

THE DEARTH OF INTERDISCIPLINARY-BASED BOOKS: THE HISTORIAN AS CULPRIT

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Abstract

It is stating the obvious that historians reneged on their promises of a concerted application of the interdisciplinary research approach in the reconstruction of the histories of motley acephalous societies, especially to the southeast of Nigeria. It is disheartening to learn that only a few historians are equipped and disposed to this approach having received little or no tutelage on interdisciplinary-based studies. This method has received lipservice patronage for about sixteen decades, and moreso, since the 1970s. Instead of pursuing this effort, the historians, for a larger student clientele shopped for, and got attached to, Pentecostal disciplines, such as International Relations and Diplomatic Studies, among others. These would as of necessity been part of an all-embracing history curriculum. And those who have used this methodology are either disowned or become pigeonholed into the other disciplines that form part of the interdisciplinary research vanguard. The paper concluded that the reconstruction of the vast histories of acephalous societies, especially where writing tradition did not exist are scanty non-indepth essays since the interdisciplinary approach was not employed. There are, therefore, no turnkey books that could serve as general reference materials for interdisciplinary research methods. Archaeology alone cannot solve this problem because it ought to be used in conjunction with disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, ethnography, ethnobotany, linguistics, phylogenetics and the physical sciences in general.

Keywords: Dearth, acephalous, ethnography, turnkey, appendages

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to survey, first, the neglect of the interdisciplinary research approach by historians, especially the senior ones who, however and obviously, are

not schooled in it, and foremost, to re-emphasize the need to fully grasp the contents, perspectives and methodologies of African history. The re-emphasis is significantum of its importance, since Africa has been a stage upon which the dramas of human development and cultural differentiations have been acted out since the beginning of conceivable history (O. E. Uya, 1984: 1).

From being labelled the “Dark continent” waiting to be discovered by Europe to espousing theories that were motivated by the need to justify the continued domination of Africa, historians were nonetheless challenged by the best methods to adopt in writing African history. Indeed, colonialism was, and still remains, an important watershed and a continuum in African history; and played a significant but certainly not an overwhelming part (Uya: 1984). Consequently, Basil Davidson asked, “Can We Write African History? Kenneth Dike, E. J. Alagoa, Ade Ajayi, Michael Crowder and Ali Mazrui, among many, seemingly answered in the affirmative with titles, such as “The African History and Cultures in the Process of Nation Building in Africa” and “Africa Discovers Her Past” (Uya: 1984).

The initial reactions to Eurocentrism were pan-Africanist that was enunciated by Africans in the Diaspora as an emotional and intellectual reaction against inhuman treatment, despoliations, injustice, oppression and alienation by the colonialists (Olusanya 1984: 10). Thus, a home-based effort was needed for substantial contributions to be made in the study and documentation of African history, especially of the acephalous societies.

Some commentators argued that the Muslim and European scholars did not document the non-centralized societies in pre-colonial times because they were not centres of commerce, trade and politics. This in essence meant that among the factors that led to centrality, in especially political organizations, were commercial activities, complexity of the economy and geographical location (Gloria Thomas Emeagwali, 1982). However, non-centralization does not imply absence of political structures and commercial activities that could have led to accumulation of capital and surpluses, and subsequently to state formation but in addition to certain peculiarities that did not occur, and still are absent, in acephalous societies.

From the distribution of non-centralized societies in pre-colonial times, they tended to be located away from the major trade routes. But it must be pointed out that it was not all the non-centralized societies that found themselves on trade routes that developed into centralized societies. Nonetheless, some societies, such as the Aro and Nri participated in the long distance trade in pre-colonial times, had political structures and accumulated capital, and even had military and oracular backings, but could evolve into centralized states. The position here is that it is not trade that

transforms non-centralized societies into centralized societies but the presence of facilitators that appropriated the surpluses to form capital and service organs for coercion. The reasons for the societies remaining non-centralized were because they practiced subsistence agriculture, had non-specialized political apparatuses and not backed by special organs like the police and army. It cannot be explained away by saying the Aro and Nri, among others, could not evolve into centralized states because they were located away from trade routes; in fact, they were even found in-between centralized societies.

