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TOWARDS THE DECOLONISATION OF THE ARCHIVES AND WRITING AFRICAN HISTORY: PRELIMINARY ISSUES

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Abstract
The study examines pioneer efforts at decolonising the archives using Afrocentric lens to ensure that the historical scholarship derived from them reflect, as much as possible, the real history of the African people and not that fabricated by colonial invaders. Critical use of oral and archival sources in researching and writing the history of Africa was a project of pioneer African historians of the post-World War II era championed by the Nigerian historian, Kenneth Onwuka Dike. Although little known outside West Africa, Dike is the Father of Modern African Historiography, who cannot be circumvented in the study of the methodology and epistemology of decolonisation of African knowledge systems. Dike introduced oral history as a methodological tool in reconstructing Africa history owing to its preliterate past. He was the first scholar to use oral sources for his doctoral research at the University of London in the 1940s—a time scholarly perception of oral history as a reliable source of historical data was marked by scepticism. Dike combined a critical use oral sources and archival materials to construct a narrative that was largely void of falsifications, distortions, myths, and misrepresentations of the African past. The Ibadan School of History incarnated Dike's epistemological stance, and the publications of the Ibadan History Series and the Historical Society of Nigeria deployed his new methodology of oral and archival sources in their production of historical knowledge. The decolonisation and Africanisation of the history curriculum and pedagogy was pursued vigorously especially before and after Nigeria's independence in 1960.The contemporary resurgence of the decolonisation of the curriculum in African universities must not blind us from appreciating the historical roots and cradle of the intellectual decolonisation processes in Africa which this paper explores. The study foregrounds and sensitises practising historians on the genesis of the combination of the critical use of oral sources and archival material in a bid to attain an Afrocentric account of the past.

Keywords: Decolonisation, Africanisation, archival sources, oral sources, African lens, Kenneth Onwuka Dike, the Ibadan School of History, African universities.

Prolegomenon

This paper focusses on the decolonisation of the archives and its corollary, the Africanisation of the history curriculum, on the eve of Nigeria's independence in 1960 and the period immediately after, as a quest for an alternative global south epistemology. Let me attempt to address the issue of the decolonisation of the archives with an anecdote. In 2008, I was invited to present a paper at a methodology workshop in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The title of my presentation was: "The Question

of the Use of Archives in Historical Writing." I had hardly made a sentence when a colleague from the University of Sierra Leone angrily stopped me with a call to order. He ranted that colonial archives were of no use and could not be used for the reconstruction of African history because they were replete with falsehoods and the voice of the coloniser about the African past. My colleague felt archives perpetuated the colonial agenda in Africa and students should not be encouraged to rely on colonial archives. Whatever problems he had with colonial archives; my response was simple: Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Colonial archives in Africa may have their shortcomings but they are still useful as research tools and venues, and they comprise primary data for historical reconstruction which cannot be discarded. Archival materials are considered vital by historians as a primary source of history and are indispensable for the creation of new knowledge.[1]

This essay is a contribution to the ongoing decolonisation and Africanisation debates in African scholarship. It allows us to revisit the genesis of the African decolonisation project, especially the role of Africanist historians in fostering that discuss using archival documents and oral data. This is important because if we do not know where we are coming from with the decolonisation theory and practice, we cannot firmly tell where we are now and where we are going to. As extant literature reveals, the significance of the Ibadan School of History under Kenneth O. Dike as the cradle of the decolonisation and Africanisation project in African Studies is little known outside Nigeria and perhaps West Africa. A few examples would suffice. Bahru Zewde, Emeritus Professor of History at Addis Ababa University, and the Executive Director of the Forum for Social Studies, who also serves as Vice-President of the Association of African Historians, wrote an incisive article on "African Historiography: Past, Present and Future," in which he marginally alluded to the Ibadan School of History's contribution to the development of African historiography.[2] Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia's article, "The History of Africanization and the Africanization of History," hardly alludes to the beginnings of these processes which kicked off and flowered at the University of Ibadan in the 1950s and 1960s.[3]

This study articulates the methodology of exploiting the archives and oral history as part of the efforts to decolonise and Africanise African History curriculum at that nascent and pristine stage of the discipline at the University of Ibadan. Whereas the decolonisation of the discipline campaigns in the 2000s shook the academia like a tsunami, there are still question marks about its novelty, how far it has gone, and what it has concretely achieved. This paper presents a case of the decolonisation of historical knowledge through the judicious exploitation of oral history as an essential complement to documented archival sources. Kenneth Dike's decolonisation methodology led to the reconstruction of African history on Afrocentric lines, and the inauguration and proliferation of African history in the school systems in Nigeria and beyond. As we go crazy today with the decolonisation of the disciplines and the curriculum, we must not ignore the mileages covered by

[1] Durba Ghosh, Jeff Sahadeo, Craig Robertson, and Tony Ballantyne, *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Duke University Press, 2006); Michael Moss, "Archives, the Historian, and the Future," in *Companion to historiography*, ed. Michael Bentley (Routledge, 2006), 960-973.
[2] Bahru Zewde, "African Historiography: Past, Present, and Future," *Afrika Zamani* 7, no. 8 (2000): 1999.
[3] Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia, "The History of Africanization and the Africanization of History," *History in Africa* 33 (2006): 85-100.

pioneer architects of decolonisation and Africanisation of the disciplines and the curriculum and ask whether we have seriously achieved anything remarkable.

This paper is divided into three parts. First, it attempts to explain and dilate on the operational meaning of archives which cannot be limited to "rows and rows of boxes on shelves, impenetrable without the codex which unlocks their arrangement and locations."[4] Archives also include Intangible Cultural Heritage owing to the paradigm shifts on how archives are perceived today.[5] Second, it discusses the endeavours of pioneer historians in the 1950s and 1960s in decolonising the archives through the prism of oral history and Africanising history writing and teaching against an avalanche of discourses of Western Afro-pessimists who pronounced on the non-existence of African history outside contacts with Europe. In so doing, this paper recognises Kenneth Dike as the "Father of Modern African Historiography" in terms of his unprecedented innovative methodology and epistemology of decolonisation. Third, this paper examines the development of Africanisation of the history curriculum under the aegis of the Ibadan School of History and its decline into oblivion. This decline was followed by the emergence of new gurus of oral history and method, in which Jan Vansina and David Henige are highlighted as scholars who embody that spirit.

