



Memory and Oral Tradition: Perspectives on Advances in African Historiography

Oge Samuel Okonkwo

Department of History, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, Ghana

*Corresponding author: osokonkwo@st.ug.edu.gh

Abstract: We can think about memory and oral tradition when we consider how important contemporary historiography is to the preservation of a society's traditions. As a collective memory, African oral traditions contain elements like proverbs, prayers, myths, stories, idioms, that historians must not ignore. However, contemporary social theories have emphasised the interdisciplinary connection between memory and oral tradition in the development of knowledge. This essay tries to provoke some reflections on the validity of memory and oral tradition's contributions to the development of historical knowledge and, concurrently, to the (re)construction of African historiography. Through the use of primary and secondary sources, this article makes the case that the oral tradition extends beyond mythical stories and represents a vast learning environment because it relates to essential human traits. This point of view makes it clear that oral tradition and memories both have a functional purpose, which is to serve as sources of preservation. Therefore, oral tradition helps to maintain and spread collective memory by providing a means for individuals to retain information.

Keywords: Africa, Oral Tradition, Memory, African Historiography, Knowledge

Introduction

This paper discusses oral sources, particularly memory and tradition/oral history, and its contribution to the renovation of historiography in order to produce a perspective on oral references in historical events in the discipline of social sciences, specifically in the area of modern African history. Examples include the Scramble for Africa, Mau Mau Uprising, Apartheid in South Africa, African Independence Movements, Rwandan Genocide, Nigerian Civil War, women's role in African history, and oral traditions and indigenous knowledge. These oral testimonies provide insights into the lives of African communities, their experiences, and the long-term impact of colonization on their societies. In particular, considering research and knowledge generation by employing methodological techniques from oral sources appears crucial to many scholars (Finnegan, 1970). Oral sources, such as oral interviews, testimonies, oral histories, folktales, legends, songs, poems, proverbs, ceremonial and ritual narratives, performance arts, genealogies, memory maps, life history narratives, and ethnographic fieldwork, are essential for researchers to understand African cultural practices and traditions. These sources provide first-hand accounts and personal narratives, enriching historical research and challenging Eurocentric biases. By analyzing these oral sources, scholars can engage with diverse voices and perspectives and contribute to a more inclusive and comprehensive historiography that respects the cultural heritage and knowledge of African communities.

Several African nations struggle with the lack of research and oral source documentation, which results in the omission of documented sources. African nations, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia, South Sudan, CAR, Chad, Mali, and Guinea-Bissau, have faced challenges in research and oral source documentation due to political instability, armed



conflicts, and economic challenges. These nations have limited access to formal education and documentation facilities, making it difficult for researchers to access and preserve oral sources and historical documentation. The absence of a centralized government and continuous conflict has further impacted research initiatives and the preservation of oral sources. The DRC, Somalia, CAR, Chad, Mali, and Guinea-Bissau have all faced challenges in research and documentation efforts, resulting in gaps in recorded oral sources. In this regard, it is thought that the understanding of and gathering of oral testimony might be a useful tool for filling in this gap and, as a result, aid in the formation of contemporary African history. Since the historian frequently requires a range of records that are not only written ones, oral sources may, by their very nature, add a life dimension and fresh insights to history. If so, it is crucial to demonstrate the development of a key practise that is a component of modern historiography (Finnegan, 1992). With a literature analysis that enables an evaluation of its benefits based on the reasoning of certain historians, the goal of this study is to dispel some misconceptions regarding the application of oral tradition as a historical source.

African History in the World

Africa has always been a part of world history. According to palaeontology, humanity first appeared in Kenya's Rift Valley. The origins of humanity can be traced to other regions in Africa, such as the Afar region of Ethiopia. The discovery of the fossilized remains of a hominid named "Dinkinesh," also known as "Lucy," in the Hadar region of the Afar Triangle in Ethiopia in 1974 provided critical evidence of an early hominid species, *Australopithecus afarensis*, dating back approximately 3.2 million years. This finding offered valuable insights into the evolutionary history of hominids and contributed to our understanding of the early stages of human development in Africa. African history academics must recognize and acknowledge these different sources and perspectives when discussing the rich and diverse history of Africa. By addressing this gap and embracing the plurality of sources, we can gain a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of Africa's role in world history and the origins of humanity.

