

Professor, PhD (Ibadan)
University of Swaziland

The Anglophone-Francophone Historiographical Divide. Who benefits?

By *Professor Nicodemus Fru Awasom*,

Department of History

University of Swaziland

Panel 34: Ecas 4

ABSTRACT

There is an enduring iron curtain between Anglophone and Francophone nationalist historiographies that has persisted into the postcolony and which is largely explained by the colonial mould in which these two linguistic communities evolved and ossified. The first intellectual schools in Africa to emerge and challenge the imperial narratives that refused the existence of African history in the post Second World War era were the Ibadan School and Dakar School of History representing the Anglophone and Francophone intellectual traditions respectively. Yet the two nationalist historiographical traditions have hardly crossed their respective cultural boundaries owing to the linguistic barrier inherited from colonialism. Put differently Francophone universities privilege the teaching of Francophone African historiography while the Anglophone counterparts restrict themselves to the historiography of Anglophone Africa. The focus of this paper is the bifurcated development of Anglophone and Francophone historiographies that provide a counter narrative to colonial and postcolonial hegemonic discourses through ideological revisionism, reversal and re-statement. I argue that that the Anglophone and Francophone intellectuals, acting independently of each other, supplied the necessary ideological ammunition which the nationalists for the deconstruction of the colonial enterprise, and the construction and consolidation of nation-states. In the postcolony, the two schools of history are still divided in their reaction to major threats to the African past represented by Sarhozy's infamous speech in Dakar rejecting the existence of any past of the African continent. The divided ranks of Anglophone and Francophone scholars does not benefit Africans; it only helps to impoverish African historiography and distort the image of the African in the eyes of the 'other'.

1. Introduction

Decolonisation is one of the principal themes around which contemporary African studies revolve for the simple reason that the African continent was a thorough colonial casualty. The enduring and visible imprint of colonialism is the European balkanisation of Africa into several blocs of which the Anglophone and Francophone blocs are the most preponderant. Communication and intellectual exchange between these two blocs have been hampered and compounded by the English and French linguistic divide. Even within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and its military wing ECOMOG, English and French stand as stumbling blocks to communication.

This paper focuses on the Anglophone and Francophone divide in the intellectual sphere in Africa and looks specifically at how nationalist historians in Anglophone and Francophone Africa vigorously pursued the same objective of nation-building through their writings. But the linguistic iron curtain descended between the two communities from their respective colonial past making it difficult for any cross-fertilisation of ideas to take place. In the postcolony, Anglophone and Francophone historians largely continued the tradition of acting in isolation from each other. Whereas Francophone history departments privileged the teaching of Egyptology as a missing link in African history that emphasises the African origin of Egyptian civilisation, Anglophone history departments are not similarly committed to such an intellectual engagement. And when French president, Nicholas Sarkozy unearthed the old myth of the non-existence of African history in Cheikh Anta Diop University in Senegal on 26 July 2007, an energetic riposte came exclusively from Francophone and French Africanist scholars¹ while their Anglophone counterparts maintained an embarrassing silence as if they are not Africans and Sarkozy's insults did not include them.

Anglophone and Francophone African nationalist historiography, in essence, should be seen as the manufacture of an anti-colonial ideology or a counter discourse that asserts African historicity, humanity and ingenuity, and extols unity and independence against the foreign oppressor². Nationalist historians conceived the necessary ideological ammunition which the nationalists utilised to deconstruct the colonial enterprise and to consolidate the nascent nation-states moulded by Europeans in the last quarter of the 19th century after the Berlin West African Conference. These Anglophone/Francophone African nationalist schools were fighting for the same cause-decolonisation-in dispersed ranks. Randrianja and Davidson point out that in the postcolony, nationalist historiography was progressively transformed into an all-important ideology of consolidating independence in Africa³. This historiography therefore shaped the mindset and consciousness of nascent African statesmen.

In essence, this paper argues that Anglophone and Francophone nationalist historians championed decolonisation and developed distinct methodologies of recovering the African past through their writings but their ideas remain divided along linguistic lines without any significant attempt at the cross-fertilisation. The two schools continue to operate generally in divided ranks despite the wealth of their respective historiographies and against a backdrop of the resurgence and resilience of the colonial historiography in

¹ For the response of these scholars to Sarkozy's unsympathetic utterances about Africa see Adame Ba Konore (ed.) *Petit précis de remise à nouveau sur l'histoire africaine à l'usage du président Sarkozy* (Paris: Paris, La Découverte, 2008.).

² For interesting overview of Anglophone and Francophone historiography see Joseph Ki-Zerbo (ed.) *UNESCO General History of Africa volume 1: Methodology and African Prehistory*: (California: James Currey, 1990).

³ Solofo Randrianja, "Nationalism, Ethnicity and Democracy," In Stephen Ellis (ed.), *Africa Now: People, Policies and Institutions* (London: James Currey, 1996: 20), Basil Davidson, Basil, *The Search for Africa: A History in the Making* (London: James Currey, 1994).

the post colony, particularly at the onset of the third millennium, which witnessed the revival of the old colonial discourse of the refusal of the historicity and humanity of Africa by conservative European elite. This linguistic divide in the academia does not maximise the enrichment of African knowledge production.

This article is divided into four parts. The first two parts surveys the common grounds on which Anglophone and Francophone historians developed their respective historiographies that underscore Africa as part of world history and civilisation. This is followed by a highlight of the resurgence of the old colonial historiography in conservative European circles and the response of African scholars coming largely from Francophones with the support of French Africanists. The last part is the conclusion.