The Concept and the Decolonisation of Archives

What is an archive? According to archaeologists, humanity has often had the practice of keeping official documents dating back to the second and third millennia BC. However, modern archival thinking can be traced to the French Revolution when the French created in 1790 the French National Archives from various government, religious, and private archives. The French National Archives possesses perhaps the largest archival collection in the world (with records going as far back as 625 A. D).[6] An archives can easily be understood as a place where people visit in search of firsthand evidence from old records which take the form of letters, reports, notes, memos, photographs, and other primary sources for historical reconstruction.[7] Archives could refer to an accumulation of historical records or materials in any medium, or the physical facility in which they are located. It is therefore the historian's laboratory. Archival records are selected for permanent or long-term preservation on grounds of their enduring historical, cultural, or evidentiary value. Archival records are normally unpublished and almost always unique, unlike books, articles, or magazines of which many identical copies may exist. This means that archives are quite distinct from libraries in terms of their functions and organisation. However, archival collections have come to be housed in university libraries as well.[8]

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[4] Sue Breakell, "Perspectives: Negotiating the Archive," *Tate Papers* 9, no. 3 (2008): 1.

[5] Marianne Rostgaard, "Archival Paradigms: The Past, Present, and Digitised Future of Danish Archiving," in *The Nordic Model of Digital Archiving*, ed. Greg Bak and Marianne Rostgaard (Routledge, 2023), 23-41.

[6] See Maynard Brichford, "The Origins of Modern European Archival Theory," *The Midwestern Archivist* 7, no. 2 (1982): 87-101.

[7] Terry Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms." *Archival science* 13 (2013): 95-120; Maximilian Chami, "Community Awareness for Archives in Tanzania: A Case Study of Zanzibar National Archives," *Journal of the South African Society of Archivists* 50 (2017): 56-66.

[8] Verne Harris, "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 63-86; Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, "Content and Use of Colonial Archives: An Under-researched Issue," *Archival Science* 16, no. 2 (2016): 111-123: Ellen Cushman, "Wampum, Sequoyan, and Story: Decolonizing the Digital Archive," *College English* 76, no. 2 (2013): 115-135.

Hawkins notes that over the past two decades, archives that primarily held physical artifacts and printed documents are increasingly shifting to digitising items that did not originate digitally, which are then usually stored away. The mass digitisation and exponential growth of born-digital archives has taken place, and this has resulted in an enormous volume of archives and archival data being made available digitally.[9] This allows for greater accessibility when using search tools and databases as well as an increase in the availability of digitised materials from outside the physical parameters of an archive. The historian goes to the archive because he is chasing the past which has occurred and has gone and can only be brought back again by historians in very different media.[10] The historian goes to the archive for that purpose-that purpose of capturing the past.

Our African cultural heritage has come to be considered as an important component of the concept of archives. The UNESCO concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is broad and includes monuments and collections of objects as well as inherited ancestral traditions or living expressions passed down from generation to generation.[11] These heritages include oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge, and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. While fragile, intangible cultural heritages are an important factor in maintaining Africa's specific identity in the face of growing Western hegemonic globalisation. An understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of different races and ethnicities helps with intercultural dialogue and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life. The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not just the cultural manifestation itself but also the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within the African continent and the world at large.[12]

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[9] Ashleigh Hawkins, "Archives, Linked Data and the Digital Humanities: Increasing Access to Digitised and Born-Digital Archives via the Semantic Web," *Archival Science* 22, no. 3 (2022): 319-344.

[10] Christopher A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed, "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1441-1464.

[11] Sophia Labadi, *UNESCO, Cultural Heritage, and Outstanding Universal Value: Value-Based Analyses of the World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage Conventions,* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2013); Kurin, Richard, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Key Factors in Implementing the 2003 Convention," *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 2, no. 8 (2007): 9-20; Yumeng Hou, Sarah Kenderdine, Davide Picca, Mattia Egloff, and Alessandro Adamou, "Digitizing Intangible Cultural Heritage Embodied: State of the Art," *Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage* (JOCCH) 15, no. 3 (2022): 1-20; Alivizatou Marilena, "Contextualising Intangible Cultural Heritage in Heritage Studies and Museology," *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 3, no. 6 (2008): 43-54. Eleonora Lupo., "Envisioning Design Strategies for Intangible Cultural Heritage Activation," in *Connectivity and Creativity in Times of Conflict: Cumulus Conference Proceedings Antwerp 2023* (Belgium: Cumulus-Academia Press, 2023), 605-610; Jeannette A. Bastian, *Archiving Cultures: Heritage, Community and the Making of Records and Memory* (Taylor & Francis, 2023); Madireng Monyela, "African Indigenous Knowledge on the Cloud: The Role of Libraries, Archives, and Museums, in *Digital Preservation and Documentation of Global Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, ed. Tlou Maggie Masenya (Hershey: IGI Global, 2023), 219-235.

[12] Sophia Labadi, *UNESCO, Cultural Heritage, and Outstanding Universal Value: Value-Based Analyses of the World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage Conventions,* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2013); Kurin, Richard, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Key Factors in Implementing the 2003 Convention," *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 2, no. 8 (2007): 9-20; Yumeng Hou, Sarah Kenderdine, Davide Picca, Mattia Egloff, and Alessandro Adamou, "Digitizing Intangible Cultural Heritage Embodied: State of the Art," *Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage* (JOCCH) 15, no. 3 (2022): 1-20; Alivizatou Marilena, "Contextualising Intangible Cultural Heritage in Heritage Studies and Museology," *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 3, no. 6 (2008): 43-54. Eleonora Lupo., "Envisioning Design Strategies for Intangible Cultural Heritage Activation," in *Connectivity and Creativity in Times of Conflict: Cumulus Conference*

Oral tradition in Africa is an alternative archive given that pre-colonial African societies were largely pre-literate. That is why there is an old African proverb which states that when a knowledgeable old person dies a whole library disappears.[13] There were royal palace historians referred to as griots whose traditional role was to preserve the genealogies, historical narratives, and oral traditions of their peoples; praise songs were also part of the griots' repertoire. The griot profession was hereditary and had long been a part of West African culture. The virtuosity of the griot is the culmination of long years of study and hard work under the tuition of a teacher who is often a father or uncle.[14] The notion of "alternative archive" was further developed and applied by the eminent African scholar, Toyin Falola in his book, *Decolonising African Knowledge: Autoethnography and African Epistemologies*.[15] Falola applied autoethnography to the understanding of African knowledge systems. Considering the "Self" and Yoruba Being (the individual and the collective) in the context of the African decolonial project. He successfully stripped away Eurocentric influences and interruptions from African epistemology and avoided colonial archival sources in his work by relying on alternative archives created by memory, spoken words, images and photographs to look at the themes of politics, culture, nation, ethnicity, satire, poetics, magic, myth, metaphor, sculpture, textiles, hair, and gender.[16] This sophisticated scholarship of an intellectual guru does not mean that archives are irrelevant. His work is just a case where it is possible to construct essentially African knowledge systems without reliance on colonial archives.