Egypt, located in the north of the African continent, was in contact with elements of the famous Greek civilization, establishing Africa as an important part of world history. So, contrary to long-held beliefs, Africa has a past. Africa's history has been influenced by historical biases and misconceptions, such as George Hegel's Eurocentric perspective and Herodotus's criticized Aryan model. Hegel's ideas portrayed Africa as a continent with no historical development or contribution to human civilization, perpetuating the notion of Africa as a place of darkness and backwardness. The *Stolen Legacy* by George G. M. James challenges these biased views by criticizing the misappropriation of African contributions to civilization by Western scholars. The book exposes how the achievements of ancient African civilizations, particularly in Egypt, were stolen or misattributed to other cultures. It is crucial to confront and debunk these erroneous views and misrepresentations of Africa's history. By engaging with works like "The Stolen Legacy" and reevaluating historical narratives, scholars can contribute to a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of Africa's historical legacy. Due to the ignorance of historiographical, political, and social thought that existed for many centuries, which was considered to be devoid of history, and which only started to possess some level of historiographic knowledge with the arrival of the colonisers, this historical knowledge was always relegated to a secondary level (Foley, 1998).

Up until the 1950s, Europeans studied African history to disprove the possibility that the continent had any sort of history prior to the arrival of the colonisers, denigrating the idea that



there might have been a past, and labelling the native populations "barbarians" and "uncivilized." George Hegel, a prominent 19th-century philosopher, shaped the European perspective on African history by presenting a hierarchical view of world history, with Europe at its pinnacle. Hegel's perspective placed Africa and other non-European regions at lower stages of development, with little historical significance. This perspective was influenced by Eurocentric and racist attitudes, which labelled African civilizations and cultures as "barbarians" and "uncivilized." However, it is crucial to critically assess Hegel's viewpoint and the broader Eurocentric paradigm that informed European perceptions of African history. Modern scholarship has extensively documented the rich and complex history of Africa, dating back to ancient civilizations like Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopia. These civilizations made significant contributions to art, architecture, science, mathematics, and governance. In contemporary African history studies, scholars aim to counter Eurocentric biases and present a more balanced and accurate portrayal of Africa's history. By revisiting historical narratives with a critical and inclusive approach, history academics can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Africa's historical legacy and challenge the Eurocentric biases that have hindered the appreciation of its rich and diverse history. The notion that Africans might have a history of their own continent was dismissed because the continent's history was seen through the eyes of Westerners.

African historians took a new perspective on their own history during the continent's decolonization activities with Pan-African Congresses and nationalist movements promoting a new perspective. African historians developed historiography, formed historical associations, and established academic journals, fostering national identity and pride in African heritage. These events contributed to the development of African universities, historiography, historical associations, and curriculum reforms. Using fresh sources like oral histories, linguistics, and archaeology, they presented an alternative perspective to that which was studied in Europe. This reflection is pertinent in this instance because it demonstrates how the study of African history in general and Mozambique in particular presents a particularity in relation to the study of global history based on a reevaluation of the significance of oral reporting, that is, of oral tradition and memory. Mozambique, a politically named territory in southeastern Africa, is a diverse nation with rich cultural diversity and historical heritage. It is home to numerous ethnic groups, each with its own customs, traditions, and languages, contributing to the vibrant tapestry of Mozambican society.

Oral tradition and memory play a crucial role in Mozambique's history, as they preserve the collective memory of past events, including pre-colonial and colonial periods, as well as the struggles and achievements during the fight for independence and the post-colonial era. Mozambique's historical uniqueness is reflected in its struggle for independence and the subsequent challenges of nation-building. Exploring Mozambique's history from multiple perspectives, including oral tradition, archaeological findings, and linguistics, offers a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the country's past. This approach allows for a more inclusive approach to history, acknowledging the contributions and experiences of diverse communities and cultures in shaping the nation's identity and trajectory. Emphasizing Mozambique's uniqueness enriches the study of African history and underscores the significance of context-specific research in understanding the complexities of global history. The majority of the African continent's peoples and empires lacked writing, therefore, their historical and social accounts are based on oral tradition, whose generationality was carried out by legends, myths, or reports that were passed down from generation to generation (Okpewho, 2007).



These oral sources represent cultures in which peer relationships were highly valued and historical knowledge was shared among them, with the knowledge that some people were particularly skilled at memorising and passing on this knowledge to succeeding generations. As a result, the oral record serves as a starting point for additional research, which will use archaeology and comparative history of the surrounding peoples to validate the reports (Finnegan, 1992).

