethnic or linguistic. These states remained under the

domination of these colonial powers until from the late 1950's onwards when after the independence struggles, some of them quite protracted and bloody, they regained their independence but, by and large, within the artificial territorial framework created by the colonial powers.

History then is replete with attempts to create states out of nations and nations out of states. In Africa today, the states are already in existence. Like the United States and Holland, all of them emerged out of the struggle for independence that gathered the force of a hurricane after the Second World War. Again, like the United States or Russia, or Hungary, or even England and the Fulani Empire but unlike Germany or Italy or the Arab states or Turkey or Asante or Benin of old, each modern African state consists of groups of peoples, who, it should be emphasized, are not migrants but autochthones. The problem then is this: Should each of these groups be developed into a single nation in the European sense i.e., a group of people who, speaking the same language and having the same culture, social and political institutions, or should nations be forged out of the component ethnic groups by trying to develop in them a sense of community or identity and loyalty to an overall state. Furthermore, should this nation-building take place within the existing framework of states or should the boundaries of the existing states which were by and large arbitrarily laid down by the imperial powers redrawn to take cognisance of cultural, ethnic and nationalistic realities?

It should be obvious from what we have learnt from Clio that almost all the nations in Europe. the Middle East, the Americans and in Africa before the era of partition were, initially, forged primarily as a result of wars aimed either at the imposition of the culture and language of a dynasty or a principality over the other groups or of the union of groups of peoples of the same cultural and linguistic traditions living in a geographical area or of a successful bid for independence. Secondly most of these wars took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and especially the nineteenth, a century in which, according to Hugh Seton-Watson, "the whole tradition of progressive political thought . . . was in favour of centralism and against local diversity". But the spirit of our times is certainly against wars, even of a localised nature. Moreover, there is now great respect for peoples with

distinctive cultures and institutions of their own, however insignificant numerically they may be. Thirdly, and the most important of all, if nations are to be forged by war, which of these groups comprising each of the African countries is to spearhead the attack or play the role of the Capetains, the Normans, the Muscovites, the Oyoko and the Sefuwa, of France, England, Russia, Asante and Bornu respectively? Nation-building through war in modern Africa could only have been resorted to by the Colonial powers who had the material resources to do so. With their expulsion, the possibility of achieving linguistic and cultural homogeneity in any of the new African states through war should be ruled out. Moreover, in view of the doggedness with which African states have been guarding their territorial integrity since independence, and above all of the adoption of the principle of "respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each member state and for its inalienable right to independent existence" by the O.A.U., it is obvious that nation-building can take place in Africa only within the existing political framework of states.

If war cannot and should not be resorted to and if state boundaries cannot be redrawn, then the lesson that Clio teaches us as far as nation-building is concerned is that we have to operate within the existing framework of states and allow our cultural, religious, social, ethnic and linguistic differences to take their natural course while simultaneously forging a sense of identity and loyalty to the state. We should develop common bonds and shared interests through a dynamic programme of social reform, through economic, industrial and rural development aimed at integrating the separate economies of the various areas into complementary and unified structures, through modernization, and above all, as in the case of America, through universal education.

It should be noted that I am *not* advocating a single culture and a single language for each modern state in Africa. Though both would be advantageous, indeed ideal, Clio's instruction is that they are really not necessary for the inculcation of a sense of identity, national cohesion and consciousness among peoples living in a state. The Swiss area as nationally conscious as any nation and yet they do not speak the same language. The Germans and the Austrians speak the same language but they are not a single nation. If a single language or culture does develop naturally in the

course of time, well and good; but no single culture or language should be imposed by legislative fiat on the peoples of any African country.

In the meantime, what should be emphasized is not simply the learning of each other's language but rather the overall economic and social development and modernization of the various regions constituting the state. The importance of economic development in this exercise cannot be overemphasized. As a recent authority, Rivkin, has pointed out, "Almost in direct proportion to the retardation of growth or stagnation of African economies, the cause of nation-building has been adversely affected, for both economic development and nation-building share the problems of modernization and the need at the heart of the modernization process for change in methods, attitudes of mind, and ways of thinking, in order to achieve their respective and inextricably related ends, national growth and cohesion".