Thus, the reasons for the neglect of acephalous societies were because they were not situated on trade routes and centres that would have attracted many traders, artisans, travelers, European explorers and Islamic clerics. The visitors always found it profitable to settle in the centralized societies in order to be patronized. The Muslim scholars who came equipped with the tradition of writing from the Muslim world became employed as palace chroniclers: Documenting events. Rulers in Western Sudan, such as Idris Alooma, commissioned some of them to write the history of their kingdoms and personal biographies. Thus, they wrote about trading activities and on centres of Islamic learning such as Kano, Timbuktu, Jenne and Sokoto - the capital of the Fulani Empire (Robin Hallet, 1970: 4). Leo Africanus (Muhammed al-Fasi) described Timbuktu as a centre of learning where there were many magistrates, doctors and men of religion; and of the king's affluence and army. Ibn Batuta told of his tortuous journey across the Sahara to Mali Empire, but left enviable records about the empire. Arabic scholars, such as Al-Bakri and Al-Idrisi wrote about Old Ghana Empire (Basil Davidson, 1974: 78). The kingdoms were regarded as making history since they caused reasons for inter-group relations. But since the non-centralized polities were not engaged in rigorous trading activities and did not provide conducive environment for the operation of the scholars and explorers were not regarded as making history and consequently neglected. The result was a huge collection of historical records on the socio-political and economic activities of the centralized societies, such as on their king lists, military exploits and trading relations; and none on the so-called stateless societies Robin Horton, 1971: 73).

Equally, when the pre-colonial European traders, adventures and missionaries came, they were equally attracted to these kingdoms and further produced maps, article and books on them. Among such explorers was Henrich Barth who wrote on Kano (Robin Hallet, 1970: 6). Although, the works by pre-colonial Arabs and Europeans are patchy and poor in geographical coverage, they, at least, provided a historical base for the study of the kingdoms.

The students of African history thus became faced with the challenge of writing the history of the non-centralized states hitherto regarded as insignificant, in all its

complexities and ramifications. By this time, it must be pointed out that, African history had become a subject of academic interest in her academic institutions. Departments for its study were started in many African Universities, and even overseas. In spite of zeal exhibited by the Africanists they became confronted with obstacles fraught in writing the histories of non-centralized societies. There were no written materials to be consulted. Moreover, some scholars, including Africans, trained in Western historiography regarded the study of non-centralized societies as a waste of time. It was unimaginative to contemplate writing the history of a place that was not documented. It was argued that such a history, if ever written, would amount to a bundle of guesses and unclarities. Yet, there were many things in the past that were unknown. Should the heavy work envisaged in this task make it insignificant? Robin Hallet has pointed out that: "To brood too long on these limitations is simply to discourage action" (Robin Hallet: 13).

During the era of historical 'propaganda and trumpeting' of a glorious African past, the historians used the Western methods of historiography that would not appropriately be applied effectively to the African situation. A new methodology was needed in the presence of a new source of historical data - oral traditions that was deemed invaluable in reconstructing the African past, especially the acephalous societies. But it had, and still has, inherent problems. Finding solutions to the problems and making oral data acceptable became a major preoccupation of the historian.

The essence of writing this paper is not necessarily to catalogue the processes of African historiography and interdisciplinary research, but to state categorically that the initial momentum garnered by African historians has waned presently (2016). This has been compounded in Nigeria by its government's de-emphasis of the study of history in its schools curriculum from the primary to the tertiary levels. Perhaps, it became regarded as unnecessary by historians to engage in the study and improvement of a discipline that is no longer relevant in Nigeria, for instance. For sustenance and relevance, the historians have gone begging to be attached to disciplines that seem 'modern', such as International Relations, International and Diplomatic Studies.

However, to underscore the need for a concerted effort in the study and application of the interdisciplinary research methods, a description of oral traditions, their advantages and deficiencies need be rehearsed. Though oral traditions have been found to be laden with problems, it has become urgent that they should be collected, analyzed and stored as historical data. This is because we cannot ensure the preservation of oral traditions in the minds of aging men and women who are losing

their memories and dying and, in addition to the changing socio-cultural patterns of societies.

