

2004 Convocation Lecture

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS
NIGERIA

History and Society

to be delivered by

Emeritus Professor J. F. Ade Ajayi, NNOM, OFR

(Vice-Chancellor, University of Lagos (1972- 1978))

- on Tuesday 7th December, 2004
- at Julius Berger Lecture Theatre, University of Lagos
- at 11.00 a.m.

The University of 1st Choice and the Nation's Pride

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HISTORY

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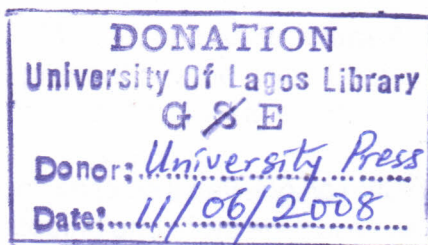
SOCIETY

A Convocation Lecture delivered at the University of Lagos on
Tuesday, the 7th of December, 2004.

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HISTORY AND SOCIETY

*Being the text of the Unilag Convocation Lecture, delivered at
the Julius Berger Lecture Theatre, Faculty of Engineering,
December 7, 2004*

INTRODUCTION

My aim in this lecture, is to urge that we take a moment to analyse what is really wrong with our society and to suggest what we can and should be doing about it. The degree of violence and instability in our society is intolerable. It is no longer strange to hear that a number of students have used matchets to kill fellow students of the same institution on campus. There are always rumours that some people sacrifice their children in the search for wealth. And the number of corpses that turn up at shrines may be proof of this. Armed robbery and political assassinations are rampant. Business enterprises collapse because no one trusts any other, not even his brother or sister, to play fair. There is such instability and unpredictability that it becomes very difficult to initiate policies that could be sustained for a year or two before "unforeseen circumstances" necessitate a revision, if not reversion. The IMF prescribed Structural Adjustment. We tried it and the present regime goes from one reform agenda to another, but we remain ill at ease.

Hence, although we claim to be a developing nation, we know that we are not developing and, if we are not developing, we must be retrograding. The average man in the street, knows that life is becoming increasingly difficult in spite of the fact

that we are earning increased revenues from oil in the world market.

As Shakespeare used to say, things are out of joint in our society. It is as unpredictable as if we are uncertain that $2+2$ will add up to 4. What really is wrong with our society? It is of course always easy to pass the buck and put the blame on other people, our former colonial masters, our current leaders, the armed forces etc. There is also what in historiography we call the monocausal mentality, to identify one major issue and see it as the scapegoat that caused all the ills. We could talk of the loss of our sense of history, or the intervention of armed men in our politics. But we need to be more thorough than that.

Let us consider two principal issues in our past and see in what ways they have contributed to our sense of malaise. The first is the trans-Atlantic slave trade. When we teach history at all, we cannot forget to mention the slave trade. But we have failed to confront it as an issue in our past. The slave trade has been going on since the end of the 15th century, but it is the impact of the 19th century that is most current. Not being literate, we carry most of the remembrance of our past in our oral traditions. Many scholars have remarked on what is called the collective amnesia about the slave trade in our oral traditions, as if we would rather not think of it and pretend that it never happened. Some notable historians have even put it in writing that Africans should not continue to harp on the evils of the slave trade as if we are the only people in the world that have suffered from slavery. The Jews do not say much about their period of slavery in Egypt, but they are determined that the world must not be allowed to forget the Holocaust, so that there will never be a repeat anywhere else in the world. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is the Black

Man's Holocaust. But a problem does not go away because we deny its existence or drive it into our sub-conscious.