The constitutional and legal institutions to be set up should also be of such a nature as to ensure political stability and participation of the population in this task of nation-building. This would call for a careful examination of the nature and role of the Military, the type of constitution (whether unitary or federal), the type of local government system to be instituted and the role to be accorded the Press, the Civil Service and the Judiciary. Full participation of all sections of society in the affairs of the state and political stability are necessary prerequisites for nation-building — prerequisites to which our "Men on horseback", to borrow Professor Finer's fine phrase, would do well to betake themselves.

In the effort at the development of national cohesion, Clio and this time in her African mammy cloth can come to our aid in yet more ways. It is my firm conviction that a good knowledge of the past of the different groups composing the states, of their cultures and institutions, and of their roots will promote mutual respect and understanding which will break down the barriers of fear, suspicion and distrust that keep the various groups apart. As Professor Ajayi has put it, "Increased knowledge of the actual state and development of the cultures of different African peoples in the past will not foretell the future, but it will provide understanding." Surely only an Ewe or Ga, or Asante or Kusassi or Dagomba who understands his own past and respects his own cultural heritage as the woman in my friend Okot Bitek's *Song of Lawino* is, can

develop confidence in himself and look at members of the other groups of the state in the face. Moreover, a good knowledge of our past and cultures will enable us to sift the relevant from the irrelevant, the progressive elements from the stagnant or retrogressive ones, the genuine from the phoney, the solid from the mumbo jumbo, which should jointly constitute the yarns that should be used in the weaving of new nations in Africa. Like Blyden, that great pioneer of African personality and Pan-Africanism, I believe that "Every race . . . has a soul, and the soul of the race finds expression in its institutions, and to kill those institutions is to kill the soul — a terrible homicide. No people can profit by or be helped under institutions which are not the outcome of their own character." Or as Solanke, that great Nigerian nationalist of the 1920's put it, "How is the spirit of a people to be formed and animated and cheered but out of the store house of its historical recollections."

Finally, History will also, to quote Rivkin, reveal to us a glorious past "which can be invoked as a goal to recapture, as a birthright, the enjoyment of which was interrupted by the colonialists, and now ripe for restoration, or as a colonialist act of "balkanization" which must be politically corrected as part of the emergence of the African personality". It will also enable us, I should quickly add, to avoid some of the mistakes, blunders and follies of our own predecessors and past regimes, civil and military alike. Indeed, the editorial of the *Gold Coast People* written probably by that versatile scholar, lawyer and nationalist, John Mensah Sarbah, gives a more balanced account of the use of Clio in nation-building. Advancing reasons for the founding of the Collegiate School, the editorial said, "In our opinion, a young man should learn what the constitution of his country really was and is, how the country had progressed into its present state, the people that had threatened it, the malignity that had attacked it, the courage that had fought for it, and the wisdom that had made it great. And it is because we believe an intelligent study of our own history will breathe into our youth a pure public taste and kindle the flame of patriotism in each native breast, that we hope great things for the country from the Collegiate School." Incidentally, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I am happy and proud to say that I am a product of this Collegiate School, the school which after all manner of vicissitudes developed into the Mfantsipim School of today.

Besides enabling us to understand and appreciate our past and laying foundations for the future, History can, and in my opinion, should be taught at the primary and secondary school levels in such a way as to promote nation-building. And for this, special history text books should be prepared. I can feel some of you shuddering in your seats at this thought, and I do not blame you either considering the deliberate manipulation of History for the purposes of political propaganda and political indoctrination in very recent times. But there is absolutely no doubt that in the preparation of history textbooks for use in primary, middle and even secondary schools, one has necessarily to select the facts from the academic histories, and in this selection, one has to use one criterion or another; and to that extent one is bound to be biased or prejudiced. One American book on the teaching of history maintains that in learning history "every pupil should have a conviction of the value of democratic processes. He should be alert to the threats which always confront democratic processes, but determined to expand rather than curtail these processes." A Russian history book claims that "The Modern History course is of very great importance in the formation of a Communist World outlook among pupils." Many English historians also see history through the Whig spectacle which is shaped by the dogma that "the be-all and end-all of human evolution is parliamentary democracy." In selecting their facts therefore, the Russian teacher or text book writer would be guided by his desire to foster 'a communist world outlook', the American by his anxiety to expand 'a conviction of the value of democratic processes', and an English historian by his Whig prejudices and preconceptions aimed at nurturing parliamentary democracy. From these different standpoints, the histories that they write are bound to be different, each of them not necessarily false or even distorted but certainly prejudiced.