2. Overview of the Colonial Discourse of the Refusal of African history as a Strategy of Domination

If Immanuel Wallenstein's modern world-system theory is anything thing to go by, it highlights the entry of Africa into the global system leading to the effective reconfiguration of Africa into spheres of European domination and exploitation, followed by decolonisation and independence⁴. Because Africa was a victim of the world-system of inter-dependence and collectivity while Europe was triumphant, European ideologies were easily formulated to capture the status quo of the conqueror and the vanquished and ultimately the coloniser and the colonised.

European colonial historiography, in essence, denied African agency and claimed that African history was kick-started by the advent of Europeans to the 'dark continent' and was essentially the account of the itineraries and activities of European explorers, trade merchants, missionaries and colonisers. Africa, unlike other parts of the world, did not make history because blacks allegedly achieved nothing and recorded nothing. According to G.W.F. Hegel, the great influential German philosopher, and "his intellectual descendants", Africa was the ultimate "undeveloped, unhistorical" other of Europe. Zeleza notes that:

Hegel's "Africa proper," to use his divisive and dismissive phrase, is a truncated monstrosity, "the land of childhood," from which North Africa and especially Egypt is excised and attached to Europe, and where history, philosophy and culture are "enveloped in the dark mantle of night" because its inhabitants, "the Negro exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state⁵.

In his 1830-31 lectures, Hegel divided the world into two: historical peoples who had contributed to the development of humankind, and non-historical peoples who had no

⁴See Donald R. Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa: A History of Globalization in Niimi, the Gambia* (M.E. Sharpe; 2 edition February 2004), 15-17.

⁵Paul Tiyambe Zeleza 2006, "The Inventions of African Identities and Languages: The Discursive and Developmental Implications", In: Olaoba F. Arasanyin and Michael A.Pemberton, (eds.), *Selected Proceedings of the 36th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project, 2006, 1.

hand in the development of humanity. He stated that the history of the world travelled from East to West, for Europe was absolutely the end of history, Asia the beginning, Africa being no historical part of the world. Africa had no movement and no development to exhibit. Blacks had no history other than merely “blank darkness”⁶. Even though Hegel never set foot on Africa and his writings were based on hearsay or guesswork, they remained quite influential and informed European perception of Africans south of the Sahara for a long time. Hegel’s writings were therefore a harbinger of European historiography of Africa.

In his book *The Races of Africa* (1930) Charles G. Seligman argued that the initiative for historical construction and change in Africa could not possibly be due to the effort of Africans themselves but from outside forces introduced by Hamites who are light-skinned peoples of non-negro origin. This hypothesis was constructed on the premise that the Hamites were responsible for certain major developments in Africa such as the establishments of kingdoms and empires through various methods including conquest and cultural diffusion. Like Hegel, Seligman claimed that Egypt was not part of Africa but part of the Mediterranean world. Egyptian civilisation was logically and incontestably the handiwork of Caucasians. The Swahili culture of East Africa was an Arab invention rather than a Bantu invention⁷. The overall effect of the Hamitic hypothesis on colonial historiography was the exaggeration of the role of the external forces in the history of sub-Saharan Africa. The theory explained the historical advances of African peoples as being dependent on external stimuli arising from contact with one of the branches of the Caucasian race who were the fountain of civilisation⁸.

Related to the Hamitic hypothesis is the Sudanic State Theory developed by two distinguished European professors of history, J.D. Fage and Roland A. Oliver. They made a Herculean effort to revise African history in a more positive light by acknowledging the existence of great empires and kingdoms in Africa before contact with Europe. In their book, *A Short History of Africa* published in 1962, they generalised the common origins of African kingdoms which they referred to under the common label of “Sudanic states”. But they wrote that the divine kingship institutions common in Sudanic states first developed in Egypt from where they diffused to the rest of Africa⁹. Their assumption was that Egypt was Caucasian. As we shall see in this paper, Cheikh Anta Diop had an axe to grind with the European claim of the origin of Egyptian civilisation.

In 1923, A.P. Newton, a Professor of Imperial History at the University of London expressed the view that “History only begins when men take to writing”. If you do not have a recording system, you cannot have a history and this is evidence of the backwardness of the African people. In 1951, Margery Perham, a Research fellow in

⁶ Cited in Thandika Mkandawire, “Introduction”, In: Thandika Mkandawire, (ed.), *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development* (Dakar: CODESRIA & London/New York: Zed, 2005), 8.

⁷ Ivor Wilks, “African Historiographical Traditions, Old and New”, In: J.D. Fage, *Africa Discovers her Past* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 7-11.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Roland Oliver and J. D. Fage, *A Short History of Africa* (Penguin: 1962)

colonial administration at the University of Oxford wrote: “Until the very recent penetration by Europe the greater part of the continent [Africa] was without the wheel, the plough and the transport animal; almost without store houses or clothes except for skins; without writing and so without history” and a visible civilisation¹⁰.

After several African nations had acceded to independence in 1960, Hugh Trevor-Roper still proclaimed during his inaugural lecture at the University of Oxford, that there was nothing like African history. Trevor-Roper stated: “Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present, there is none; there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. There rest is darkness...and darkness is not the subject of history. There is only the unrewarding gyration of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe”¹¹. His lecture was couched in the familiar European discourse of the “civilised” and the “primitive”, the “developed” and the “underdeveloped”, and the salvation mission of the European in Africa.