Take this eye witness account of the wars invoked by the slave trade in Egbaland in 1854:

To the northeast of and near to Ibadan are the extensive ruins of Owu Owu was the first town destroyed. After this fell Ikija... From thence, the conquering army of Ifes, Ijebus and [Oyos] proceeded against other towns of the Egbas. Kesin and Emere soon fell. They then settled in the Egba towns of Erunwon and Ijemo and a part pitched on the road to Itoko. Here they found cause of quarrel with Ijemo and destroyed it. Itoko next fell. Returning through the ruins of Ijemo, they passed through Oba and Itoku to Ijeun... where they settled. The Ijebus wishing on account of the slave trade, to have the army near them, invited them to come to their country.... From [Ipara and Iporo] two divisions of the army went out daily, kidnapping and destroying the smaller towns, the Ijebu slave dealers always offering a ready market for their captives. The Egba towns of Igbore, Imo, Igbein etc. joined their strength together in an attempt to destroy the camp of Ipara... but the enemy defeated them with much slaughter; and, as a consequence, Igbore, Imo, Igbein etc., fell in turn. About a twelvemonth after this, more or less, a quarrel was sought with [the last remaining major town], Ikereku,... and although the town was assisted by the Egba towns of Itoku. Oba, and Erunwon, Ikereku after a few months' siege, fell and, as a matter of course, Itoku, Oba, and Erunwon shared its fate, the three later being stormed and taken in a day. It was after this that

the army moved to Ibadan, destroying all the Gbagura towns... till not one remained.

That was Dr. E. C. Irving, a CMS missionary doctor writing from Abeokuta. The point at issue here is how did the Egba people cope with the memory of the pain of that nightmare. The Yoruba people say that 'my child is dead is far more bearable than my child is missing'. When the child dies, you perform necessary funeral rites. You give an account to the ancestors and you get on with your life. What do you do when so many are missing; not dead as such, but missing, kidnapped and carried away? The remaining Egba, of course, proceeded to try to have a new life in and around Abeokuta with four Obas in one town. But, apart from the government, what about the society? They proceeded to edit out the slave trade from their memory, leaving behind just a history of wars that cannot be easily explained without reference to the slave trade. They were wars like never before. No surrender or ceasefire was permitted. It was total war in which the town had to be destroyed, all able bodied people were captured as slaves, and those not fit to travel were killed so that the army was not impeded from marching to the next target. Was this where the factor of "fight to finish" in our politics came from?

It will take a psychologist or psychiatrist to explore the effects of the different facets of that tragedy on the character of the Egba people. I am not in any way suggesting that this was the antecedent why Aro became the nation's top mental hospital and the seat of the nation's top psychiatrist and former Deputy Director of WHO. When we remember that we are merely using the Egba as an example, and that no part of Nigeria escaped from the slave trade at one time or the other, we have to consider the overall impact of the slave trade on the Nigerian society as a whole.

A leading writer, J.P Clark, in an address to the Nigerian Academy of Letters in 2000 has suggested that if we wish to develop and make progress, we need to confront and not deny or ignore the slave trade as part of our history and to perform cleansing rites, if necessary, to exorcise the ghosts or the missing millions. We need to arrange for the return of as many of the descendants of the missing millions as possible in an attempt to re-orientate ourselves and rediscover our real identities.

That is why in the Reparation Movement, we say that the slave trade damaged our societies and we need to carry out necessary repairs if we are to be able to overcome it and develop, and that, in the context of globalisation, it is in the interest of good world order and peace that Africa should cease to be a domain reserved for ad-hoc aid and charity. We need a systematic programme of Reparation if Africa is to rejoin the world train of development.

The slave trade led to the establishment of colonial rule. We have more studies of the impact of colonialism than we have of the slave trade, but we do not often do the necessary task of confronting and analyzing critically the effects of our colonial past. Let us begin with religious change, and consequent disorientation, then came western education, which alienated us from our past history, languages and culture. Some people here may still remember when we used to be punished in school for speaking in the 'vernacular'. I was told of a school where some students were punished for "laughing in the vernacular". We now have educated elite, leaders of the people, who can hardly write in their mother tongues. I myself will not feel comfortable if I had to give this lecture in Yoruba. I am more knowledgeable and more likely to quote from Shakespeare than from the *Odu Ifa*.