As E. H. Dance has shown, even plain date-lists can reflect such prejudices. For instance, selecting the most important events from 1500 to 1525, a nineteenth century English textbook drew up the following list:

1510 — Execution of Dudley and Empson.

1512 — War with France; French fleet destroyed near Brest.

1513 — Battle of Spurs; French defeated. James IV of Scotland invaded England; defeated and slain at Flodden.

1514 — Peace concluded with France and Scotland.

1515 — Wolsey made cardinal by the Pope, and Chancellor by by Henry VIII.

1518 — Wolsey made Papal Legate.

1520 — Field of the Cloth of Gold.

1521 — Henry received the title of Defender of the Faith from the Pope.

A Text book used in West Germany in the 1950's drew up the following as the important events:

c. 1500 — Italian Renaissance at its height.

1483–1546 — Martin Luther.

1517 — Luther's Theses Wittenberg.

1519–1522 — First circumnavigation of the World (Magellan)

c. 1520 — Scientific and artistic development in Germany at its height.

1524–1525 — Peasant's War in Germany.

Finally a text book in use also in the 1950's but this time in East Germany also drew up this list:

1500 — Decline of the Hansa. Beginning of manufacture in Germany.

1510 — Peter Henlein constructs the first pocket-watch.

1514 — 'Poor Conrad' Revolt.

1516 — Portuguese ship at Canton; More's Utopia.

1517 — Luther's Theses

1519–1521 — Corte's Conquest of Mexico.

1519–1522 — Circumnavigation of the World by Magellan.

1519–1556 — Emperor Charles V.

1520 — Beginnings of the Reformation in Switzerland (Zwingli and Calvin). Revolt of the Communeros.

1521 — Luther before the Diet at Worms.

1524 — Beginnings of the peasants' Revolt.
Muntzer's Articles.
Death of Holbein.

1525 — Peasant's War in Germany.
Battle of Frankenhausen
Baber conquers all India and founds the Moghul Empire
Death of Jakob Fugger.

The point to be emphasised here is that all the dates are accurate but not only do different events appear in the three lists but each list does convey a completely different impression to the pupils for the simple reason that their compilation was based on different criteria or, to use the more trendy term, models. The English list concentrates almost exclusively on politics and war; the West German list virtually leaves out politics and wars — it does not even mention the Battle of Pavia generally accepted as one of the most significant events in German history. As Dance comments: "The whole list breathes and inculcates the escapism of a generation of war-weary German teachers." Of the 21 items on the East German list, 17 are about events which are social or economic, a clear sign of its Marxist preoccupations. Factual as these lists are, then, they nonetheless convey impressions that are clearly prejudiced or biased. And I submit that this is virtually true of all history textbooks. Of course, there can be false or grossly distorted history textbooks — and I yield ground to none in deprecating such productions — but there cannot, on the other hand, be an objective or unbiased elementary or secondary history textbook.

To me, then, the teaching of history at the elementary and secondary levels cannot but be biased. The crucial question is biased in favour of whom or what? In favour of the nation or in favour of a particular party or political ideology? For African countries confronted with the stupendous task of nation-building, I think History at the elementary and even secondary levels should aim at inculcating a sense of patriotism and a sense of national pride first in its nation-state and secondly in the continent as a whole. In selecting his facts, therefore, the African textbook writer or History teacher must concentrate on those events and dates that bring out instances of co-operation and interaction among the component groups, thus debunking the fallacy that there were no contacts among the various peoples until the arrival of Europeans. He must, furthermore, emphasize the things that disclose the basic similarities in the culture, institutions and beliefs of the different groups of peoples in the country — things that will generate pride

in their past, and foster a sense of national identity. I am ready to admit that this may be prejudiced history; but it will not be false history. Moreover, it will be biased in favour of the nation as a whole, not a particular political group or social class.