Why and how do we decolonise archives in the spirit of establishing an alternative global south epistemology? This question is relevant when we take into consideration the fact that the authors of colonial archival documents were usually colonialists who often had their own agenda in shaping history in a particular direction. Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook consider archives as records which "wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies."[17] Archivists establish a clear interconnection between archives, history, memory, identity, and power with archivists taking a prominent role of "controlling and directing how we remember and how we, and others, see ourselves." Archivists are neither neutral nor impartial because "they control, privilege, and marginalise through such actions as appraisal, description and providing access."[18]

Colonial archives and their institutions in Africa need to be decolonised because their contents marginalise, distort, omit, or misrepresent the voices of the oppressed colonial peoples thereby

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Proceedings Antwerp 2023 (Belgium: Cumulus-Academia Press, 2023), 605-610; Jeannette A. Bastian, *Archiving Cultures: Heritage, Community and the Making of Records and Memory* (Taylor & Francis, 2023); Madireng Monyela, "African Indigenous Knowledge on the Cloud: The Role of Libraries, Archives, and Museums, in *Digital Preservation and Documentation of Global Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, ed. Tlou Maggie Masenya (Hershey: IGI Global, 2023), 219-235.

[13] Babacar Fall, "Orality and Life Histories: Rethinking the Social and Political History of Senegal," *Africa Today* (2003): 55-65; Alice Bellagamba, "Before it is Too Late: Constructing an Archive of Oral Sources and a National Museum in Independent Gambia," *Africa today* (2006): 29-52.

[14] Bellagamba, "Before it is Too Late," 29.

[15] See Toyin Falola, *Decolonizing African Knowledge: Autoethnography and African Epistemologies* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[16] Ibid.

[17] Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 2.

[18] Ibid: 2, 18.

creating multiple gaps and silences. There is the need to include African voices in their historical account because it is about the African past. The decolonisation of the archive is therefore an endeavour to establish "a reparative archive that engenders inclusivity." Hughes-Watkins notes that:

> Reparative archival work does not pretend to ignore the imperialist, racist, homophobic, sexist, ableist, and other discriminatory traditions of mainstream archives, but instead acknowledges these failures and engages in conscious actions toward a wholeness that may seem to be an exercise in futility but in actuality is an ethical imperative for all within traditional archival spaces.[19]

Inclusivity and a more balanced account of alternative voices not given consideration by the archivist is what the decolonisation of the archives is all about. Francis Nyamnjoh's conceptualises the decolonisation endeavour in terms of addressing "the incompleteness" of a narrative from a particular standpoint.[20] The incompleteness, silences, gaps, and missing links in documented archival narratives about Africans need to be filled by excavating alternative knowledges in the spirit of decolonisation of the archives which is the critical collection, evaluation, analysis, and use of archival material complemented with alternative African voices to produce a more Afrocentric knowledge of Africa. Attaining decolonisation of the archives is not an easy and a straightforward business because of its multiple challenges which need not delay us here.[21] Suffice it to state that decolonisation is always work in progress as each generation writes its own history. The fact that there is a contemporary resurgence of the decolonisation discourse is a pointer to the fact that decolonisation is an unfinished and an unfolding business.[22]

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[19] Hughes-Watkins Lae, "Moving Toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 5, no. 1 (2018): 6: 3. For more on the decolonisation of the archives see Trish Luker, "Decolonising Archives: Indigenous Challenges to Record Keeping in "Reconciling" Settler Colonial States," in *Archives and New Modes of Feminist Research*, ed. Maryanne Dever (Routledge: 2020), 108-125. Livingstone Muchefa, "The Archivist, the Scholar and the Possibilities of Decolonising Archives in Zimbabwe," *African Research and Documentation* 136 (2019): 22-35.

[20] Francis B. Nyamnjoh. "Incompleteness: Frontier Africa and the currency of conviviality." *Journal of Asian and African studies* 52, no. 3 (2017): 253-270; Herman Wasserman. "The Incompleteness of Knowledge Production: An Interview with Francis Nyamnjoh." *African Journalism Studies* 43, no. 3 (2022): 1-9.

[21] See for instance, Isabel S. Schellnack-Kelly. "Decolonising the Archives: Languages as Enablers and Barriers to Accessing Public Archives in South Africa," *Archives and Manuscripts* 48, no. 3 (2020): 291-299; Jonathan Jansen. "The Problem with Decolonisation: Entanglements in the Politics of Knowledge," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 61, no. 1 (2023): 139-156; Trish Luker, "Decolonising Archives," 108-125. Muchefa, "The Archivist, the Scholar and the Possibilities of Decolonising Archives in Zimbabwe," 22-35.

[22] Karl Hack, "Unfinished Decolonisation and Globalisation," in *Connected Empires, Connected Worlds*, ed. Robert Fletcher, Benjamin Mountford, and Simon Potter (Routledge, 2022), 18-50; Monika Romina Istratii Hirme and Iris Lim, "Editorial II: The Praxis of Decolonisation," *The SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research* 11, no. 2017-2018 (2017): 10-15.

The Context of the Contemporary Discourse on Decolonisation

The decolonisation discourse has grown exponentially in recent times "among educators globally with a focus on one area of the broader decolonising project, the curriculum and pedagogy (DCP) in higher education."[23] The contemporary resurgence of the decolonisation of the curriculum in African universities appears to have been triggered and magnified by the #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) movement which erupted at the University of Cape Town in March 2015.[24] In the heat of the decolonisation struggles of the 2000s, academics joined the decolonisation bandwagon, together with the Global North and South decolonisation movements.[25] Student activists raised critical questions about whose knowledge should be produced in higher education and argued that it was urgent to address the question of DCP in their universities and colleges by the decolonisation of their universities and centring on non-Eurocentric paradigms. These interesting decolonisation movements are occurring forcefully in post-apartheid Africa with global ramifications, but they are not entirely new.

While paying homage to the social and academic struggles for decolonisation raging across South African universities, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza pointed out that these struggles were not new and "[were] familiar to many scholars raised in the academies of postcolonial Africa in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s." He opined that these struggles were an unfinished business which started several decades ago and they underscored how much South Africa could learn from the rest of the continent and that it was "a gentle caution against popular notions of South African exceptionalism."[26] My direct involvement with academics in Southern Africa starting in 2009 when I started teaching at the University of Eswatini revealed how much they knew about Jan Vansina and David Henige with reference to oral historiography and how little they knew about historiographical developments at the University of Ibadan, the cradle of the decolonisation of the disciplines in Africa starting with History. In hindsight, this study stresses that the decolonisation of the disciplines was equally intensive in the 1950s and 1960s at the University of Ibadan under the influence of Kenneth O. Dike, resulting in the production of Afrocentric knowledge through the excavation and critical use of historical data. The cradle of the decolonisation of the curriculum and pedagogy in Africa, which might not be evident to many, is the University of Ibadan in West Africa. The decolonisation movement flourished and proliferated under the Ibadan School of History with an unprecedented tempo and vigour. Is it possible to compare the decolonisation movements in the 1950s and 1960s and those of the 2000s in terms of the agenda and the intensity? There is need to examine the cradle, genesis, and agenda of the decolonisation movement in Africa to provide a background context for the appreciation of the ongoing decolonisation campaigns.