What are some of the consequences of this alienation of the elite from their cultural roots? As I have written elsewhere: "The educated elite are, for the most part, brought up to despise those without their type of education. They are forced to pay scant respect to their own family elders, and they despise the masses as a whole. Instead of acting as yeast to lift the whole society, they form an upper crust exploiting the grievances of the masses to fight for their own individual interests within the context of ethnic and religious rivalries. More than that, the elite, cut off from the reservoir of traditional culture that remains largely in the domain of the masses—the reservoir that should be their own spring of creativity — they have been reduced for the most part to the role of merely imitating development models from the outside." Most of our countries are amalgams resulting from the arbitrary partition by colonial masters. The constitutions and electoral processes are foreign and not based on the historical and cultural experience of the people. It is no wonder that they usually do not work well. The task of dedicated nation-building foreseen at Independence has not progressed. The concept of patriotism is lacking and the states themselves seldom merit love and loyalty. *Igi ti a fehin ti, ti o gba 'ni duro, b'o wo lu ni, ko le pa 'ni.* (If you lean on a tree, and it will not withstand your weight, you can ignore it; if it falls on you, it cannot kill you).

THE EDUCATION SECTOR

One of the best evidence of a sustained effort to tackle this social malaise through the education sector is the National Policy on Education. Notably, it sets out to educate Nigerians through the Mother tongue and yet promote the learning of other Nigerian languages and English to promote national solidarity. But we all know that the Policy is not working. The Policy appears to have been designed above, and is being

implemented nonchalantly. With the current policy of Universal Basic Education, Elementary Education has become one way to attract Federal and Foreign grants into the State treasury. Let us repeat: Basic education cannot be universal; it must be planted within each individual culture. There is no universal culture. As for the National Policy, there was little planning to supply the necessary language teachers. English remains very badly taught and we see the result in our newspapers everyday. More tragically, we see the result in our universities where an incredible percentage of our teaching is wasted because of inadequate grasp of the English language by most students, and perhaps some of the staff as well as some of the books published by some University staff anxious to gain promotion through self-publication also bear out the limitations of the English, which is our official language, and language of learning. There is very little of the old community rivalry to promote education, attract the best teachers and take pride in their schools because they represent the future of the next generation. Where now do we find the old Action Group enthusiasm for Free Education as when Chief Awokoya declared: that promoting education must be tackled as a national emergency of war, and must move like a revolution. We had a Federal Education Minister once who cancelled the opening of the National Open University on the grounds that it would be utilized more by Southerners than Northerners and would therefore widen the educational gap.

When in 1959, on the eve of Independence, Lord Ashby was asked to lead a number of Nigerian educationists to enquire into the needs of Independent Nigeria for Higher Education, their Report was entitled *Investment in Higher Education*. The mood then was that development must begin with massive investment in higher education. Hence, the

competition among Regional Parties and leaders for adequate investment in Higher Education. This was evident in the first generation universities: Federal – Ibadan and Lagos; Regional – ABU, Nsukka, Ife and then Benin. Each was carefully planned, with widespread consultation and considerations of cultural studies and patriotism. There were plans for staff training and development, link up with various research centers locally and with universities abroad through exchange programmes. The next generation of universities was centrally planned, responding to the initial sense of abundance of the oil boom and more politicized. The Regional universities of the first generation were taken over by the Federal Government and, soon the inadequacy of the Federal Government to finance all the universities adequately became obvious. Largely because of this, the response of the military regimes was to tighten Government control over the universities largely by turning the NUC from the autonomous body protecting the autonomy of the universities into a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Education. From this centralised control, the military regimes proceeded to establish control over the Trade Union Congress. In the process, the labour unions were encouraged to merge into national unions according to various trades and industries. Thus the universities were unionized not by the workers of each university forging unions but by separate National Unions by Academic Staff, Senior non-Academic, Technical and Administrative Staff, and Junior Workers. Thus the universities became fragmented into rival unions so that when ASUU went on strike to demand special allowances for academic work, the Senior Technical and Administrative Staff might follow suit to demand similar or comparable advantages. In the process, the decline of the universities was rapid. Above all, the World Bank agencies adopted the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) as an ideology to