This Eurocentric historiography of Africa can be explained in terms of ignorance, social prejudice and cultural chauvinism and the rationalisation of colonial domination. There was also a great deal of misunderstanding of what should actually constitute African history. The rejection of the existence of African history may rightfully be seen as an attempt to “silence the past” in the logic of “power and the production of history”¹² and to justify the encapsulation and perpetuation of colonial domination of the continent. That type of historiography was a form of brainwashing to hold the African down in a perpetually condescending posture. It is against this background of a historiography of domination and denigration that Anglophone and Francophone scholars emerged in the post Second world War era.

2.1 The Separate Riposte of Anglophone and Francophone Scholars to the Historiography of Domination

There is a compendium of intellectual writings on British and French colonial systems that need not delay us here¹³ but the bottom line was that colonialism involved the authoritarian domination of the subject peoples in all spheres by the colonising powers. And as already pointed out, the colonial enterprise was rationalised on grounds of the inferior and infantile position of the African couched in his failure to produce his own

¹⁰ J.D. Fage, “Introduction”, In: J.D. Fage, (ed.), *Africa Discovers her Past* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971: 1-7); Ivor Wilks, “African Historiographical Traditions, Old and New”, In: J.D. Fage, (ed.), *Africa Discovers her Past* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 7-11.

¹¹ Cited in Ivor Wilks, “African Historiographical Traditions, Old and New”, 7.

¹² l-Rolph-Michel Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Baston: Beacon Press 1995).

¹³ See for instance, D. Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule, 1889-1945*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1976; W.M. Roger Louis (eds.). *France and Britain in Africa*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1971; P. Geschiere, Peter. “Chiefs and colonial rule in Cameroon: Inventing chieftaincy, French and British style.” *Journal of the International African Institute*, 63(2):151-175, 1993;. M. Mamdani,. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996;. T. Smith,. “A Comparative Study of French and British Decolonization” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20(1):70-102. 1978;D. Whittlesey,. “British and French colonial technique in West Africa.” *Foreign Affairs*, 15: 362-373, 1962.

history and civilisation. The African nationalist historiography, which developed in the post Second World era, was characterised by the rejection of the thesis of the non-existence of African history, the re-awakening of colonised peoples and their clamour for independence. It was within this context that Anglophone and Francophone scholars developed a counter-discourse to the obnoxious European historiography of domination particularly during the struggle for political independence in the 1950s and 1960s. This nationalist historiography “sought to correct the one-sided and racist historiography that served the colonial ideological apparatus” of domination¹⁴. The nationalist historiography was a concerted intellectual effort by both Africans and non-Africans (European and American) scholars to counter the partisan views about Africa. Thus, the decolonisation process was achieved through an alliance between African nationalist historians and white liberals¹⁵ although our emphasis shall be on historians on the African continent.

This nationalist school of historiography, in essence, was the historiography of Afrocentricity, of the valorisation of African ingenuity in the creation and flowering of a rich African civilisation, particularly African kingdoms, empires or nation-states before and during the colonial époque as evidence of our humanity. Nationalist historiographies were least concerned with social and economic changes than they were with establishing chronology and progress of kingdoms and empires to underscore the rich civilisation and governance capacity of Africans, and to provide an ideology that would facilitate the struggle for independence and enhance and legitimise the position of the new elite in society.

Which were the major Anglophone and Francophone Schools of nationalist historiography? The Anglophone School of Historiography¹⁶ comprised: the Ibadan School at Ibadan University in Nigeria under the likes of K. O. Dike, S. O. Biobaku, A. E. Afigbo, E. A. Ayandele and Jacob Ajayi; the Dar es Salaam school at University College of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania under Terence Ranger, Walter Rodney and Arnold Temu; and the Kenya School pioneered by the doyen of Kenyan historians, Bethwell Ogot. The Francophone School of Historiography was essentially championed by the University of Dakar under the hegemony of Cheikh Anta Diop, Abdoulaye Ly and Joseph Ki-Zerbo.

The Anglophone and Francophone Schools of history shared the same concerns about the denigration of Africans as a strategy for colonial domination and the perpetuation of colonial rule and sought to challenge such European ideological stance by providing a

¹⁴Hannington Ochwada, “Historians, Nationalism and Pan-Africanism: Myths and Realities”, CODESRIA’s 30th Anniversary Conference, Dakar-Senegal, 10-12 December 2003, 6

¹⁵ It was an alliance that was not without its stresses and strains as Zewde noted. Outside Africa several schools of African studies emerged, including the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London and the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the United States which stood out prominently and whose voices were heard through two respective pioneers-Roland Oliver and Jan Vansina (Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia, “African Historiography and the Crisis of Institutions”, In: Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (ed.), *The Study of Africa, vol 1, Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Encounters* Dakar: CODESRIA, 2006), 138-140.

¹⁶ There also flourished the distinct South African School of historiography which is not treated in this essay because of its specificities as a settlement colony with conflicting racial agendas.

counter discourse for African liberation. But the two schools operated largely within the confines of their colonially carved spheres. This approach was understandable during the colonial period for the simple reason that Africans were under colonial domination and it was easier for Anglophone and Francophone nationalist scholars to address the issues of decolonisation in their respective spheres first before being free to pursue a more vigorous pan-African objective.