To achieve the ends advocated here, the teaching and writing of History must be the responsibility of the central government. The preparation of the syllabus should be undertaken by the central government and the same textbooks prepared by teams of historians ideally drawn from all the regions should be used throughout the country.

Finally, however, if African history is to be of really effective use in our task of nation-building, if it is to be a source of knowledge, provide the appropriate material out of which properly-orientated textbooks can be written, then it should first and foremost be thoroughly historicized at the University and post-University levels. By the historicization of African history, I mean the conduct of research into, and the writing of, African history at these levels, in strict accordance with scientific and objective analysis of available data, and by the application of the most rigorous standards and techniques of shcolarship. We should not replace one set of myths and stereotypes concocted by Europeans and Americans with another set formulated by Africans. Myths are myths be they white or black and they should be avoided at all costs at the levels in question.

Besides historicizing African history, we should also decolonize, or to use a more positive term, africanize African history. By the decolonization of African history I mean four main things: the use of other sources besides the documentary, the approach to research into African history from the African and not the European perspective, the interpretation of data against the African and not the European background, and finally the application of the same terminologies by historians the world over.

There are many European historians who believe, to quote one of them, Professor A. P. Newton, that "History begins when men take to writing," and who therefore use only documentary sources in the reconstruction of the past. Indeed, so close is this identification of history with the use of written sources that some historians did arrive at the conclusion that since Africa had no writing until the coming of Europeans, and since only the history of Europeans

in Africa could be reconstructed from these European documentary sources, there was nothing like African history. It is gratifying to be able to assert here that the view that Africa has no history until the coming of Europeans is now being entertained only by a few eccentric professors such as Professor Trevor-Roper and in a few eccentric Universities such as Oxford, and I have neither the time nor even the inclination to flog dead or virtually dead horses here. Suffice it to say that this view which once held almost universal sway was based on three assumptions which can all be readily refuted. The first was that writing was introduced into Africa only by Europeans from the fifteenth century onwards. This is palpably false since even ignoring the old African Meroitic and Axumite scripts, the former dating to as early as 300 B.C., writing was introduced into Africa by the Arabs in the eighth century A.D. following the rise of Islam and its meteoric spread into eastern, northern and western Africa.

The second assumption is that only the activities of Europeans can be reconstructed from the European records. Indeed as one of them, the controversial Regius Professor of History, Hugh Trevor Roper, put it as recently as 1962: "Nowadays, undergraduates demand that they should be taught the history of Black Africa. Perhaps in future, there will be some African history to teach: But at present there is none. There is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness . . . and darkness is not a subject of history." But these historians forget that the Europeans in Africa paid attention not only to their ships and castles, their trade goods and balance sheets, their bibles and chapels but also to the attitudes and the circumstances of the Africans among whom they had taken up residence and with whom they had to deal. Moreover, trading and missionary activities were affected one way or the other by the state of politics, by inter-state wars, and by the state of the roads linking their castles and forts with the inland regions. Therefore there are accounts in these European sources of what was going on not only within the range of the guns of their forts and castles, but also in the inland regions from which the history of Black Africa, to borrow Trevor-Roper's term, can be written.

The third assumption referred to already and the one most relevant here is that African history can be reconstructed only from written sources. This assumption, I dare say, remained unchallenged until as recently as the late fifties, and African historiography

was then characterised by the use exclusively of documentary and usually only European documentary sources. But this veteran and popular assumption is also false for African history can be constructed not only from documentary sources but also from such non-documentary sources as archaeology, social anthropology, musicology, ethno-botany, serology, linguistics, even eclipses and the last but by no means the least important, oral traditions and other traditional African sources. The contributions that archaeology has made to the study of history including that of Professor Trevor-Roper's own country are too well-known to be repeated here. The increasingly scientific study of African languages, music, art and blood-groups are proving invaluable in the identification of the cradles of various ethno-linguistic groups, of the routes of their migrations and of the nature of the contacts and borrowings between and among various African peoples, while ethno-botany is steadily illuminating the dark question of the origins of the neolithic revolution and the diffusion of various food crops in Africa.