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[23] Riyad A. Shahjahan, Annabelle L. Estera, Kristen L. Surla, and Kirsten T. Edwards. "Decolonizing Curriculum and Pedagogy: A Comparative Review Across Disciplines and Global Higher Education Contexts," *Review of Educational Research* 92, no. 1 (2022): 73-113.

[24] #*RhodesMustFall* was a protest movement that began on 9 March 2015, originally directed against a statue of Cecil Rhodes, an inveterate imperialist, at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. The campaign for the statue's removal developed into a global movement and led to a wider clamour to "decolonise" education across South Africa.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "The Decolonization of African Knowledges," paper presented at the 9th Africa Day Lecture, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa (2017): 1-10.

West Africa's Pioneers of the Decolonisation of History

Pioneer professional African historians emerged and flowered in the high noon of decolonisation in the late 1950s and early 1960s in an intellectual atmosphere characterized by Western denial of African history and the denigration and dehumanisation of the Blackman. Western scholarship, premised on racism and prejudice of the conqueror, concocted and circulated Afro-pessimistic falsehoods about African history and this resulted in the emergence of a counter narrative by a coterie of professional western trained African historians to combat these negativities. Eurocentric scholars were all too ready to agree that Africa had no history at all, and African history began with the coming of Europeans and the introduction of widespread literacy in Africa. A few examples representative of such Afro-pessimistic European scholars will suffice.

Reginald Coupland, Beit Professor of Colonial History at Oxford wrote that before the coming of the Europeans, the main body of Africans "had stayed for untold centuries of barbarism…stagnant…neither going forward, nor going [backwards]."[27] Europeans felt that what passed for African history during the colonial period was largely the activities of Europeans in Africa. Africans were projected in colonial historiography as passive and therefore non-participants in developments unfolding in their own environments. Africans were therefore destined to be ruled by "the more superior and civilised Europeans."[28]

Arthur Percival Newton, an eminent English scholar, asserts that "history begins when men begin to write" and preliterate Africa could not have had a history. Following the same logic, Margery Perham, an Oxford University don states that Africa was "without writing and so without history."[29] This anti-African postering was hinged on Von Ranke's nineteenth century source-based history campaign promoting the idea that history must be constructed on documentary evidence. European historical scholarship therefore equated history with the existence of documentary evidence. A new generation of African scholars trained in the European tradition of the historical methods, vigorously countered the Afro-pessimistic mythologies of the non-existence of African history in the 1950s and early 1960s in what came to constitute the "historiography of decolonisation."[30] These scholars focused on African realities and demonstrated the glorious and sophisticated history, culture and dignity of Africa in order to "counter the dangerous lies that Europeans had systematised and institutionalised about the African past."[31] The pioneering works of this generation set new challenging directions for African historical studies in content and methodology.

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[27] Cited in Muriel Evelyn Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 17.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid. See also Gloria Chuku, "Kenneth Dike: The Father of Modern African Historiography," in *The Igbo Intellectual Tradition: Creative Conflict in African and African Diasporic Thought*, ed. Gloria Chuku (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 137-164.
[30] O. E. Uya, "Trends and Perspectives in African History," in *Perspectives and Methods of Studying African History*, ed. E. O. Erim and O. E. Uya (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd, 1984), 6.
[31] Ibid.

The Emergence of Kenneth Dike as the Founding Father of Modern African Historiography

The metaphor of Father figures in history helps to legitimise scholarly practices of various kinds that are considered important by the community of scholars.[32] Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886), for instance, is considered the modern founding "father of critical history" and the "father of the modern practice of writing history" because of his monumental contribution to western historiography.[33] Similarly, Kenneth Onwuka Dike, a celebrated African historian of the twentieth century, qualifies as "the Father of Modern African Historiography"[34] because of his retrieval of African history from the doldrums of colonial entanglement that had marginalised and even refused its existence. Dike did so by insisting on deploying, for the first time in contemporary historical scholarship, African oral sources to complement documentary evidence to establish a more balanced African-centred narrative of the African past. According to Ibadan's Professor Ajayi, Dike adopted an Afrocentric methodology of historical writing against all odds which was unprecedented, and his method came to constitute a major intellectual breakthrough in historical writing.[35]

Dike's methodological innovation started when he registered for his doctoral degree at the University of London. He had the courage to challenge the methodological orientation he had received from faculty that was influenced largely by the Rankean epistemology which emphasised evidence-based history anchored on written archival sources. He proposed the inclusion of oral sources in the writing of his PhD thesis because he knew its value. He was a connoisseur of the historical wealth of oral sources from his interactions with the elders of his community and concluded that Africans had a rich history to be exploited from oral sources which were not documented. Dike's thesis proposal therefore contained the use of oral sources at a time when there was scepticism about their suitability for historical reconstruction.[36]

Although the use of oral sources later came to be widely accepted and became "axiomatic,"[37] it had been used before by ancient Greeks like Herodotus and Thucydides. But the standard practice of writing history in Europe since Ranke was reliance on documented first hand evidence. Dike's courage to dare the postgraduate committee with an innovative methodology that was not in vogue paid off as the postgraduate committee of the University of London gave him the green light to proceed to do oral history fieldwork. He, therefore, combined oral and written sources for his research. Ajayi opines that Dike "was the first to get the use of oral sources accepted as part of a scholarly work for a doctorate degree at the time it was not easy to get a University Committee to agree to it."[38] Dike's proposed methodology of oral historiography in thesis writing on African history in the 1940s was unprecedented in scholarly historical writing.

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[32] Matthew A. Fitzsimons, "Ranke: History as Worship," *The Review of Politics* 42, no. 4 (1980): 533-555.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Chuku, "Kenneth Dike," 137.
[35] Jacob F. Ade Ajayi, "Towards a More Enduring Sense of History: A Tribute to K. O. Dike, Former President of the Historical Society of Nigeria, on Behalf of the Historical Society of Nigeria," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (1984): 1-2.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

Dike was inclined to use oral sources for three reasons. First, he realised the inadequacies of the available written primary sources which he consulted at the archives for his thesis. They were external in origin and orientation, and they did not highlight African perspectives. Determined to reclaim the past "glory of Africa," Dike adopted indigenous African data set with emphasis on oral data as valued and vital sources for the reconstruction of African history. This was facilitated by his background in folklore, especially the traditions of famous itinerant Awka blacksmiths, and the oral history of African traders in the Niger Delta area. Armed with the rich oral historical narratives of the peoples of the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria, Dike could not accept the idea that that Africans had no history beyond European activities when he was aware of the enormous history that could be collected from alternative African archives stored in people's memories.[39] He adopted an Afrocentric approach by focusing on internal African factors, especially defensive measures undertaken by the Niger Delta societies against imperialist penetration and the shrewdness of African traders in their transactions with European traders. He achieved historical authenticity and relevance by documenting and validating African agency. By documenting the experiences of African traders through oral interviews, he was able to capture how Africans engaged in their business dealings with Europeans. He projected Africans as agents of their own history. His emphasis on the African agency was important in defining the objects of African history who interacted with the Europeans on their own terms.[40] Dike's narrative was an important departure from the methodology of colonial and imperial historians who focused principally on the Europeans as the makers of African history.