2.2 The Anglophone School of Historiography and the Quest for Liberation and Nationhood

The Ibadan School of History, as it came to be known, became the paradigm of a new nationalist historiography. The School pioneered and promoted African historical scholarship at a time it was badly needed as “an intellectual wing of the African nationalist movement set in motion to liquidate the European colonial regimes that were established in consequence of the Scramble for and the eventual partition of the African continent by European powers”¹⁷. Its doyen, Dike, achieved “an intellectual breakthrough” as to the methodology, “meaning and place of history in African societies”. Taking advantage of his firm roots in folklore, especially traditions of the itinerant Akwa blacksmiths, he outrightly rejected the idea that Africans had no history beyond the activities of Europeans on the continent. African history could be tapped from Africans using an appropriate methodology that went beyond written sources.

When Dike had to register for a PhD thesis in the University of London, he insisted on working on a topic that focused on the activities of Africans and not Europeans and required the study of Oral Traditions in the field. Dike was not the first to use oral material for historical research given that the use of oral material goes back to the time of the ancient Greeks. For instance, Thucydides’ history of the Peloponnesian War was constructed on the oral accounts of eyewitnesses. In Ajayi’s words, Dike’s importance lies in the fact that he:

...was the first to get [oral material] accepted as part of a scholarly work for a doctorate, and it was not easy then to get a supervisor or the relevant University committee to agree to it. That is why his resultant work: *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta* marks an important milestone in the evolution of historiography not only in Africa, but also generally¹⁸.

Dike therefore privileged African memory which could be also equated to European archives or written sources. When Joseph Ki-Zerbo states that when an old man in Africa dies, it is an archive that is burnt, he is simply underscoring the importance of oral

¹⁷ A.I., Asiwaju, “Editorial Note”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. XII, Nos. 3 & 4, 1985.

¹⁸ J.F. Ade Ajayi, “Towards a more Enduring Sense of History: A Tribute to K.O. Dike, Former President, Historical Society of Nigeria on behalf of the Historical Society of Nigeria”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. XII, Nos. 3 & 4., 1985, 1-3.

tradition in non-literate societies and the necessity of collecting them before they disappear with their authors.

Dike changed the focus of African history from Europeans to Africans themselves, thereby making Africans the central, and not passive, actors of their own history. Dike's pioneer work brought out the interplay and dynamism of West African societies and their ability to maintain their identity in spite of four centuries of interaction with Europeans. Dike therefore demonstrated that Africans had a distinct history of their own and a distinct way of managing their affairs. This nationalist brand of history, in essence, contested the claims of metropolitan powers that Africans could not govern themselves on grounds that they were a backward people and could not stand on their feet.

Dike emphasised the necessity of the Afrocentricity of African historians in order to be relevant to their society. The insistence was that African history must be the history of Africans in Africa and not that of Europeans in Africa. Local sources and historical traditions must be used to supplement European metropolitan archives. Tradition must be accepted as valid material for historical research.

In 1956, Dike was made a professor of history at the University of Ibadan and became the first Nigerian to head the institution. Dike's main task was to decolonise the minds of Africans by de-emphasising European history and emphasising African history which, heretofore, has no place in the British school curriculum. To Dike's credit, he successfully Africanised the history department in the University of Ibadan and reformed the curriculum to create a truly African approach to the teaching of African history¹⁹. The Ibadan School dictated the pace for the teaching of African history which other Nigerian universities had to take cue from and which influenced the teaching and writing of history in Anglophone Africa.

The Ibadan scholars promoted the proper study of African history at all levels of education in Nigeria and English-Speaking West Africa. They initiated several scholarly projects including the establishment of an umbrella organisation of professional historians known as the *Historical Society of Nigeria* and a regular scholarly publication known as the *Ibadan Historical Series*. The *Ibadan Historical Series* which Dike inaugurated with Longman, London, were essentially products of PhD dissertations defended at the University of Ibadan. The example of the Ibadan School of History scholarly publication series was emulated by the University of Ghana, which also launched its own series, the *Legon Historical Series*.

The collaborative efforts of the *Historical Society of Nigeria*, the history department of the University of Ibadan and the West African Examinations Council, led to the birth of new syllabuses in African history for secondary schools in Anglophone West Africa²⁰. Many Anglophone scholars therefore embarked on the writing of text books on African history to make this dream a reality. In this way, the intellectual agency was brought to the fore to lay the foundations of a new Africa. This measure was a brazen way of

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

decolonising the mind-set of Africans by teaching them their own history and achievements and underscoring their capabilities.

Francophone Africa did not follow the same steps like their Anglophone counterparts in the postcolony in significantly introducing a dose of African history at secondary and high school levels. The same observation may be made about the teaching of African history at the university level in Francophone Africa. In the Department of History Department of l'Université de Yaoundé in the 1970s and 1980s where this author schooled, African history did not dominate the curriculum. Metropolitan influences were still very strong with several French expatriate lecturers littered in the various units of the university.

The nationalist historiography in Ibadan remained on the ascendancy until it was challenged by a radical offshoot in Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria²¹. The ABU School indicted Ibadan of conservatism and adopting a bourgeoisie approach to the study of history while ignoring the contribution of the masses. The ABU School introduced into historical analysis an Islamic and class perspective but their focus remained on African people.