advise Government not to regard Higher Education essentially as a vital investment for development. The World Bank agencies argued that universities were more for the private good of the beneficiaries than the public good of hastening national development. The damage has been incalculable. Even now that the World Bank has been forced to recant, the theory of the private good has become engrained. It is no secret that our Minister of Finance and the Governor of the Central Bank both have their background in the World Bank. The Draft of the NEEDS document [Nigerian Economic Empowerment for Development] that I saw, had very little to say about education. Yet it is because of the potential of Information Technology to jumpstart development that Afro-pessimism has been receding and there is fresh hope for African renaissance and development. But this potential can only be realised through higher education. That was the message of the UNESCO World Congress on Higher Education in Paris 2000.

Thus, we are not tackling the problem of the decline of academic excellence in our universities. The one thing that seems clear is that Government is now open, more than ever, to encourage competition from the private sector. Yet we must admit our concern that the number of private universities is not necessarily the answer to our problem. Assuming that they will have a wider base for gathering funds for the universities, it is not clear that many of the new foundations have a clear vision of scholarly excellence that they wish or are capable of contributing. They are all competing from the same quota of staff. Overall national planning should have considered the possibility of building up Ibadan or Lagos essentially as Postgraduate Institutions providing staff for the increasing number of undergraduates.

HISTORY AND CULTURE IN THE ACADEMY

If we seem to be wandering away from our topic of History and Society, let me quickly add that our universities have adopted the slogan of graduating students both in character and learning, but have hitherto done so little on the issue of character. If we are to tackle the malaise in the society, our universities must try to return to the path of academic excellence, and also pay more attention to the character of our students as future leaders of society. The basic message is that our renaissance must be predicated on ending the alienation of the educated elite from the cultural roots. This must be done without promoting ethnicity or religious intolerance. In encouraging the cultural roots of each student, we must at the same time be promoting synthetically Nigerian culture. We recommended before that no one should take a degree in the Humanities in our universities without showing competence in the literature and thought of one major Nigerian language. Beyond that, our courses in the Humanities and Social Sciences should be focused more on the historical experiences of our people rather than of the Western World. This is not merely a call for improving the teaching of history in our schools and universities, but also to stress the need to promote nationally a sense of history. This must be the context for our nation-building, sense of patriotism and social well-being.

At the time of Independence, no one could say that the value of history in our society was not appreciated. The leaders of the nationalist movement were serious about nation-building, nationalism and the need for patriotism. They knew the implications of the colonialist allegation that Africa had no history. They were willing to join academics in refuting such an allegation, which had sustained colonialism such that even the colonized were inclined to believe that the white man was

a superior being, akin to a god. The nationalist leaders needed little persuasion to encourage history in the academy and to fund projects such as the Benin Historical Research Scheme, the Yoruba Research Scheme, the Northern Research Scheme, the Eastern Research Scheme and the Kenneth Dike Aro History Project. At one time, the History Department at Ibadan had no fewer than four full professors, and began to supply staff, including vice-chancellors, to other universities.

Today, the story is very different. History has lost its glamour and this must be regarded as part of the malaise, or one of the major consequences of the malaise in our society. In most of our universities, History is no longer regarded as an adequate area of study by itself. We now have Departments of History and International Relations, History and Diplomacy, History and Public Administration, History and Strategic Studies etc. The nation no longer values history. Issues of nationalism, nation-building, and patriotism are hardly referred to. Instead, there is demand for a National Conference which some fear can only end in a decision to break up into our different nationalities. The University of Ibadan has not a single full professor of History, and retired professors have been urged to come from retirement to try to help with the teaching of Postgraduate students. This is a little tricky because some of the professors had offered to remain on contract but the University had no funds to pay contract officers, and pensions have not been paid for close to two years. The number and quality of students showing up to read History has fallen sharply. This follows the shift of students' affection and respect from History to Economics, Law and other Social Sciences generally. We need to explore rather dispassionately the causes and consequences of this

decline in the respectability of History as an academic discipline.