Oral Traditions

What are Oral Traditions?

Oral traditions are oral testimonies concerning the past that have passed through a chain of transmissions from person to person and from generation to generation to the present. It must seem to be authentic, with rumours and intercalations sifted out of them through the techniques of reconstructing history (Jan Vansina, 1967: 57). Oral traditions are divided into broad and unique forms which have been delineated and categorized as the theoretical (Vansina) and prose narratives or commentaries.

The theoretical categories are, namely, the formulae, which are titular (ritual names), slogans (statements or short expressions, didactic (which are intended to instruct, show riddles and proverbs) and ritual (incantations recited by initiates); poetry, which is in the form of songs and are rarely recited; the list which embodies place and personal names that trace genealogies, give king lists and show roots of migrations (E. J. Alagoa, 1978: 9); and tales referred to as orature and myths that must be in accordance with a people's culture. They are of direct significance and most reliable. "Pre-literate and pre-scientific peoples made rational attempts through myths, to make sense of their world" (P. Stevens Jnr., 1978: 21). It deals with societies' fundamental realities. Defaulters in rendering these traditions were known to have been penalized or put to death.

The largest body of oral tradition is in the form of prose narrative commentaries. This is tradition obtained through commentaries that deal with legal precedents, explanatory and occasional commentaries by rulers (Alagoa, 1978: 9).

Having enumerated the various forms of oral traditions they cannot be taken at their face value since they have been subject to *structuring and restructuring* as new people come to power. Thus, have been referred to as *charter* for the political offices of the communities. This has made oral traditions to be present-oriented rather than past reflective. In Igboland, from the last decade, there have been cases of chieftaincy struggles and each of these contending groups have successfully traced their origin to the supposed ancestor of the place. However, we cannot divorce the present from the past. It is only left to the academic historian to be able to detect falsifications and to subject his materials to accepted historical techniques.

In societies that did not have writing culture, storage of information depended on human memory that have, over time, been influenced by new commentaries,

rumours and premeditated intercalations that were aimed at misleading people. However, the use of oral traditions as source for writing history could be sustained through frequency of repetitions, especially where place and personal names are recited, during coronation and funeral ceremonies. In some communities, for instance among the Yoruba of Nigeria, there are specialists who undergo years of apprenticeship before practice. They are called the **Baba Alawo (Babalawo)**. The trained griots use mnemonic devices such as talking drums and xylophones as accompaniments to aid recitations. In traditional societies, especially during rituals, wrong recitations attract the wrath of the gods or ancestors and the death penalty was, and still is, meted out to those who knowingly and unknowingly falsify king and genealogy lists. These are in addition to milestones, such as monuments, regalia and tombs, eclipses and epidemics that point to specific and significant events in time.

Easily used in reconstructing the history of a people or places are their **totems** which could be used as methodological devices in juxtaposed with the people's oral traditions (E. O. Erim (1984:39). Societies have been found to be totem-synonymous and they remind individuals of an ever-expanding sphere of social relations in their clans and kindred before the final groups or sub-groups that form the most probable recognizable levels of kinship emerged. Of course, this also requires that individuals must have certain information about their heritages. The totems are part of such heritages. Thus, the primary or kinship totem could be used to reconstruct the theory of origins of ethnic groups in any geographical region of the world. From a broader perspective, totems provided, and still provides, the fulcrum for sustained social, economic and political links between states and peoples in pre-colonial times, which formed the structural bases of the predecessors in contradistinction to their successors of modern nation states in Africa (Erim: 40). African historians have so much depended on anthropological analysis (without knowing how the anthropologists do it) and, often times, did not regard as important as oral tradition a factor as **totemism**. It is regarded as tragic for African historians' failure to realize (and when they do) to practice what others outside the discipline have realized long ago and that is that history is a powerful instrument for forging unity of peoples and inspiring them to greater heights (G. O. Olusanya, 1984).

A dependence on oral traditions to establish a chronology for African history has been a fruitless venture as a result of the problem of **memory elision**. The human memory cannot effectively store events that happened in the past. In practice, only few traditions go back to dates beyond 1200-1500 AD. Even the documented ones do not cover much time since, for instance, recording in West Africa started about the 10th Century by Muslim scholars (Vansina: 63).