Elsewhere in Anglophone Africa, the East African School of nationalist historiography took roots in its original East African lone Makerere University²². Against a background of the colonial order and ideology, the struggle emerged in Makerere's depot of history, where the African component of the syllabus was very weak and the colonialists did not make it their business to reverse the order. The triumph of the nationalist ideology over colonialism in the late 1950s and 1960s created propitious grounds for the development of a forceful nationalist ideology. Historical knowledge produced in the 1960s was conceived basically as a liberating social force and a means of consolidating independence²³.

The trajectory and nature of East African nationalist historiography was coloured by the different political, social and economic programmes that the postcolonial states subscribed to and accelerated by the split of the University of Makerere into three independent universities in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya in 1970. Scholars therefore complied with the different analytical paradigms in their respective countries. Nyerere's socialist Tanzania had to produce the type of history that reflected state ideology.

²¹ Paul E. Lovejoy, "Nigeria: The Ibadan School and Its Critics," In Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury eds.), *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1986: 198).

²² Makerere University in Uganda was first established as a technical school in 1922. It became the University of East Africa in 1963. It was therefore the home of many post independence East African leaders including Milton Obote, Julius Nyerere, Benjamin Mkapa and Mwai Kibaki.

²³ T.O. Ranger, "'The 'New Historiography' in Dar es Salaam: An Answer", *African Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 278: 50-61. Also see T. Ranger, "Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of Nations....", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol.. 30, No.. 2, 2004: 215-234.

Consequently, the Dar es Salaam school of historiography in Tanzania²⁴ under Terence Ranger, Walter Rodney and Arnold Temu distinguished itself by the shift of focus from nation to class and from the history of kings to the history of the masses.

The Kenya School of Historiography pioneered by the doyen of Kenyan historians, Bethwell Ogot, engaged in a less doctrinaire type of historiography. Like the Ibadan School, Ogot demonstrated African societies had well organised states engaged in long distance trade with properly organised market systems. In sum, Africa had a rich historical past. Ogot's approach to historical studies was largely liberal, emphasising the need for the sources to speak and the need to produce objective history based on authentic African historical sources. Thus, the empiricist approach dominated his discourse. Ogot's magisterial study of the Luo revealed his rich historiographical perspective²⁵.

Anglophone nationalist historiography, in essence, reinterpreted African history in aggressive nationalist terms characterised by the refutation of racist prejudices which had, hitherto, highlighted African passivity. The historiography recognised the importance of tradition in the writing of African history, and focused on Africans as a people with a distinct civilisation and tradition who had often had the capacity to govern themselves. The rich Anglophone historiography largely remained within the confines of Anglophone Africa and was not meaningfully shared with the Francophone world owing to the language factor.

2.3 The Francophone School of Historiography and the Propagation of the thesis of Negro-African Origin of Egyptian civilisation

The Francophone School of Historiography was essentially the Dakar School of thought comprising Cheikh Anta Diop, Abdoulaye Ly and Joseph Ki-Zerbo that was originally based at the University of Dakar in Senegal²⁶. This school, like their Anglophone counterpart, provided a counter discourse to the prevailing colonial historiography of domination that refused to recognise the existence of African history. But the Anglophone and Francophone schools were not connected during the colonial phase and barely interacted fruitfully in the postcolony.

Cheikh Anta Diop was the brainchild of the Dakar School and his ideas shaped the nature and scope of history in Francophone West Africa. Diop went to Paris at the age of 23 in 1946 to become a physicist. He was, however, pushed into pursuing alternative studies by the prevailing provocative intellectual atmosphere which denied Africans a place in history and world civilisation and relegated them to stagnant beings on the world stage.

²⁴ Terence O. Ranger, "The New Historiography in Dar es Salaam: An Answer," *African Affairs*, 70, 1971, pp. 50-61

²⁵ Bethwell Alan Ogot, 1967, *A History of Southern Luo: Migration and Settlement 1500 to 1900*. Volume 1, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967).

²⁶ Baboucar Barry, "Writing History in Africa after Independence: The Case of the Dakar School", Paper presented at Seminar on Problematizing History and Agency: From Nationality to Subalternity, organised by Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 22-24 October 1997.

Diop had to fight such views by changing his field of studies to the humanities and social sciences in order to be better equipped with the adequate instruments of combating such ideologies. He therefore embarked on the study of history, anthropology, linguistics, and biblical works to determine the origin of world civilisation which was being brandished as the handiwork of the Caucasian race.

Diop's study emphasised the similarities between the institutions of pre-colonial Africa and those of ancient Egypt. He revealed that the great Egyptian civilisation, which is the source of inspiration of subsequent world civilisations, is Negro-African in origin. The great Pharaohs (Kings) of Egypt were of Negroid origin. Diop stated that not only were early Egypt's origins African, but throughout the whole of Egypt's Dynastic era (the age of the Pharaohs), and during all of her periods of national splendour, men and women with black skin complexions, broad noses, thick lips, and tightly curled hair, were dominant in both the general population and governing elite²⁷.

Diop traced the original occupants of Egypt to Negro Africans through examining the Egyptian mummies, drawings and scientific tests. Diop's major argument is that in practice it is possible to determine directly the skin colour and, hence, the ethnic affiliations of the ancient Egyptians by microscopic analysis in the laboratory. One of his important works published in journals is the dosage test-a technique developed by Diop to determine the melanin content of the Egyptian mummies. Only blacks have melanin which protects them from the tropical sun and minimises the prospects of skin cancer.