We succeeded in convincing the most conservative colonialists that African history went far beyond the history of the activities of Europeans and other invaders in Africa. The history of Nigeria is now recognised as the history, not of the activities of the invaders, but of Nigerian peoples, far beyond what George Goldie and Lord Lugard could have "made".¹

This achievement was made possible largely because of the use of oral traditions to supplement archival material. Indeed historians can rightly be proud that they pioneered the meaningful use of oral material. Although, social anthropologists had been exploiting oral material, their work was vitiated because they imagined that oral material was static and that the material they collected in the colonial period was unchanging and remained valid for all time, the whole of the pre-colonial period included. The information they derived was therefore misleading and shallow. The historians added the necessary dynamic factor. Oral material came alive, and became of value, not only for historians but also for sociologists, writers, political scientists, psychiatrists, and other professional groups as well. Institutes of African Studies were established largely to promote the collection and exploitation of oral material.

1 The reference is to books published on the eve of Nigerian Independence:

John E. Flint: *Goldie and the Making of Nigeria*, Oxford University Press, London, 1960.

M. Perham, *Lord Lugard, Maker of Nigeria*, (Dust jacket on Lugard, *Years of Authority*), Collins, London, 1960.

The Europeans and Americans also embraced the value of oral material for historical purposes. They began to establish archives and documentation centres for oral material. From this they began to write the histories of hitherto voiceless groups in society. People's history became possible as the history of strands in the society who did not keep diaries or write memoirs. This has transformed the writing of social history world-wide. Yet our own historians have not embraced the lesson adequately. Historians in Nigeria have on the whole abandoned contemporary history to political scientists. They have not grasped that the political history by political scientists like Billy Dudley and Dick Sklar² cannot be a substitute for a proper history of Nigeria since World War II or since Independence. I once trod on people's toes when I said that the fiction produced by a literary writer entitled "*Just Before Dawn*" was more insightful as history than the 12 volumes of compilation of archives without adequate historical analysis and evaluation by the National Commission.³

When Dr. Dike died I said in a tribute that he had already been jettisoned into oblivion before he died because the "Enduring Sense of History" which he strove for was never achieved, and he became a victim of our social malaise. I said in 1981.⁴

2 See J.F. Ade.Ajayi: *History and the Nation and Other Addresses*, Spectrum Books, Ibadan, 1991.

3 J.F. Ade.Ajayi: *The Past in the Present*. The Factor of Tradition in Development, " NNMA Award, Winners Lecture, December 1990, NIIA, Lagos.

4 J.F. Ade.Ajayi: "Towards a More Enduring Sense of History" in *History and the Nation*, op. cit. p40-41.

Perhaps, one reason why there is so much violence, aggression and instability in our day to day life is that we have so little consciousness of a time perspective. We act and react as if there is only today, no yesterday, no tomorrow. We seem to care so little about the past; we have no enduring heroes and we respect no precedents. Not surprisingly, we hardly ever consider what kind of a future we are building for our children and our children's children.

We lack statesmen with any sense of history. Politics of the moment dominates our life, leaving no room for evaluating achievement or appreciating merit. We, therefore, recognise no permanent values or yardstick of achievement to hold up as models for our youths. The corruption in our society goes beyond those who steal public funds and pervert justice; it includes those who forget, as we say, "the horsemen of yesterdays", the individuals and values that sustained us in the past, and applaud only those who for the moment and by whatever dubious means have access to power or to money enough to buy attention.