Having pointed out the problems inherent in oral traditions, they cannot totally invalidate them. Oral traditions are an essential storehouse for historical data for African historians who have adopted them as techniques for their usage. They have employed the basic steps stipulated in the use of oral traditions, such as collection, documentation and interpretation or writing of the history. Yet, there are other problems that transcend the realm of their history and thus, a call for the interdisciplinary research approach.

But before considering the interdisciplinary approach, it will be important to discuss the basic steps that have been adopted as means of finding solutions to the problems inherent in the writing of the histories of acephalous societies.

Uses of Oral Traditions or Myths

The **Collection of oral traditions** must be systematically and scientifically done, taking notes of the cultural, social, religious, political and economic aspects of the peoples' lives and, if possible, their language (including its semantic: syntax and phonemes). It will be a credit to the historian if he is a native speaker of the language of the people whose history he has embarked on to write. Many versions should be collected from the same community and from different persons in the community. If it concerns a particular community, neighboring communities' traditions must be equally recorded for comparative purposes in order to justify claims made by the community under study. If an Igbo community, for instance, claims a Benin area origin, it will also require going to Benin to conduct oral interviews. The names, ages and experiences of the informants must be recorded too because these will help in assessing the time coverage and validity of the oral traditions collected. However, some elderly men are not more informed than their juniors in some communities (personal experience during a field work).

The next step, which is **documentation**, goes hand-in-hand with the collection of oral traditions. The researcher here uses taping, waxing and even photography in recording his information. "But the major responsibility for documentation relates to the disposal of the final result of the research" (Alagoa, 1978:18). The historian here faces the problem of availability of recording equipment and the maintenance of these tapes since they are subject to wears from frequent use and weather.

The next is **transcription**. This requires a good knowledge of linguistics, its techniques and knowledge of the community's orthography, in spite of the fact that the researcher might be an indigene. Here, if the historian does not have orientation in the other fields while collecting and analyzing oral traditions, he/she will definitely give wrong interpretations of the data collected and concomitantly draw misleading inferences and conclusions.

The last step involves the **interpretation** of the data collected for writing the history. It will be recalled that the cultural, economic, social and political aspect of a people are recorded during collection. This then requires that the services of scholars that are well vexed in the descriptions of the other aspects of the society. The limitations are now obvious. The historians must resort to other disciplines to curb their limitations in order to achieve reliability in the use of non-narrative sources. **This will then involve students of the other discipline, such as archaeology, linguistics, biology and cultural anthropology (ethnography).** The results got from these disciplines will be compared with the oral data collected by the historians. Warning African historians against undue emotionalism and sterile skepticism, A. E. Afigbo (1984: 54), had on the study of segmentary societies said that:

The wide-ranging and laudable concern for the methodology of oral tradition has not only helped to point out the centrality of oral tradition as a source for the history of Africa especially of Black Africa, in the pre-colonial period or even in the colonial period. It has also made all would be exploiters of this source alert to its major pitfalls.

In his own studies, G. I. Jones, itemized two types of oral traditions, namely, those which refer to the recent past (TRRP) and those that refer to the distant past (TRDP); and opined that those that refer to the recent past are more valuable than those information from the distant past, especially when used in conjunction with other written European records (Afigbo: 55; G. I. Jones, 1963: 24; and Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, 1950: 50). On his own, Robin Horton, insists that oral traditions can only become viable if its indications are considered along those of “linguistic maps, culture trait maps and the results of archaeological work” (Horton: 79-80). Continuing, based on an earlier position, A. E. Afigbo (1984: 63) further stated that:

Our goal in reconstructing the history of the segmentary societies, no matter our source, should not be to write for them the same heroic genre of history as we write for the great states. It should be to write history which is as close an approximation to their own experience as is possible within the sources and technique available to us.... We must ensure that the questions which we put to the oral traditions of any society are consistent with the intent and concern of the people’s perception of their world.