In essence, the solid range of methodologies employed by Diop in the course of his extensive Afro-Egyptian labours included among other things the:

- Scientific scrutiny of the epidermis of the mummies of Egyptian kings for verification of their melanin content;
- Precise osteological measurements and meticulous studies in the various relevant areas of anatomy and physical anthropology;
- meticulous study and comparisons of modern Upper Egyptian and West African blood-types;
- Documents of racial usage employed by the early Africans themselves;
- Biblical testimonies and references that deal with the ancient Egyptian's ethnicity, race and culture;
- The testimonies of early Greek and Roman travellers and scholars describing the physical characteristics of the ancient Egyptians that clearly refers to blacks.

From such a meticulous study, Diop concluded that Ancient Egypt was a Negro-African creation. The implication of Diop's seminal work was that Negro Africans were the genesis of world civilization. Diop's thesis was a bombshell to European imperial intellectual tradition of considering everything African as black and inferior. With a single stroke of his pen, Diop totally deconstructed the myth of the Blackman being portrayed as a stagnant being without a history and without any contribution to world civilization²⁸.

²⁷ Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilisation: Myth or Reality* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1974).

²⁸ Ibid.

Diop's message was not what a colonising power, particularly France, wanted to hear. The French colonial policy of assimilation and paternalism was constructed on the myth of European superiority. Colonial peoples were considered as backward and incapable of standing on their feet or governing themselves without French paternalism. The post war French colonial policy established at the Brazzaville conference in 1944 was designed to build a grand French empire comprising overseas French dependencies and metropolitan France. France therefore ruled out the possibility of "full" independence for its dependencies in 1944 at the Brazzaville conference²⁹.

Any ideology which challenged French colonial designs was bound to be combated. It is for this reason that the French authorities poured their vengeance on Diop's articulations by refusing him the right to defend his doctoral thesis on "the Origin of Egyptian Civilisation". It was only when France came under pressure to accept independence in the late 1950s that Diop finally succeeded in defending his doctorate³⁰. The English version of Diop's Book: *The African Origin of Egyptian Civilisation: Myth or Reality* was published in 1974.

Perhaps it is important to point out that the singularity of the Dakar School of nationalist historiography lies in its claim of the genesis of world civilisation to Negro-Africans thereby debunking the colonial myth of a stagnant Africa that has nothing to show on the planet. The Dakar School went further to propound the methodology of teaching African history. While recommending that African history should be studied, it insisted that Ancient Egypt, whose marvels are the handiwork of Negro Africans, should be an important component of the history. According to the Dakar School, the study of African history cannot be complete without including the study of ancient Egyptian history. In other words, Egyptology should be included in the curriculum of all African universities as a way of enabling Africans to trace, appreciate and reconnect with their historical links and contribution to world civilisation³¹. Diop was therefore attempting to unite Africans through a common history and restore Africa's battered dignity. Cheikh Anta Diop's project was therefore a pan-African federalist one when he reclaimed the Negro-African origin of Egyptian civilisation and hence the cultural unity of the continent³². The Dakar School, like its Anglophone counterpart, also emphasised the importance of oral sources

²⁹ Joseph-Roger Benoit, *L'Afrique Occidentale Française De la Conférence de Brazzaville (1944) à l'Indépendance (1960)* (Nouvelle Editions africaines, 1982).

³⁰ It should be noted that by 1960 the French government, which had been resisting the possibility of ever granting full independence to its colonies, changed its mind in favour of decolonization in the late 1950s against a background of mounting bloody rebellions in Algeria and Cameroon. This new spirit no doubt allowed for more tolerance and Anta Diop's revolutionary thesis could be defended.

³¹ Baboucar Barry, "Writing History in Africa after Independence: The Case of the Dakar School", Paper presented at Seminar on Problematising History and Agency: From Nationality to Subalternity, organised by Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 22-24 October 1997.

³² The Senegalese scholar, Barry, however observes that "the paradox surrounding ... Diop is that in the cultural debate he placed emphasis on unity, the total liberation of the continent and the restoration of African dignity", but in practical political terms, "he confined himself within the narrow limits of the nation-state of Senegal in a manner contrary to his federalist" or pan-African scheme (See Barry 1997: 3)

in the recovery of the African past and encouraged African researchers to use traditions in their writings.

Both the Anglophone and Francophone Schools shaped the methodology of writing and teaching history in the postcolony. However, the Francophone contribution to African historical thought remains largely unknown in Anglophone Africa just as the contribution of the Anglophone scholars is little known in Francophone history departments.

The call of the Dakar School for a new methodology for the study of African history by including Egyptology as a special history course appears to have been answered exclusively in Francophone universities in Africa. Even in Bilingual Cameroon with an English and French colonial past, Egyptology is studied exclusively in the History Department of l'Université de Yaoundé 1 which is in Francophone Cameroon. It is not offered in the Anglo-Saxon University of Buea in Anglophone Cameroon. Needless to state that Egyptology is not a privileged course in History Departments in Anglophone Africa.

Essentially, the Francophone School of History, like its Anglophone counterpart, shaped the teaching of history in the postcolony. The two schools underscored the fact that Africans had a distinct history of their own and were makers of civilisation in their own right. African history highlighted the fact that Africans were capable of assuming their destiny instead of being subjected to alien rule under false pretexts. The fault line between Anglophone and Francophone historians, traced by the language factor, became visible in the third millennium with the revival of the old racist historiography that rejects the existence of an African past.