The nation suffers which has no sense of history. Its values remain superficial and ephemeral unless imbued with a deep sense of continuity and a perception of success and achievement that transcends acquisition of temporary power or transient wealth. Such a nation cannot achieve a sense of purpose or direction or stability, and without them the future is bleak.

CAUSES OF DECAY

We have to admit that one major cause of the rapid decline is that as historians, we failed to consolidate our initial success. We behaved as if merely convincing the Western nations that we have a history was enough, and that we did not need to do more to establish what that history is. The totality of our historical knowledge of Nigeria remains focused on the 19th and early 20th century. Take the history of the Yoruba. Having regurgitated the material in Samuel Johnson, what do we know of the Yoruba in the period before the 19th century? We end up saying that after Oduduwa, Chief Awolowo was the first leader of the Yoruba. We ignore the whole period of Ife hegemony and the slave trade era, which set the scene for the 19th century wars. We collect largely eyewitness accounts, which can hardly take us back more than 150 years. Some traditions such as in the *Odu Ifa*, cult histories, histories of institutions, of agriculture, of food crops etc we have not collected or tried to analyse. Such sources are too amorphous for MA and Ph.D students and they are the only ones who claim to be doing any research these days.

We all point to the introduction of Social Studies in the JSS schools in place of History and Geography as the major blow to the teaching of History in schools which has now affected the inflow of students to read History in the universities. In fact, the problem was with the historians who looked on when Social Science people hijacked the teaching of Social Studies in schools exclusively for their NCE and B.Ed students with no acquaintance at all with historical orientation. We have since discovered that the real damage is not that so many students leave school without basic facts of their history. The real damage is that so many students leave school without learning to think in terms of the sequence of time. The historians who tried to make up for this lacuna overloaded

the syllabus for WAEC and NECO with the result that the students in SSS voted with their feet. The syllabus in Government and Economics are far more attractive. We could have taught an enduring sense of history, without overloading the syllabus with facts and dates. Hence the drop in the numbers and quality of students sitting for the School Certificate and the high failure rate. We should immediately have started to prefer for admission into History degrees students with good grades in Government and Economics before those with low grades in History.

Let us also face the fact that we have failed to grow with the growth of our discipline. Because of the lack of the factor of dynamism in colonial anthropology, we have refused to become involved in the development of the Social Sciences. In most of the US and Western Europe, Departments of History have grown within Faculties of the Social Sciences. History has grown with the methodology of the Social Sciences, and much of that has passed us by as we remained fixed in the Faculties of Letters and of Humane Studies. We responded to a limited extent to the criticism of the Neo-Marxist School of under-development⁵ in that we took on board, more attention to socio-economic factors of change. But because of the lack of data we could not develop econometrics and other tools of Social Science research. Hence our total failure to deal with pre-1800 history.

Most of the decline in the importance of history in the academy is in fact not peculiar to History but part is of the general decay of the universities in Nigeria and, indeed, Africa-wide. I noted a point mentioned in a recent article by

5 *Ibid*, pp 28-29

Akilagpa Sawyer that a major factor in the decline of universities is the "aging" faculty, that is to say that with the younger generation, a university career is no longer the career of first choice.⁶ I hope this means not that people of my generation had no resources and programmes to raise the generation to succeed us, but that the generation after us have not been able to sustain our efforts. This point needs to be emphasized. The institutions that helped to build up people of my generation and the generation after us are no longer there: the university as a whole, the Historical Society of Nigeria and the annual congresses, the staff training programmes; grants for research and to attend conferences and congresses. There was a time when the History Department at Ibadan maintained a Volkswagen car for the use of postgraduate students driving themselves for fieldwork.