The Place of Memory

According to Halbwachs (2011), the dichotomy between spirit and social facts and personal memory and social memory is identical. A person's memory interprets an awareness that is reduced to using only its own resources as a distorted and incomplete replication of memories that the community acknowledges as being both common and its own. On the one hand, "lived history" gives each person a unique memory, and on the other, the events that group members remember are thought to make up the group's collective memory or history. As a result, Halbwachs (2011) continued to be interested in studies involving collective memory, which led to the posthumous release of his seminal work on the subject, *The Collective Memory*. In his view, memory served as an alternate method via which the group's emotional attachment, or social cohesion, was maintained (not through violence). He testified that every recollection was a perspective of the collective memory and that such memories were always consistent with facts and ideals that were important to some groups but not to others.

Memory is a fabrication of the past based on emotions and experiences, according to Elliot (Oring, 2012). It is adaptable, and experiences are recalled in light of future experience and current demands. Oral tradition, in turn, emphasises representations of collective memory because, through narrative, it feeds memory and aids in memory reactivation. Writing history while taking oral tradition into account requires objectivity. Oral tradition enables its resumption and spreads by providing ways for the preservation of collective or social memory (Finnegan, 1992).

According to Scheub (1985), memory is a mental and intellectual reconstruction that really results in a selective portrayal of the past. Memory is a complex mental and intellectual process of reconstruction, influenced by personal experiences, cultural influences, and emotional connections. In oral tradition, memory plays a vital role in preserving past events through storytelling and verbal communication. However, this selective portrayal can lead to emphasized or distorted aspects of the past, as well as forgotten or downplayed aspects. Scheub's insights into memory's nature have significant implications for the study of history and folklore. Historians and folklorists must be aware of the selective nature of memory and potential biases that may influence the recollection and transmission of past events.

Oral histories, while invaluable sources of cultural knowledge, need to be approached critically and contextualized within the broader historical and cultural context. Understanding the interplay between memory and identity is essential for understanding the construction of cultural identity and how communities remember, interpret, and pass down their history. This history is never just that of the person, but rather one who is placed in a family, societal, and national context. Mweti (1999), in response, asserts that "memory is an essential element of what is regarded as identity, individual or collective, whose quest is one of the main activities of people and societies today, in heat and in sorrow." Dasylva (2017). says that it is "a basic element in the making of heritage, one of the most advantageous cultural and political events



in discourse analysis, and, as such, should be seen in terms of the social and historical trajectories that participants, concepts, and product lines go through, as well as in the context of changes caused by spatial, (multi)cultural, and theoretical separations."

Finnegan (1970) states that "the build-up of components in memory is a part of daily life in most civilizations without writing, and in many areas of ours." As a result, the first area in which the collective memory of unrecorded people begins to form is that which provides an obvious historical foundation for the presence of ethnic groupings, families, or origin myths. In other words, they serve as the repository for society's objective and ideological past. However, memory is not passed down verbatim but rather through storytelling, singing, and other oral traditions, which allow for greater creative licence.

The temporality of a subject's life may therefore be covered by memory, both as a type of knowledge and as an experience. This option is so important to Heath (1983) that, after thinking about the process of remembering, he understands that it is a mental movement that we do not always grow because it is taxing or challenging. But it's a beneficial exercise. Even though many years have passed and countless facts have been encountered, we still analyse who we are and how we came to be. The past is a realm in which, utilising our memories, we may find refuge among ourselves, lean over ourselves, and reconstitute an identity. Memory is a crucial aspect of shaping one's identity, as it is a form of knowledge and experience that is influenced by social contexts and communities. Maurice Halbwachs, a prominent French sociologist, argued that collective memory is a shared and social phenomenon, forming a group's identity and shaping its historical consciousness. Jan Assmann introduced the concept of cultural memory, which is established through various practices, such as rituals, literature, and historical narratives. Paul Ricoeur, a renowned philosopher, explored the relationship between memory and narrative identity, arguing that individuals construct their identities through storytelling, using memory as a key resource for creating a coherent life narrative. Jacques Maritain's quote emphasizes the value of knowledge in fostering inner unity, as it helps individuals make sense of their experiences, draw connections between past and present, and construct a meaningful identity. Understanding the complexities of memory and its relationship to knowledge enriches our understanding of human consciousness, cultural heritage, and the continuity of identity across time.