The interdisciplinary research approach only makes the historian an integral part in the process of reconstruction, waiting patiently for the students of the other disciplines to come up with their results. This is so because oral traditions would not

give us the sort of solid 200, 500, or 1000 year coverage. It must be recalled that oral traditions are deficient in time and coverage. The archaeologist comes in handy at this point. His problem, as far as the writing of the history of non-centralized societies is concerned, is that of **chronology**.

Archaeology

Archaeology is concerned mostly with the material remains or fossilized results of human existence and behaviors. Its methodologies are different from those of historical reconstruction, which are based on written, or oral traditions. Thus, according to V. E. Chikwendu (V. E. Chikwendu, 1984: 64):

For an archaeologist... oral information [is] a working hypothesis. It is generally known that archaeologists do not accept as authentic things in non-archaeological circles [but] as speculative and at best learned guesses.

In spite of preponderant ethno-botanic evidences to suggest the domestication of yams from the wilds in West Africa, archaeology is yet to unearth the remains of yams or evidences of its production. Thus, to better appreciate the relationship between oral traditions and archaeology, four main stages of archaeological investigations are considered which will, in turn, constitute archaeological evidence.

The archaeologist preoccupies himself with the finding of artifacts that are defined as things made and unmade by deliberate human actions which are better in building chronologies and delineating cultural sequences of events in the past (J. Deetz, 1967: 3). The artifacts include parts of the human body, such as bones and hairs, architectural left over, such as huts, caves and houses, large settlement structures such as city walls, outlines and plants. Included are also domestic refuse heaps, grave goods being presents or property made to or belonging to the dead, religious places and objects, fortifications, tools, weapons and ornaments. These artifacts are subject to destruction especially the organic ones like bones and sculptures made of wood. The inorganic ones, for instance charcoal, stay longer.

Archaeological methods include the reconnaissance and finding of the sites mentioned in oral traditions, and then excavating them, recording all the finds, analyzing the materials recovered in a systematic way, and then the writing of a report to interpret human occupation of the site that is under investigation (Thurstan Shaw, 1969: 5). The archaeologists do not work in isolation but in conjunction with the natural sciences. This is simply because he cannot do the work alone. After all, archaeology like oral traditions has its own shortcomings. The analyses of the artifacts, which include cleaning, sorting, labelling and recording, are essentially a laboratory process. The dating of the objects is the work of the relevant experts in

physics. Plants and seed remains are sent to the chemists and botanists. Faunal remains go to the zoologist, the soil scientist deals with soil samples, and human remains go to the anatomist while computations are done by statisticians and with computers. The geologists deal with stone and rock analysis. It is only after these bits of information might have been assembled before any meaningful reconstruction, of course coupled with the specialist report, can be made.

The archaeologist uses the **relative** and **absolute dating** methods. The relative method entails placing an assemblage in time relative to other assemblages. Here the archaeologists do not make assertions rather he says this is before this. For instance, if we have two layers of soil, 'A' and 'B' where 'B' is below 'A', we can infer that 'B' is older than 'A'. This is termed **stratigraphy**. There is a problem here because in case of any likely historical accident, objects that were in 'B' could be found in 'A'. In this case a wrong inference could be drawn. For the archaeologist to be able to describe sequence of events and say when they took place must resort to absolute dating. **It must be pointed out that absolute dating in itself is not very absolute.** Nonetheless it has, to a larger extent, provided a solution to our chronological problems. The invention of the **Radio Carbon** dating method by Doctor W. F. Libby in 1948 has greatly improved our reliance on absolute dating.

Archaeology has given credence to the study of non-centralized societies. Though archaeological reports do not always tally with oral traditions, archaeological work from the scratch relies heavily on oral tradition. This is because before the archaeologists embark on excavations oral interviews are conducted to ascertain a probable site. Though more archaeological works are centred on the centralized states, the excavations at Igbo Ukwu, Nsukka, Ugwuale, Ezzira, Afikpo and Umundu in Eastern Nigeria hinterland and Ke, Okochiri and Ogolma in the Delta, show the promises of archaeology in tackling the problem of writing the histories of acephalous societies (N. Nzewunwa, 1980). **Nevertheless, to fill the gap provided by oral traditions in terms of time coverage, only archaeology can do it more affectively. His help to the historian in modern times is invaluable, especially where documentation is poor or non-existent (B. A. Ogot, 1974: 67).**