3 The Revival of the Historiography of Domination and Denigration of Africa in the Twenty First Century

The old colonial logic resurfaced and started staring Africa at the face as proponents of the colonial historiography of domination started re-echoing and rehearsing the old rejected theory of Africa's stagnation and non-belonging to the historical world in the 2000s. Such statements were made against a background of tropical Africa's multi-faceted developmental woes. Owing to its multiple problems of development, Africa was fitted properly in the framework of a continent of blackmail and labelling. Under such labels as 'black hole' 'blank space', the 'rentier state', the 'predatory state', the 'lame Leviathan', the 'prebendal state', the 'crony state' the 'kleptocratic state', and 'the hopeless continent', European voices were being raised again. Their echo was that Africa seems hardly worthy of attention in the study of the connections and energies that define the twenty-first century³³. Africa was therefore treated as being out of tune with the third millennium. The pronouncements of the French government and its ideologues are illustrative of this blackmail and labelling.

³³ Abolade Adeniji, "Universal History and the challenge of Globalisation to African Historiography", *Radical History Review*, Issue 91, Winter 2005: 98-103. Mkandawire 2001: 300-301, Joseph 1987).

The conservative government of Jacques Chirac resuscitated the old idea that the colonial enterprise was essentially positive and was undertaken for Africa's benefit. His successor, Nicolas Sarkozy went further in a caricature of a sort of State of the Union address, which he delivered like a colonial overlord, on 26 July 2007 at the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal in French³⁴.

Nicolas Sarkozy stated that Africa should endeavour to claim a place in world history in which it is absent and endeavour to catch up with the rest of humanity. Like Hegel, Trevor-Roper, and other European ideologues before him, Sarkozy insinuated that Africa was still out of mainstream world historical developments. He called on Africans to distance themselves from nature in order to enter human history and invent their destiny. Building on the theory of Africa historical stagnation, Sarkozy stated that "the African peasant only knows the eternal renewal of time, rhythmmed by the endless repetition of the same gestures and the same words....In this African imaginary world where everything starts over and over again, there is no place for human adventure or for the idea of progress"³⁵. During his speech in Dakar, the French president refused to call the university by its name, undoubtedly because pronouncing the name of Cheikh Anta Diop would have resuscitated the erudite's rich historiographical position on Africa

In a short visit to Libreville shortly after his Dakar trip, Sarkozy said during a press conference: "I want to help Africa to develop and I want to speak frankly as I did yesterday in Dakar", Sarkozy said "one cannot blame everything on colonisation". Widespread corruption, famine, dictatorships, civil wars, genocides cannot be blamed on colonialism or Europeans. Africans sold their brethren into slavery and they should stop blaming others. Africans have themselves to blame for their failure to develop instead of looking for excuses or blaming Europe. The French said aloud what others were probably still saying in whispers.

It would have been expected that the community of African historians would react with one voice to Nicholas Sarkozy's negativities. But the colonial linguistic divide did not make this possible as Anglophone Africa was literally mute while Francophone scholars took up the challenge alone. Mention should be made of the scathing criticism of Sarkozy by Achille Mbembe, the author of *De la postcolonie*. In his characteristic style, Mbembe shot back at Sarkozy:

How is it possible [for Sarkozy] to come to Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar at the start of the 21st century and address the intellectual elite as if Africa didn't have its own critical traditions....?

What credibility can we afford such gloomy words that portray Africans as fundamentally traumatised beings incapable of acting on their own behalf and in their own recognised interests? What is this so-called historicity of the continent which totally silences the long tradition of resistance,

³⁴ Lova Rakotomalala, "Global Voices on Line, African Writers Criticise Sarkozy in Open Letter", August 21st, 2007. Also see http://www.dibussi.com/in_their_own_words. Posted on September 17, 2007 The response of Francophone scholars, except otherwise indicated, is from this source.

³⁵ Ibid.

including that against French colonialism, along with today's struggles for democracy, none of which receive clear support from a country which, for years, has actively blocked local satrapies? How is it possible to come to promise us a fanciful Euroafrica without even mentioning the internal efforts to build a unitary economic framework³⁶?

Achille Mbembe argued that Sarkozy had exaggerated and did not seem to realise that the colonial era was over and Africans were moving forward in their own way and at their own space despite all the odds created for Africa by metropolitan powers and the new world economic order.

Under Adam Ba Konare, (a Malian historian married to the former chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, Francophone historians created a scientific committee, *Memoire-Afrique*, of fourteen members in September 2007, to respond to President Nicholas Sarkozy July speech. Adam Bâ Konaré said African historians could not accept that the history of Africa should be manipulated and ridiculed again because of ignorance and arrogance. She expressed shock to see the oldest continent in the world “relegated to the place of an immature and unconscious child, on whom ... light is yet to lit” and which had to be pitied³⁷.

The Francophone scholars accused Sarkozy of historical revisionism of colonialism, the genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda and the slave trade. They argued that the role attributed to of Africans in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade as sellers of their compatriots was grossly inappropriate and particularly disingenuous, coming from the president of a former colonial power. They stated that France had insulted the memory of the victims of the violence of the transatlantic trade. They noted that “never in the history of humanity had one nation oppressed another without the complicity, if not zeal, of the ruling elite of the conquered nation”. France's implication in the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda was highlighted and the historians stated that some French authorities were even tempted to openly confess to it.