Second, Dike reverted to oral sources in 1948 because of his frustration with the fifty-year ban on accessing classified documents from the Public Records Office in the United Kingdom for scholarly research. The available written documents were European accounts which were not detailed enough and were largely external to African realities and more focused on European activities. Dike felt there was a wealth of historical knowledge in African oral sources which he could use to complement, revise and contextualise existing written documents.[41] To prepare his PhD dissertation, Dike went to Nigeria for field work for a six-month period in 1948 during which he also consulted official materials (consular papers, minutes of the courts of equity, and intelligence reports) which he subjected to critical analysis by comparing the documented sources with oral sources to attain source authentication. Dike was awarded a doctorate degree on 28 July 1950[42] and he became the first African to "pass through professional training" in Western historical scholarship.[43]

The outcome of Dike's doctoral thesis was *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta* published in 1956 by Clarendon.[44] This book, considered as Dike's classic *magnum opus*,[45] marked an important milestone

[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ajayi, "Towards a More Enduring Sense of History," 1-2. Alexander C. Ugwukah, "The Value of Oral Tradition to a Researcher of African Historiography," *Historical Research Letter* 17, no. 5 (2015): 25-53.
[42] See P. D. Curtin, "Recent Trends in African Historiography and their Contribution to History in General," in *UNESCO General History of Africa*, I (Portsmouth, 1981), 54-7.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Kenneth Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Clarendon Press, 1956).
[45] Tekena Tamuno, "Nigeria, 1898-1998: Reflections on Amalgamation, Federation, Integration, and Transition," in *Dike Remembered: African Reflections on History, Dike Memorial Lectures* Ed. E. J. Alagoa (1998), 81.

in the evolution of African historiography with the acceptance of the use of oral sources as a valid tool for historical reconstruction and a focus on the African agency.[46] Terence Ranger described Dike's book and its original methodology as the rediscovery of the African initiative in historical writing.[47] Robert July gave Dike credit for being "responsible for many of the advances in historical scholarship that marked the two decades following the conclusion of the Second World War."[48] Adiele Afigbo qualified Dike's achievement of combining African oral and archival sources with a focus on African actors as a "timeless achievement" and opined that the merit of Dike's study lay in its "ideological and methodological innovativeness."[49] As the pioneer Africanist scholar to introduce oral sources in scholarly historical writing, Dike revolutionised African historiography by emphasising African agency.[50] He was clearly the "prime mover" of the new African history and historiography privileging African initiative, epistemology, and African centred perspectives.[51]

Dike's acclaim as "the father of modern African historiography" derives from his innovative methodology which set in motion a new approach to African historiography, "amounting almost to a revolution in the academic world."[52] No longer was African history to be treated as the history of European activities on the continent. Dike located the African squarely at the centre and not at the margin of his own history. Such was the message of Dike's book.[53] Dike's publication opened the floodgate of research and publications in history under the aegis of the Department of History at the University of Ibadan fully subscribed to the "Dikean" methodology. Dike therefore established a firm foundation for the development of African historiography in the academia.

The Africanisation Drive of the History Curriculum in the Department of History at the Ibadan University College

When Dike joined the History Department in November 1950, he was in a haste to introduce courses in African history in a bid to Africanise the history curriculum. The University College Ibadan was still under the University of London at the time as Nigeria was still under British rule and such a task could not have been easy. Omer-Cooper notes that the syllabuses taught at Ibadan "had to be approved by London University because the University of Ibadan was still a college under the University of

[46] Ibid.
[47] Cited in John D. Omer-Cooper, "The Contribution of the University of Ibadan to the Spread of the Study and Teaching of African History within Africa," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria.* 10, no. 3 (1980): 24.
[48] Robert William July, *A History of the African People* (Waveland Press, 1998).
[49] Cited in John D. Omer-Cooper, "The Contribution of the University of Ibadan to the Spread of the Study and Teaching of African History within Africa," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 10, no. 3 (1980): 24.
[50] B. E. Awortu, and N-Ue Uebari Samuel, "African Intellectual Revolution In the 20th Century: A Review of Kenneth Onwuka Dike's Contributions to African History," *International Journal of African and Asian Studies* 13 (2015): 140-148.
[51] Alexander C. Ugwukah, "The Value of Oral Tradition to a Researcher of African Historiography," *Historical Research Letter* 17, no. 5 (2015): 25-53; Oladipupo Abiola Olugbodi, "Knowledge Production in Historical Reconstruction in Nigeria," *AIPGG Journal of Humanities and Peace Studies* 2, no. 2, (2021): 1-25; Chuku, "Kenneth Dike: The Father of Modern African Historiography," 137.
[52] Olutayo C Adesina, "Teaching History in Twentieth Century Nigeria: The Challenges of Change," *History in Africa* 33 (2006): 17-37.
[53] Ibid.

London. Consequently, the emphasis in history was on British and European History."[54] Thus, the only courses available in the history department were essentially Eurocentric which was what the colonial educational system in British colonies offered. The history syllabus comprised three courses: Europe and World Affairs, 1789-1870; Europe and World Affairs after 1870; and British Social and Economic History since 1783.[55] As a champion of African-centred history crowned by the University of London, Dike's reaction to European dominated history syllabus was expected.