Biological Data

Another non-narrative source is biological data which has been divided into two parts, namely, the whole part relationships and the fundamental biological process. The use of the whole part relationship as data is because many West Africans have been farmers and many crops are planted in different regions. During archaeological works, if pollen grains are recovered from clay, for instance, they are usually taken to a trained botanist who will first detect the type of plant that has it and then the region

in which such a species of plant can grow. We can then infer that since this crop was grown in this type of vegetational region and that this was domesticated from the wild variety, hence this group of people who had lived there planted it. The ages of such plants have been determined by directly associating once-living materials bulky enough to provide sufficient carbon test. This also applies to animal bones (Shaw: 10).

The fundamental aspect, which involves **natural selection** and **artificial selection** as biological data, can be used as a source for historical evidence. The historical relevance of this is that it enables us to make assertions about where a given species was originally domesticated. Thus, we can say that all domestication started from the wild, with human use of a wild species and followed by selection of superior mutations. Hence, where a species is an indigenous domesticate we shall expect to find the wild relatives. In as much as biological data seem to be an invaluable source, the debate by scholars on the origin, introduction and domestication of cultigens makes it unreliable yet for historical purposes (Gabel, 1967: 232).

Ethnography

Another non-narrative source of evidence is ethnography that examines the social and cultural characteristics of groups in the present day and not necessarily concentrating on the past, as the archaeologist would do. Here, the first method, which has been called the **law of cultural divergence**, runs parallel with the linguistic comparative method. It is assumed that cultures start from a point and diverge at another. The old and new points now form the basis for historical reconstruction. The divergences might have arisen as a result of historical accidents. The resultant two daughter cultures will in turn begin to experience different historical challenges. If the historian stumbles upon such cultures he will compare the similarities and peculiarities between the old and new points. If the latter outweighs the former, we can infer that the cultures have just separated and vice versa. But the problem here is to determine which of these cultures are borrowed or genetic so as to infer a common origin (Horton).

The second law, the **“Before and After”** method which was devised by Professor Robin Horton states that man being conservative in character changes with reluctance in terms of culture unless faced with new, and often traumatic, experiences. If two societies ‘A’ and ‘B’ are of the same origin and with a similar culture, should one of them, for instance ‘A’, face a historical challenge ‘K’ (either trade or invasion), it becomes impinged by ‘K’. If the anthropologist or historian stumbles on them, ‘B’ will always tell how ‘A’ was before it was hit by ‘K’. In Kalabari, the Opuama were hit by the Atlantic slave trade while the Kalama were not. Differences in their political, social and economic institutions are pointers to the effect of the Atlantic Slave Trade on the Opuama (Horton).

Linguistics

Another source of historical evidence for writing the history of non-centralized societies is linguistics. Its relevance lies in the fact that it goes farther back into the remote past when compared with evidences from oral traditions. It is mostly studied because of how languages separated and diverged from each other thousands of years ago. Linguistic data has since helped us to determine common origins; time lapsed since separation, location of homelands and recent cultural interchanges. The most important method of interpreting linguistic data, especially in trying to establish common origins, is through the comparative method. Here, we use the knowledge of linguistic divergence derived from the study of a language whose history has been written as a means to an end. The end is to discover the historical significance of patterns of similarities and differences. This comparative method is based on a body of generalizations concerning the way in which language is affected by the splitting and dispersal into new geographically separated areas by its speakers, whereof occurs changes of vocabulary, especially in the non-basic vocabulary, pronunciation and changes in grammar. The language of the dispersed population first divides into dialects and after many years, say thousands, becomes two distinct languages. In this comparison, emphasis is laid on basic vocabulary because people tend to stick more to it than on non-basic vocabulary, which are but additions of new experiences (Horton, 1982).