How much research is going on in our universities now? A Ph.D student came to show me her draft Ph.D thesis and I was embarrassed. She has not done much research, and the supervision has been much less than thorough and yet the student is anxious to get a Ph.D. The quality of the students have fallen right from the top in many places where, in spite of the dearth of research, some people still insist and lobby for promotion to become professors. The senior lecturers who lobby and become VCs are hardly in a position to halt any senior lecturer impatient to become professors, and colleagues in other universities cannot always remain unmoved. There is, moreover, the problem that most of those now running our universities have themselves grown up in this period of decadence of standards and, are without

6 Akilagpa Sawyer: "Challenges Facing African Universities: Selected Issues" in *African Studies Review* vol 47, 1, April 2004, African Studies Association, Rutgers, NJ pp 1-59.

adequate exposure to international standards of academic excellence and have been guided more by political than academic considerations.

One of the major factors of decline, which rarely gets the attention it deserves, is the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the World Bank. It deserves emphasis (a) because it has been a major cause of the underfunding that we have tended to focus attention on; and (b) although SAP has been discredited in theory, the current managers of the Nigerian economy from the Minister of Finance and the Governor of the CBN downwards are as we mentioned above, World Bank people with roots deep in the SAP doctrines and ideology. Specifically they view higher education from the "private good" approach emphasizing the private interest of an elite group which they are willing to attack, if not to destroy. They play down the "public good" perspective, which places higher education as an investment at the centre of development planning and strategies.⁷

The politics of University education providing the context for the decay has, of course, also affected many leaders of ASUU who intervene from time to time in the appointment of VCs, usually in favour of political rather than academic considerations. In approaching the problem of the necessary reform of universities, we should consider the need for a complete re-orientation of the academy, in addition to tackling the issue of funding.

7 *Nigerian Economic Empowerment Development Strategies*. See my Comments on it to the National Elders Council on Development, meeting in Abuja, December 2003 for inadequate attention to the role of Education in Development.

SOME CONSEQUENCES

A friend of mine says that practitioners in a profession such as medicine are lucky. They see before them at once the result of their failures and they rush to have them buried before they start stinking. The hospital thus gets known in Yoruba as *Ile Iwosan, the House of Healing*. In professions such as ours, our failures do not become evident for a generation or two when, like a time bomb, they boomerang. Who can evaluate the consequences of three generations of students with no teachings at all in history or a sense of history? Another friend of mine says the difference between a politician and a statesman is the sense of history: the politician can only work for today; the statesman has a memory of the past and a vision of tomorrow. What do we say of a politician who decides to establish a university and sites it in his village as a rural amenity rather than as an urban facility? It is not surprising that we are not drawing the lessons from the failures of our political system. Our politicians put all the blame for all our failures on the military and not on the response of the politicians to the antics of the soldiers. We thought the soldiers were bad enough but the politicians are already perceived as so much worse that some misguided people are ready to wish the soldiers back in power. Even then, there is hardly any doubt that, apart from a few former customs officers, it is only ex-military officers who are in a position to have made enough money from politics to acquire the "muscle power" to be able to take commanding positions in our current politics of money power which, no less a person than the President of the Senate himself has described as a form of "Investment".

A wise-crack says the people have the kind of government they deserve. This is largely because we sit down perpetually to bellyache about our government and our social malaise

but we are not prepared to do anything about it, not even to get into politics and try to make a difference. We are not even prepared to comment intelligently and in public about what is going on. To comment intelligently would require basic yardsticks of evaluation, which can only come from an enduring sense of history and sense of values. For example, we lump all former heads of state together including the head of the weeks-old temporary contraption that the courts have declared illegal. Our halls of fame, Merit Awards and National Honours are always full because we have no yardstick by which we establish heroes and anti-heroes. This was not so in traditional societies when history was an active part of life, and heroes were made by popular acclamation. Usurpers who rig elections to office could not expect to be hailed as heroes, unless the gods smile on them and, in spite of themselves, they have achievements through war or good governance or acute sense of justice and equity which extol their names.