However, the source whose enormous potentiality in the reconstruction of the African past is only being realized is the oral traditions of African peoples. This source includes oral narratives, oaths, appellations of various stools and names and court poetry. It is indeed true that most members of the Colonial School of African historiography and even some well-meaning European and American scholars are exceedingly sceptical about this particular source. The famous American cultural anthropologist, Murdock, has described it as 'the one type of historical information that is virtually useless.' Now, since many Europeans cannot even remember the maiden names of their grandmothers, let alone those of their great-grandmothers, I can appreciate their scepticism. But from my own work, and from that of others in this field, I can positively testify to the crucial importance of this source. The way in which oral sources have enabled us to fill in some of the gawning gaps left by the documentary sources and to add fresh to the bare bones provided by the other sources have been truly amazing. Besides oral traditions, mention should also be made of other African traditional sources, such as musical sources, material or physical sources and institutional sources. The first include information derived from various orchestras, songs, chants, funeral dirges and horn, flute and drum music; the material or physical

sources include the regalia, the emblems, the drums and the stools of the various states, and the institutional sources include various rituals, ceremonies and festivals as well as the constitution and the gods of the state.

By decolonization of African history, then, I mean first and foremost the use of a greater variety of sources other than the written or the documentary. The data provided by such disciplines as archaeology, linguistics, musicology, social and cultural anthropology, serology and above all by oral traditions and African traditional institutions, ceremonies and music must all be grist to the mill of the new African historiography. Indeed it is the application of such a diversity of sources, disciplines and techniques which has made the study and writing of African history since the 1950's such a fascinating and challenging intellectual activity.

The second step towards decolonizing African history is by approaching research into African history essentially from the African perspective, that is, asking questions and exploring themes of relevance to the African and not the European. The themes and questions that should concern us are, for instance, not so much why and how Europeans came to Africa but rather what they found and how they were received on their arrival; not what they did so much as the reaction of the Africans to these activities and how the activities affected the social and political institutions and beliefs of the African. We should be concerned not only with why Europe abolished the slave trade but also with how the slaves were obtained in Africa and the effects of the slave trade on African states and societies; we should deal not so much with why Europe partitioned Africa and the sort of economic and social policies that were pursued as with the picture of the African states on the eve of the partition, the nature of the resistance or collaboration the Africans displayed, and the impact of colonial rule on Africa.

But even in the new historiography we should not end here. Unlike the study of European and American history, that of Africa should not be confined only to trade and politics but it should be culturally and institutionally orientated. We should therefore include the study of such institutions as the traditional systems of government, traditional diplomacy and diplomatic techniques, traditional orchestras, traditional gods and their roles, some rituals, ceremonies and festivals and such cultural activities as weaving, art and dancing.

Such a study will enable us to present as comprehensive a picture as possible of the evolution and development of our societies. Above all, we should not be on the defensive by simply proving that Africa does have a past, but assume the offensive by exploring what impact Africa has made on the New World as well as on Europe, and not only in the prehistoric period but even in the era of colonialism and independence. In other words, the classical themes of colonial African historiography — the coming of Europeans, exploration of Africa, missionary activities, the slave trade and its abolition, partition and colonial rule — should be set in their proper perspective. And of course, the approach to history in which Africans were, to quote the words of Sir Reginald Coupland, the Beit Professor of Colonial history at Oxford, "a great black background to the comings and goings of brown men and white men" should be buried in silence and oblivion.