In a comparison which attempted locating the homeland of the Lower Niger group of Communities of the Eastern Niger-Congo branch (Kay Williamson, 1982), the principle of homeland location, which states that the area, which maintains the most distinctly related languages, is likely to be the area of their homeland. It was inferred that the homeland of the Lower Niger group of communities would be around Ekpeye in the Rivers State as a result of the distinctness of the languages here. Inferences were drawn from a comparison of agricultural products, food and its preparatory implements among the languages of the Lower Niger group. Also compared is yam production/cultivation among the Igbo (Abam), Ekpeye (Ahoada) and Ikwerre (Ogbakiri and Emohua). A proto-relationship between the languages and their speakers was established, implying that they came from a common homeland.

From Table 1 (below), it is clear that there is a relative degree of firmness or coherence from the reconstructed culture words and, thus, has been able to infer an old culture element. The languages fit into one geographical environment and they tend to cluster towards the south around Ekpeye, which probably at their proto-stage understood each other. However, there have been changes in the sound systems of the languages due to innovations. In such innovations we see (**kw**) as in 'Okwuru' in both Igbo and Ikwerre having changed to (**hu**) in Ekpeye. However, these are still cognates but have contributed to changes in the phonology. Since the speakers of the

three languages dispersed from a common homeland, they have simple words for most of the cultural words, which cannot be reduced further. Such words are for yam, cocoyam, banana, okra, oil, pepper, fluted pumpkin and beans. There are, however, compound words which still maintain their simple words, for instance we have **ede** in both Igbo and Ikwerre but **-nwuji** has been added to **ede** in Ekpeye. In the comparison, there are some borrowings which are being used together with the original culture words. For instance in Igboland (Abam column), the second words for cocoyam and banana- **nkasi**, and **ukom** were borrowed from the Ibibio in pre-colonial times through warfare and trade.

Table 11 (below), which dealt on Yam production again shows a common origin because only phonological and grammatical changes have occurred. One can, therefore, conclude that through linguistic comparison of culture words one can establish the homeland of different peoples with different languages, though the compared languages might seem as dialects to a foreigner. The fact is that sharing the same geographical environment has always meant sustained inter-group relations through trade and warfare. Proto-Lower Niger speakers were essentially agricultural, had the same mode of production and produced same crops before their separation from around Ekpeye in the distant past.

But this **comparative method** could be placed on the same level with relative dating in archaeology. The Linguists therefore sought for a method of absolute dating method. This was devised by Morris Swadesh and known as glottochronology. This lays emphasis on basic vocabulary which are being dropped and replaced by other vocabulary at a constant rate. That is if we know what percentage of basic vocabulary two languages

TABLE 1: AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS AND FOOD PREPARATORY IMPLEMENTS

ENGLISH	IGBO (ABAM)	IKWERE (OGBAKIRI)	EKPEYE (AHOADA)
Yam	Ji	Iji	Iyi
Cocoyam	Ede/rikas	Ede	Edenwuji
Banana	i	Nnenne	Anyibo
Plantain	Une/uko	Ekninima	Ideni
Okra	m	Okwuru	Uhulu
Oil	Une	Mono	Mono
Pepper	Okwuru	Ise	Ese-bo
Fluted pumpkin	Manu	Ognu	Uyi
Broad leaved pumpkin	Oso	Mgbognurnu	Okpokolo
Beans	Ugu	Akidi	Akidi
Grinder	Ugbogo	Rugwnu	Iyeugwewere
Grind	Akidi	Gwu	Gwe
Grinding	Ngwe	ogwugwu	Ugwepia egwepia
To grind	Gwe	Ogwu	Ugwe
Pounding	Ogwigw	Ofufu	Usupia-usupia
Mortar	e	Worikne	Nweke
Pestle	Igwe	Odo	Odo
	Osusu		
	Ikwo		
	Odu		

INTERVIEWEES: 1. Ogbakiri (Ikwerre) - Gloria Worukwo and Ahoada (Ekpeye) - Akpaka

TABLE II: YAM PRODUCTION

ENGLISH	IGBO(ABAM)	IKWERRE(EMUOHA)
Yam	Ji	Iji
Mound	Okwu	Rukpohnu
Yam Seedling	Isiji	Risiji
(Yam) tendril	Omo(ji)	Ume(ji)
Stemming	Igba - omo	Ogbakwnu -ume
Barn	Oba	Ofa
Yellow Yam	Oku	Oko
God of Yam	Nfijioku	Ajoknuji
(Yam) harvesting	Igwu	Ogwugwu