Dike set out to make a case for the immediate introduction of African history[56] but he could not have his way because of the European dominance of the Department of History and the absence of necessary textbooks for the teaching of African History. The British treated Dike's Africanisation drive as too radical and it was turned down. This forced Dike to resign in 1952 and join the West African Institute for Social and Economic Research (now NISER) where, besides his research duties, he revised his PhD thesis for publication and did the preliminary work necessary for the establishment of the National Archives of which he later became the first Departmental Head as Director.[57]

Dike returned to the History Department in 1954 and became the first Nigerian Head and Professor in 1956 and this had implications for the Africanisation of the history syllabus. The University of London finally authorised the introduction of courses in African history in 1956 while the question of suitable textbooks on African History sill posed. From this position of strength as Chair of the Department of History, Dike started recruiting several Nigerian scholars who became adherents to his Afrocentric approach to history writing and teaching. These scholars came to constitute the cream of the Ibadan School of History and they included Joseph Anene, Jacob Ajayi, Ade Aderebigbe, Christopher Ifemesia, Obaro Ikime, Emmanuel Ayandele, and Tekena Tamuno.[58] A number of foreign scholars, many of which came to teach in Nigeria, are also often associated with the Ibadan School, including Michael Crowder, Abdullahi Smith, J. B. Webster, R. J. Gavin, Robert Smith, and John D. Omer-Cooper.[59]

Soon after Nigeria became independent in 1960, Ibadan severed its special relationship with London and assumed the status of an independent university. The History Department initiated the fight for a new Afrocentric degree structure. Within the new system a study of Nigerian/African history with documents became the centrepiece of the final degree year in history. Dike entrenched in the Department of History the African-centred perspective of historical scholarship. Consequently, African graduate students were required to register titles for their PhD dissertations on pre-colonial African history in a bid to assert the existence of African history before the advent of the Europeans

[54] Omer-Cooper, "The Contribution of the University of Ibadan to the Spread of the Study and Teaching of African History within Africa," 23.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Adesina, "Teaching History in Twentieth Century Nigeria," 17-37.
[57] Ajayi, "Towards a More Enduring Sense of History, 1-2; Nwaubani, "Kenneth Onwuka Dike, Trade and Politics, and the Restoration of the African in History," 2-3.
[58] Omer-Cooper, "The Contribution of the University of Ibadan to the Spread of the Study and Teaching of African History within Africa," 23.
[59] Ibid.

which Afro-pessimistic scholars claimed did not exist.[60] Put differently, African history emerged as a veritable instrument to create "a new historical image" of Africa.[61]

The shared vision of promoting African perspectives in writing its history championed by Dike led to the emergence of the Ibadan School of History.[62] The Department of History transformed itself into the Ibadan School of History because of the collective meaning-making epistemology of the construction of historical knowledge in Africa by combining oral and documented archival sources. This new methodology gave direction to students of African history to produce knowledge with a heavy dose of the African agency. What is wholesome in the epistemology of the Department of History was its capacity to hold together the community of scholars through a shared understanding and practice of the writing of African history. The Ibadan School of History was the first, and for many years, the dominant, intellectual tradition in the study of the history of Africa from the 1950s until the 1970s which marked its golden age.[63]

The Ibadan School of History was characterised by its overt Nigerian nationalism, and it was pitched towards building a Nigerian national identity through publicising the glories of its pre-colonial history. The school was quite traditional in its subject matter, being largely confined to the political history that Western Africanists scholars in Europe and North America considered too restrictive and disagreed with. This led to some friction between the Ibadan School and the Africanists in Britain and the United States. Western Africanists felt that the Nigerian scholars should be more objective and less involved in Nigerian politics. Conversely, the African scholars of the Ibadan School saw American and British universities as bastions of imperialism. Consequently, the Ibadan scholars shunned western based *Journal of African History* in favour of the domestic *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*.[64] However, the quality of the methodology and scholarship of the Ibadan scholars was never questioned.

The Ibadan School of History gained international reputation because of the vital role it played in the spread of this new approach to the study of African history in West Africa and beyond. Professor Michael Omolewa observed that:

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[60] Chukwuemeka Nwosu, "Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike 1917-1983: Father of Modern African Historiography," *Journal of Modern European Languages and Literatures* 12 (2019): 14-23; Jacob F. Ade Ajayi, and John Middleton, *Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara*, 3 (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1997).

[61] Ibid.

[62] The Ibadan school of history was the first, and for many years the dominant, intellectual tradition in the study of the history of Africa following Dike's Afrocentric historical paradigm. It originated at the University of Ibadan, in Ibadan, Nigeria, in the 1950s, and remained dominant until the 1970s. See A. E. Afigbo, "The Flame of History Blazing at Ibadan," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 7, no. 4 (1975), 715-720.

[63] For more on the decline of the Ibadan School of History see Paul Lovejoy and Stephen Temegha Olali, "The Historical Society of Nigeria through the Years; A Narrative of the Revolution, Decline, and Resurgence of the History Discipline from 1955," in *Advocacy for History*: *A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. CBN Ogbogbo*, ed. Philip Afaha (Command Publishers, 2018); Paul E. Lovejoy, "Nigeria: The Ibadan School and Its Critics," in *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa*, eds. Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David S. Newbury (Sage Publications, 1986): 197-205.

[64] Adesina, "Teaching History in Twentieth Century Nigeria: The Challenges of Change," 17; Ayodeji Olukoju, "The Crisis of Research and Academic Publishing in Nigerian Universities," in *Africa Universities in the Twenty-First Century* 2, eds. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza and Adebayo Olukoshi (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2004): 363-75.

> The Ibadan School of History was not territorially limited, its flame blazed across nations and continents. It witnessed the dispersal of several disciples and students of the School relocating to other institutions and climes. Thus, African history gradually became well established as a worthy academic discipline in different institutions all over the world.[65]

The Department of History in Ibadan became an international intellectual pilgrimage centre for scholars interested in studying African history from African perspective. Adeoye has come to regard the 1950s to 1970 as the golden years of historical scholarship in Africa spearheaded by the Ibadan School of History.[66] This was the enviable height that Ibadan was able to attain in Africa during its golden age.

The preponderant factor that contributed to the international reputation of the Ibadan School of History under Dike's sway was its publication series. They became widely known as the *Ibadan History Series* which were characterised by their use of oral tradition and alternative historical sources, and the Africa-centredness in their narratives. The Series was established by the Ibadan History Department, in collaboration with Longman publishers, and it began publishing in 1965. The *Series* monographs ran into several highly rated volumes with Dike as the first Editor General the *Series* provided the vehicle for a substantial list of publications mostly concerned with Nigerian history, but others ranging over South Africa, the Belgian Congo (Zaire) and Madagascar. The Study of Benin History and Culture, directed by Dike, remained part of the process of elevating African history to great heights. A similar scheme for the study of Yorubaland history was launched headed by the historian Saburi Biobaku and assisted by A. I. Akinjogbin.[67] The Ibadan *Series* sums the intellectual achievement of the History Department at Ibadan during its Golden Age from 1955 to 1970. Much use was made of oral history in the *Series* in a bid to give Africans a voice. The Ibadan School soon adopted a strongly interdisciplinary approach in gathering information after the founding of the Institute for African Studies at the University of Ibadan that brought together experts from many disciplines.[68]

Dike founded the Historical Society of Nigeria in 1955 to encourage the proper study of history and to promote an appreciation of the value of history in Nigeria. The Society was one of the earliest learned societies established in colonial Nigeria, and it represented extension of the academic activities of the Department of History. Ibadan scholars were also members of the Society and contributed to its internationally known *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria (JHSN*) and its sister publication *Ta'rikh*. The first issue of the *JHSN* was published in 1956 and was devoted to the question of what history to teach in Nigerian schools and training colleges at a time when the usual textbook promoted Eurocentric biases, projecting British and European history narratives about Africa.