Such evaluations cannot be devoid of an acute sense of values. Can you imagine a Yoruba man as executive governor who insists that he is not only in government but in power and boasts that he is not prepared to be an *Omoluabi* and respect royalty and age. *Omoluabi* is the number one requirement of character for a Yoruba man aspiring to be considered a leader. We need in our education and evaluation of leaders to underscore the quality of an enduring sense of values. This is to say that a leader must stand on the basis laid by an acute consciousness of the lessons of the historical experience of the community and visions of the future. Would you believe that those who have missed a historical education are incapable of imagining what 50 years ago was like, and can therefore not envisage how to envision 50 years into the future. That is why they know today

and can only respond, as it were, from hand to mouth, with no vision of the past or the future. Even in the absence of written records, our forefathers [and shall we say, foremothers or forepersons] accumulated the lessons of their historical experience. Their sense of history and Social Science was based on that historical experience and not on the historical experience of Americans or Europeans. These were postulated in traditions, which were established as guides for behaviour in society. You follow these and do things as it is done so that the results may be what it has always been. Perhaps they became rather rigid in this and did not make enough room for initiative and innovation. But their addiction to tradition worked far better than our total lack of yardsticks and guidelines.

The result is that we end up without a clear cut sense of identity. Our identity in public life is confused because we have no ideals, and no values. We confuse the values of the Western individualistic and accumulative capitalist society with those of our sharing and communal past. Our identity in private life is a little clearer, being based on our traditional cultures; but the corruption that pervades our communal relations has spread even to our private lives as many of the elite would not hesitate any longer to steal even from the purse of the ethnic community. Corruption is often the result of this confusion of values, which allows a pastor to say that it is the responsibility of a hotel accounts clerk who brought him ₦36m as a donation to account to God how he got it. In a recently published book of autobiographical sketches, a former governor says he is a Christian, but his values based on the fear of God, derive more from traditional beliefs about God and Mother Earth who abhor lying, deceit and the shedding of innocent blood than from the Christian God. It is true that many Christians know only the God of mercy and

compassion, the miracle-working God who grants healing and prosperity, but not the awesome God, of the consuming fire, the great impartial and implacable God that condemns to hell. Thus, many Christians who will gladly swear by the Bible and go on to perjure themselves will refuse to swear on the cutlass for fear of the immediacy of the possible wrath of *Ogun*.

TOWARDS A CULTURAL RENAISSANCE

There is growing realisation that what we need in Nigeria is a revolution, and a complete re-orientation. Perhaps we have not yet reached the bottom of the pit and many of our leaders are not yet ready to say that we can no longer go on like this and we need a total turn around. My prayer is that what will come will not be a bloody violent revolution in the nature of a class or ethnic war, but a cultural revolution in which we will seek to know who we really are and clarify our identity, where we are coming from and what destination we have in mind. We often tell people from history that the European Renaissance came by way of a revolution in the Arts and Literature, not Science and Technology, though we need a junction of the two.

We need the cultural renaissance at two levels: the local nationality and the Pan-African. We cannot have a cultural revival unless we start at the local level of appreciation of our indigenous languages, philosophies, values, cuisine, dress etc. History and the Arts generally in the universities need to do more to encourage this cultural revival at the local level and to blend it at the national level. Such blending is necessary as part of replacing Western education by Nigerian education and building up students both in character and learning. The Pan-African level is essential also because as we have repeated again and again, it is Pan-Africanism that can supply

the ideological content and context of nationalism in Nigeria. This is one other reason why historians cannot afford to abandon contemporary history to political scientists alone.

CONCLUSION

All of us, academics, politicians, businessmen and women who constitute the educated elite need to be more concerned about the ills of our society, which we politely refer to as "social malaise". We need to tackle the problem through seeking and promoting a cultural renaissance, confronting every aspect of our past instead of trying to ignore or suppress some aspects. We need to teach history better and promote historical awareness. At the university level, we need to pay more attention to both academic excellence and to character building. May the Good Lord help us.

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