Interview with **Wichendu Akpe** (Enuohua)

share, we can estimate the time lapsed since separation. The basic vocabulary shared are said to be cognate. We can arrive at a percentage through which we can determine the number of years that have elapsed since separation. The lower the percentage the higher the number of years that have elapsed and vice versa. The percentage is calculated with this formula:

$$\frac{\text{Cognates}}{\text{Cognates} + \text{non-Cognates}} \times 100$$

Though Linguistic data goes for back into the remote-past than oral traditions they are nonetheless an invaluable source for historical reconstruction because the determination of the origin of a language is the determination of the origin of the people who speak it (Williamson).

Summary and Conclusion

This paper painstakingly surveyed the techniques, philosophy and phenomenon of history writing in an era of non-written culture; and discerned the problems that could arise at attempts at writing the histories of the acephalous societies in order

portray how the historian has fared in his self-imposed task of interdisciplinary studies.

Since the acephalous societies were not attractive enough for the early Muslim and European clerics, missionaries and explorers, and did not engage in expansive trading activities, they were only sketchily documented during the colonial period unlike the centralized kingdoms. Evenso, only the chronicles of the Muslim scholars on Western Sudanic empires go back to as far as the 10th century AD, while the scanty intelligence Reports on non-centralized societies by the colonial administrators only date to late 19th and early 20th centuries A.D. This then cannot give the needed historical coverage in reconstructing the histories of African (multitude acephalous) communities.

The only source that came readily handy to the African historian was oral tradition which was challenged by Western scholars and even by Africans trained in Western historiography, as a veritable source for historical writing. They demanded that the African historians should define their methodologies in a bid to validate oral tradition as a non-written source, pointing out the many limitations that are inherent in it. In defining his methodologies, the historian adopted basic steps, such as the systematic collection, documentation, transcription and interpretation of his materials. In these processes he discovered his handicaps and resorted to the interdisciplinary research approach. He involved the archaeologist in order to anchor a chronological base and sequence, the cultural comparative methods, by the anthropologists, to study and analyze cultural changes and traits, and the linguist to take care of the principles and techniques of language classification with a view to determining origins yet identifying homelands through comparative methods of culture words and lexicostatistics.

The interdisciplinary approach thus has proved invaluable in the writing of the history of non-centralized societies. The historian though starting out boldly, could not have, as things were to prove, done it alone without drawing wrong inferences and coming out with suspicious works. To further the study of African societies, especially the non-centralized ones, African scholars have formed themselves into associations both at the national and international levels. These bodies set new techniques and directions in the writing of African history, insisting on a continental approach rather than resort to propaganda. Suggestions have been made regarding the writing of those histories influenced by the colonial factor. Some of those histories have, at least, been revised. The Yoruba are no more descended from Egypt. Consequently, we have journals, such as the '**African**,' '**Journal of African History**,' '**Tarikh**,' '**Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana**' and the '**Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria**', to mention but a few.

The 'Historical Society of Nigeria', to this end, has produced the "*Groundwork of Nigerian History*". An index for measuring the status of African historiography has manifested itself in the projects undertaken by UNESCO, which has led to the production of volumes of books on the '**Methodology of African History**'. Although, the African Historian cannot claim authenticity of his product, he has provided at least a new insight into the past and, in fact, contributed to a better understanding of the present. Though there are problems in the disciplines employed in the interdisciplinary approach, it is the only means of achieving a balance in the writing of the history of non-centralized societies.

But to what extent have the historians sustained these efforts? The present crop of historians who have not received training in the various disciplines that are used in interdisciplinary research cannot interpret the contents of the few books on interdisciplinary research perspectives and methods, in most cases. This is unlike in the social sciences where the teachers and students are more engrossed in interdisciplinary studies. The historian has become an outsider in his game.

The disciplines that have been surveyed certainly require full knowledge of their applicability and a good understanding of their specific methodologies. Thus, in an era of highly segmented academic studies environment, it becomes obvious why there is a dearth of books on the interdisciplinary research approach. It must be pointed out that there is a difference between interdisciplinary research approach and research methods.

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