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[65] Christopher. B. N. Ogbogbo, "Beyond Nomenclature: Current Challenges of Historical Scholarship in Nigeria," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (2011): 166-178.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

The Department of History and the Society cooperated to get the West African Examinations Council to institute new history syllabus of Africa at the expense of Eurocentric textbooks then in vogue, and organised workshops for teachers from all over British West Africa. Two major books were published from the papers that emanated from the workshops namely: *A Thousand Years of West African History*, *and Africa in the Nineteen and Twentieth Centuries*.[69] In addition to the journal, the Society published a quarterly bulletin with news of the latest research in African history and running bibliography of recent publications. Through its conferences, branch meetings and publications the Society helped to increase and sustain interest in Nigerian and African history generally. Another vital role of the Society was its campaign to introduce courses on African history in secondary school history syllabuses.[70] Essentially, Dike left his mark in the inauguration of scholarly methodology, mentoring, institution-building, and the Africanisation of the history curriculum in Nigeria and beyond.

The Eclipsing of the Ibadan School of History and New Developments in Oral Historiography

The Ibadan School of History was not sustainable as it soon got entangled in the crisis of nation building and began to decline in importance in the 1970s. The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) had a devastating effect on the Ibadan School of History as it caused many scholars to lose faith in Nigeria as a political reality and led some to question whether Nigeria was in fact a unified nation with a national history. At the same time, rival schools such as the Ahmadu Bello and the Dar es Salaam schools of African History developed challenging the Ibadan narratives and gaining several supporters. Social, economic, and cultural history also began to grow in prominence.[71]

The economic collapse of the 1980s also greatly hurt the scholarly community, especially the sharp devaluation of the Nigerian currency, the Naira. Many local journals, including the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, faltered, and were only rarely published, if at all.[72] Nigerian scholarship in general began to decline owing to the problem of under-funding. Government revenues reduced sharply due to the collapse of the oil market, and the need to meet heavy and rising debt service obligations. This caused brain drain as Nigerian academics started leaving the country in droves for opportunities in western universities.[73]

The decline and submergence of the Ibadan School of History into a myriad of crises did not imply the erasure of Dike's contribution to the development of African historiography and the

[69] J. F. Ajayi., Ian Espie, and Kenneth Onwuka Dike, *A Thousand Years of West African History: A Handbook for Teachers and Students* (1965) and Joseph C. Anene, *Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Nelson, 1966).
[70] Adesina, "Teaching History in Twentieth Century Nigeria," 17-37.
[71] Lovejoy, "Nigeria: The Ibadan School and Its Critics," 197-205; Kristin Plys, "Theories of Capitalism and Coloniality in World Systems Analysis, The Dar es Salaam School of History and the New Indian Labour History," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 56, issue 4 (2023): 1320–1328; Nadir A. Nasidir, "The Contributions of Ahmadu Bello University School of History to the Decolonisation of Knowledge in Africa, 1962-2020," *Global South Perspectives Journal, An International Peer-Reviewed Journal* 1, issues 1 & 2, (2023): 49-69.
[72] Rowell E. Ubogu, "Financing Higher Education in Nigeria," *Journal of Research in Education and Society* 2, no. 1 (2011): 36-45.
[73] Olukoju, "The Crisis of Research and Academic Publishing in Nigerian Universities," 363.

Africanisation of the curriculum. Other scholars rose in prominence on the ashes of the Ibadan School of History in articulating oral historiography and the Africanisation of African history. Their outstanding performance somewhat seemed to overshadow Dike's pioneering efforts such that he was hardly mentioned or known outside Nigeria and perhaps West Africa.[74] In Southern Africa, oral historiography is immediately associated with great names such as Jan Vansina and David Henige. Yet Jan Vanisa made his entry into in the field of African oral tradition only in 1960, that is, four years after Dike's 1956 monumental book that showcased the importance of oral history and oral tradition. Vasina's contribution first came to public notice with his article in the first issue of the *Journal of African History,* "Recording the Oral History of the Bakuba."[75] In it, he made a brief statement of the merits of oral tradition and the need for its systematic recording and analysis. His article was followed by an account of his own work among the Kuba of the Congo.

Jan Vansina produced his seminal theoretical work on oral tradition which was published in French in 1961,[76] and was later translated into English and published in Chicago in 1965 as *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology.*[77] He argued that oral tradition was clear historical evidence needed both to be supplemented by archival material and subjected to the same rules of historical evidence that written sources were subjected. He came to be known in academic circles in the Anglo-Saxon world when Kenneth Dike and the Ibadan School of History had already dominated the academic space of oral tradition. Why was Jan Vansina celebrated in certain circles while silence was maintained about Dike, the pioneer African scholar in oral historiography?
Michel Doortmont observes that:

> Already in the mid-1950s, the Nigerian historian, Kenneth Dike, had used oral traditions and oral history for his doctoral study on nineteenth-century trade and politics in the Niger Delta. This study still stood firmly in the tradition of English liberal history, however, and relied as much on documentary sources as it did on oral materials, if not more.[78]

But Jan Vansina did what Dike never did. Doortmont continues:

> Vansina… provided *the first proper methodology for the use of oral tradition as historical source,* especially for societies severely lacking in written documentary sources, which was his own field of expertise. At the time there was still a debate going on about the value of oral tradition as a source for serious historical research, in spite of the pioneering work

[74] I taught at the University of Eswatini for over a decade and had the opportunity to participate in the meetings of the Southern African Historical Society during which Jan Vansina's name was often cited but nothing was said about Dike. When I drew colleagues' attention to Dike's monumental contribution to oral historiography, they either expressed surprise or indifference.
[75] Jan Vansina, "Recording the Oral History of the Bakuba: Methods and Results," *Journal of African History* 1, no. 1, (1960): 45-53.
[76] Jan Vasina, "De la Tradition Orale: Essai de Methods Historique," *Annals du Musee Royal de I'Afrique Central, Sciences* 2-3 (1963): 129-130.
[77] Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (Transaction Publishers, 1965).
[78] Michel R. Doortmont, "Making History in Africa: David Henige and the Quest for Method in African History," *History in Africa* 38 (2011): 10.