Thirdly, the evidence should be interpreted against the African cultural milieu and from the African point of view. For instance, it is only the historian who is aware of the African's belief in life after death and of a king continuing to be king in the other world who would understand, even if he may not approve of, human sacrificing on the death of a king. Similarly, it is only a historian who is interpreting evidence from the European or at least a non-African stand-point who will justify the slave trade on the grounds that it saved Africa from over population or contend as one has done that "it is even conceivable that it may have been more profitable for some part of this area (i.e. Lower Guinea) to have exported the equivalent of its natural growth of population rather than to have kept it at home . . . " As I have pointed out elsewhere, it is a grotesque distortion of facts to talk of overpopulation in Africa even today let alone two hundred years ago, and in any case, given a choice between dying in Africa of hunger and being reduced to chattel and being humiliated, flogged and worked to death in the New World, I, as an African, would have chosen the former.

The final process of decolonization involves the question of terminologies. It is a fact, and a very regrettable one, that European and American historians do apply different terminologies in describing institutions, events or situations that are basically the same in Africa and in their own countries. A typical example is the term 'tribe'. The Yoruba or the Ibo, like, say, the Scots or the Irish have their own culture, their own language, their own traditions

of origins, occupy specific regions and are even numerically larger than the Scots, and yet the European historian would call the Yoruba a tribe and the Scots a nation. The American historian or sociologist would also not talk of the Irish, Italian and Jewish tribes but of Irish, Jewish and Italian ethnic groups and would describe the conflict between the Irish and Italians in America not as evidence of trabilism as he would the conflict between the Ibo and the Yoruba in Nigeria but rather as a case of ethnocentricism. This is simply because the term 'tribe' has now acquired pejorative connotations and these historians would therefore not like it to be applied to any European group. I have therefore eliminated the word tribe from my historical vocabulary in place of which I always use the word people or group or ethnic group or kin-group.

Again, European historians and writers use the term "national dress" when describing their own national attire but "costume" when describing an African national dress; they would call our traditional priests fetish priests; they call the autochthones of African countries natives while they would never apply the term native to their own citizens. They even talk in terms of the discovery of Africa by Europeans! When I recall this talk, I always wonder how the Fante who were fishing off say the shore of Elmina and saw the Portuguese with what must have seemed to them (the Fante) their funny hair, rather sickly looking white skins and ridiculously looking long noses, landing on their shores would have thought if they had been told that they had then been discovered! Similarly European historians use the term slave raid in connection with Africa but say 'punitive expedition' when describing the same phenomenon in Europe. They would apply the term decolonisation instead of the struggle for independence forgetting as I have pointed out elsewhere that most African leaders became 'prison graduates' before they became Prime Ministers or Presidents of their countries. And most recently, these self-same European scholars are using the term migration in connection with the slave trade. Thus, in a very recent article, Curtin could write: "The Atlantic Slave Trade was the largest inter-continental migration in world history before the nineteenth century. As part of the great Atlantic migration which repopulated the New World from the Old, its demographic importance is sometimes obscured by the even more massive movement of Europeans in nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, for 300 years, more Africans than

Europeans crossed the Atlantic each year.". And in a book which came out only last year, Hopkins could also write: "The trade in negroes was the first great human migration across the Atlantic." Only historians interpreting evidence from the European rather than the African stand-point would use the term migration in connection with the forcible transportation of Africans some of them in chains and under the most appalling and inhuman of conditions into the United States! The examples can be multiplied but I hope the point has already been made and such terms should surely be expunged from the vocabulary of the new African historiography.

It is only when African history has been decolonized along the lines outlined above that the appropriate textbooks can be prepared and the knowledge and understanding needed for the nation-building process in Africa can be derived from it. The task of decolonizing, or, if you like, of Africanizing African history or donning Clio in a mammy cloth with a headgear to match should thus be one of the major preoccupations of our historians and research scholars.

We in Africa are facing a problem that the Jews faced three thousand years ago, that the Europeans faced between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that Mansa Musa, Agorkoli, Okai Koi, Agaja, Jakpa and Osei Tutu faced between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries. It is, of course, the problem of nation-building. In grappling with this problem in Africa today, we ignore the lessons that Clio, especially in her mammy cloth and *dansinkran* or any other authentic African hairdo, holds for us at our own peril.

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