The scholars noted that Sarkozy failed to make the slightest allusion to *Françafrique* phenomenon which is a special subservient relationship between the French political elite and Francophone African Presidents which has existed since independence and which is maintained through threat of a coup d'état for any non-compliant African president. The French scholar, François Xavier-Verschave described the *Françafrique* phenomenon in Francophone Africa as “the longest scandal of the Republic”. Sarkozy who claimed to be pursuing a new French African policy after assuming office was expected to address this subject, since he would have had much to say on France's African policy since the 1960s. According to the Francophone scholars, Sarkozy knows quite well that after the facade of independence attained by Francophone states, Paris continued using coup d'états and

³⁶ Achille Mbembe, “Nicholas Sarkozy's Africa”, *Le Messenger* and *Africultures*, August 8, 2007 (Translated by Melissa Thackway). Also see http://www.dibussi.com/in_their_own_words. Posted on September 17, 2007.

³⁷ Lova Rakotomalala, “Global Voices on Line, African Writers Criticise Sarkozy in Open Letter”, August 21st, 2007.

other means in its former colonies to dictate laws, support dictatorial regimes and control Francophone economies through the CFA zone that was pegged to the French currency and later guaranteed and protected by the French treasury. It has been this way since the time of General de Gaulle and his successors. Whether French governments were from left or right, they followed the same pattern of exploitative behaviour that was ultimately profitable to France.

Nicolas Sarkozy was not expected to publicly apologise for his country's implication in the genocide of Tutsis of Rwanda, of which there no longer exist a shadow of a doubt. Neither was he going to have the courage to acknowledge the role of the French multinational company, Elf, and certain financial groups-to which he is quite close, some say-in the plunder of the continent's resources. It is an open secret that the civil war in Congo Brazzaville that ousted President Pascal Lisuba was orchestrated by Elf. No one, even in their most foolish dreams, ever hoped for the slightest admission of this kind by the French.

The scientific committee later received over twenty contributions from Francophone authors to be considered which would constitute a book to be published of which a copy would be sent to the French President. Of great significance is the fact that French Africanist historians joined the bandwagon of Francophone historians to denounce Sarkozy . Notable among the French Africanist historians are the famous Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, emeritus professor of Paris 7, (otherwise known as Mama Africa), Pierre Boileau and Eric Huysecom. These Francophone and French scholars rejected the French thesis that downgraded Africa and at the same time revived the mainstream arguments in African nationalist historiography that maintain that Africa has its own proud history, and its present predicament cannot be understood without taking into consideration the history of colonialism and the unfavourable world economic order that has been shaped by the western powers. The book was finally published in French with Adame Ba Konore as editor and the title is *Petit précis de remise à nouveau sur l'histoire africaine à l'usage du président Sarkozy* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008.). It can roughly be translated into English as *A Précis of African History for Sarkozy's usage*. Because this important historiographical work is published in French, the Anglophone community of scholars are still cut off from its rich contents. Perhaps historians from the Anglophone world would also come on board to enrich the debate on Africa's place in history against a background of a resurgence of the old colonial historiography when an English version of Sarkozy's insults and the book that was published as a response would become available.

4. Conclusion

The Anglophone-Francophone historiographical divide is a reality and cannot be easily bridged over to the English-French linguistic divide that stands between the two communities like an iron curtain. The agenda of the two schools of history are similar-to reaffirm the existence of a rich, enduring and meaningful African past against a background of negative colonial representation of Africa as a pretext for colonialism and neo-colonialism. .

The Anglophone and Francophone Schools of nationalist schools of history therefore emerged in the post Second World War era to counter the imperial claims and to demonstrate the existence of African history, the contribution of Africa to world civilisation and the capacity of Africans to rule themselves. These schools supplied nationalists with the necessary ideological ammunition for decolonisation and the consolidation of the newly independent nation-states. Unfortunately, the Anglophone and Francophone Schools of history remained strangers to each other owing to their linguistic limitations although they were engaged in the same struggle to achieve nationhood and consolidate African sovereignty.

When the French political elite resuscitated the ghost of Hegel and Trevor-Roper by proclaiming in Cheikh Anta Diop's Senegal that Africa was out of mainstream universal history and should assume responsibility for its stagnation in the third millennium, there was no concerted effort from the African academia. Anglophone academics were largely mute and unperturbed as if on the contestation of the historicity and humanity of Africans by the French did not concern them. A Herculean riposte came exclusively from Francophone and French Africanist intellectuals. The imperialist attacks concerned the entire black race and all African intellectuals should have stood up to it and not only Francophones.

This author is aware of the fact that several internal efforts have been made to bridge the linguistic obstacle between African academics arising from Africa's colonial past.. UNESCO launched a General History of Africa in series in 1970, with the setting up of an international scientific committee of 39 scholars to oversee the writing and publication of a complete survey of the African past from an objective perspective. The periodic meetings of African historians in congresses, particularly the Association of African historians, to review their discipline and chart new perspectives and CODESRIA's refreshing initiative of bridging the colonial divide by bringing historians of different colonial backgrounds to start working together are laudable efforts that should be pursued vigorously. The pan-African Association of African Historians is engaged in bringing together African historians together periodically but it should also seize the initiative to translate major historiographical works into English and French and other wide-spread official languages spoken in Africa.

A pan-African approach to the denigration of Africa by a combined effort of the Association of African Historians and CODESRIA would have enriched the continent's riposte. It is hoped that the periodic concert of African historians would facilitate the circulation of African historical knowledge of all traditions to all African scholars. African intellectuals need to assume the destiny of the African continent in their hands and always act in concert and not in dispersed ranks.