> of Dike and others…. Vansina's [monumental] work effectively ended this debate [emphasis mine].[79]

In the estimation of the historian, David Beach, Jan Vansina's 1985 revised book, *Oral Tradition as History,"* provided a worldwide theoretical framework on oral tradition that rendered nearly all of its predecessors obsolete."[80] He represented new wine in a new African historiographical framework. Vansina continued his dominance of the African academic space with issues of historical methodology up to the 2000s that kept him blazing as an authority in oral tradition.[81] In January 2015, he was honoured by the convention of the American Historical Association with its Award for Scholarly Distinction for outstanding lifetime achievements in the field of African history. He was cited for his many innovations in scholarly methodology, institution-building, and mentoring and for reclaiming the "unknowable" history of Africa in seven landmark books from the University of Wisconsin Press.[82]

David P. Henige was another prominent Africanist that dominated the field of oral history from the 1970s to the 2000s. He impacted on the discipline of history in Africa, through his work as editor of *History in Africa* from 1974 to 2010.[83] He consistently wrote several books and a plethora of scholarly papers on African Studies and History, and made substantial contributions to historiography, epistemology, the nature of oral history and myth, and critiques of historical methodologies.[84] Henige's popular book, *Oral Historiography*,[85] was a manual on conducting oral historical research, written for academic historians who wished to use oral history methodology among nonliterate peoples in solving particular historical problems. His recommendation that tape-recorded interviews in case of oral history should be made accessible, published or in archival form, to other scholars, was an important recommendation.[86] Henige's publications of over four decades and his editorship of *History in Africa* for over three decades[87] enabled him to remain the limelight when the Ibadan School of History had greatly waned.

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[79] Ibid.
[80] David Beach, "Cognitive Archaeology and Imaginary History at Great Zimbabwe," *Current Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (1998): 47-72.
[81] Jan Vansina, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda: The Nyiginya Kingdom* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005); Jan Vansina, *How Societies are Born: Governance in West Central Africa before 1600* (Charlottsville: University of Virginia Press, 2004); Jan Vansina, *Being Colonized: The Kuba Experience in Rural Congo, 1880–1960* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).
[82] Jan Vansina, Pioneering Historian of Africa, Receives Lifetime Achievement award from AHA https://uwpress.wisc.edu/blog/2015/01/jan-vansina-pioneering-historian-of-africa-receives-lifetime-achievement-award-from-aha/ (accessed on 13 January 2024).
[83] Michel R. Doortmont, "Making History in Africa: David Henige and the Quest for Method in African History," *History in Africa* 38 (2011): 7-20.
[84] David Henige, "Historical Evidence and Argument: Supplemental Bibliography" (2006), https://minds.wisconsin.edu/bitstream/handle/1793/6479/heabib.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y; Paul Stuart Landau, *The Power of Doubt: Essays in Honor of David P. Henige* (Madison: Parallel Press, 2011).
[85] David P. Henige, *Oral Historiography* (London: Longman, 1982).
[86] Doortmont, "Making History in Africa," 20.
[87] Ibid.

Essentially, what distinguished Vansina and Henige from Dike and his West African academic peers was the fact that the duo of Vansina and Henige both western scholars, produced practical handbooks for fieldwork involving oral tradition which many African historians used in their research. Furthermore, they remained intellectually productive for decades refining and redefining the field of methodology of writing African history. The decolonisation of African history, by the continuous retooling of the methodology of African history, is what makes the decolonisation of historical knowledge, and perhaps other knowledges, a never-ending-task.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the decolonisation of the archives and the Africanisation drive of the history curriculum in Africa on the eve of independence and the period immediately after at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria as the cradle of these processes. The decolonisation of the archives was undertaken to produce an Afrocentric history of Africa by Kenneth Onwuka Dike, who proposed to his department the use of oral sources to complement existing archival sources to provide a historical narrative of trade and politics in the Niger-Delta area in the nineteenth century. The University of London approved Dike's innovative methodology which included the use of oral sources in his dissertation. Dike's revolutionary idea of alternative African archives earned him the recognition as the first western trained African scholar to receive approval to use oral history as a reliable source in data collection. He set a precedent in the deployment of the epistemology of oral historiography that was appropriately used in the African context given its preliterate past. In the process of decolonising the archives, he judiciously utilised archival sources critically by complementing them with oral sources which were equally subjected to critical scrutiny. This enabled him to produce an Afrocentric narrative with Africans as the principal actors in the trade and politics that unfolded in the Niger-Delta region. He essentially turned the tables by emphasising the preponderant activities of Africans and not that of the European invaders.

As Chair of the Department of History at the University of Ibadan, he played a leading role in creating a generation of African historians who could interpret their own history through an Afrocentric lens without succumbing to Eurocentric approaches. This was precisely the mission of the Ibadan School of History which rose under his leadership to propagate and proliferate an Afro-optimistic and Afrocentric methodology of writing African history and privileging African sources. This new methodology of writing African history was ventilated globally through the publications of the Ibadan Series and the Historical Society of Nigeria as well as through all History departments in Nigerian universities. The Department of History, University of Ibadan, quickly assumed the status of an intellectual pilgrimage centre to all Africanists who wanted to be initiated into the new African historiography emanating from Ibadan. African history, therefore, emerged as a unique field attracting the serious attention of global historians.

The Africanisation of the history curriculum was achieved at all levels of the Nigerian educational system including the West African School Certificate history syllabus. The flame of African history blazed in the University of Ibadan from the 1950s until 1970 when things started falling apart with the advent of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) and the economic meltdown which drastically affected the funding of universities.

The precedence of the new African epistemology of decolonisation had been set. On the incomplete spaces vacated by the Ibadan School of History rose several towering Africanists who pushed the historiography of oral tradition and history to greater heights by providing methodological handbooks and guidelines on oral history fieldwork in Africa, which the Ibadan School never did. Jan Vansina and David Henige dominated the subject of methodology in African history with emphasis on the decolonisation of primary sources and African agency. For over four decades they dominated the field of oral history and tradition with robust publications. Jan Vansina's revised book, *Oral Tradition as History,"* published in 1985, provided a worldwide theoretical framework on oral tradition that rendered nearly all of its predecessors outdated. Vansina continued his hegemony of the African academic space with issues of historical methodology up to the 2000s and in January 2015 the Convention of the American Historical Association catapulted him with its Award for Scholarly Distinction for Outstanding Lifetime Achievements in the field of African History. Vansina was cited for his many innovations in scholarly methodology, institution-building, and mentoring and for reclaiming the "unknowable" history of Africa in seven landmark books from the Wisconsin Press. Henige's numerous publications and his editorship of *History in Africa* for over three decades enabled him to remain the limelight when the Ibadan School of History had greatly waned.

To engage in academic debates of the 2000s on decolonisation and the alternative global south epistemologies is commendable. If this debate is to make any meaning, there is the need to gauge the mileage already covered by pioneer West African scholars. What is more, most history textbooks written by African scholars raise seriously questions: are they mouthpieces of the hegemonic North or Africans. The decolonisation and Africanisation of the disciplines started in the 1950s and to date the project still has a long way to go. Decolonisation shall always be incomplete as long as Africa's political leaders are strongly attached to the apron strings of the West for their national agendas and for economic and political survival. Nonetheless, the sluggish step in intellectual decolonisation is a step in the right direction and is commendable.