In earlier times, men had recognised the value of memory as a tool for creating identities and establishing consciences. Since the past, present, and future all connect in memory, the interconnectedness of memory and forgetting between the individual and society, the public and the private, the holy and the profane, makes it essential. Nonetheless, African knowledge and beliefs are shaped by parental knowledge, esoteric practices, and customary traditions. Traditional wisdom is deeply respected in African societies, but its limitations include lack of verification and exclusivity. This exclusivity can limit critical inquiry and hinder the growth of knowledge within African societies. To bridge the gap between traditional wisdom and contemporary scholarship, African societies can integrate critical thinking, empirical methods, and interdisciplinary approaches. Customary practices play a central role in knowledge production, communication, and dissemination, fostering order, unity, and social cohesion. However, relying solely on customs and traditions may limit intellectual growth and exploration of new ideas. It is essential to cultivate an environment that encourages open discourse, critical thinking, and the pursuit of knowledge beyond tradition. By navigating the delicate interplay between tradition and modernity, African societies can honor their heritage while continuing to evolve intellectually and contribute meaningfully to the global knowledge



community. It is essential because allegiance and mobility, information and disclosure, and suppression are all linked (Okpewho, 1992).

The vast potential of memory even outweighs the average lifespan. The memory of a period that precedes a person's life is constructed through family histories, chronicles, which document daily life, customs, narratives through generations, and several types of narration. Memory plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals, communities, and societies. It is essential for understanding how societies preserve and pass on their history and cultural heritage. Family histories, chronicles, and narratives are primary ways through which memories are transmitted across generations, creating a sense of continuity and connectedness with the past. Elders play a significant role in passing down essential information and values to younger generations. Narratives, such as myths, legends, folktales, and oral traditions, also serve as a means of transmitting cultural knowledge and values. Memory is dynamic and can be reconstructed and reinterpreted over time, allowing societies to maintain a connection with their history while embracing the present and envisioning the future. By actively preserving and transmitting memory, communities can maintain a deep connection with their past while embracing the possibilities of the future.

Man descends into the past while ignoring modern chronology. Moreover, African societies have experienced a profound impact on their approach to knowledge and learning, leading to a paradoxical situation. The emphasis on ancestral wisdom and the transmission of knowledge from parents to children has fostered a deep sense of cultural identity and continuity. However, this esoteric trend has also resulted in a reluctance to engage in further soul-searching epistemic endeavors, which could potentially expand the realm of knowledge and lead to greater connectivity and consistency. The attachment to inherited experience and memorization of events has created a pseudo foundation for learning, with little apparent relevance to public life or contemporary challenges. Recognizing the value of ancestral wisdom in preserving cultural heritage and maintaining a cohesive societal fabric is crucial. Encouraging further soul-searching and critical thinking can lead to a more comprehensive and relevant understanding of the world. A culture of inquiry can be fostered, motivating individuals to explore and challenge existing beliefs and practices, resulting in a more dynamic and adaptable knowledge base relevant to contemporary issues and public life. Individual and collective memories are discovered, combined, and constructed in this dynamic as a potential source for the creation of historical knowledge.

Memory is subjective and influenced by individual perspectives, emotions, and biases, making it a dynamic aspect of historical knowledge. Oral traditions and collective memory shape the collective memory of a community, weaving together a tapestry of historical knowledge that may not align with modern chronology. Non-linear historical narratives offer a more holistic and interconnected view of history, emphasizing the meaning and significance of events rather than strict adherence to dates and timelines. Contextualization of events within a broader cultural, social, and political framework allows for a more nuanced and insightful view of history that goes beyond the limitations of modern chronology. By acknowledging the subjective nature of memory and the significance of cultural contexts, historical knowledge can be enriched and offer a deeper understanding of the complexities and interconnectedness of the past.

Thus, the idea of memory is not uniform and has many different interpretations, some of which are as follows: preservation of knowledge's innate components; creating connections between



the present and lived experiences; reinterpretation of the past through memories and recollections; fulfilment of the past in the infinite present; evocation of liberating utopias that use the past to help recreate the present and to create the future. Thus, there are various ways to conceptualise memory. Memory can be conceptualized in various ways, including biological, psychological, emotional, collective, cultural, historical, autobiographical, episodic, and procedural. Each perspective offers unique insights into how memory functions and influences individual and collective experiences. We have discovered that, though, they all share the ability to recall the past and, more importantly, the ability of humans to hold on to and preserve that time, preventing it from being completely lost (Phillips, 2006).

It is significant to note that, as the world has evolved, memory and the ways in which it is confronted have also changed. Memory has been impacted, and its transmission has changed in an increasingly dynamic and fast-paced global society that has destroyed previous barriers and modes of interpersonal interaction. A social universe without time was established when entire conventional memories, whether from the world of the peasants or the workers, disappeared. It was seen that new groups were being formed and people were being uprooted, which eventually eroded the traditional living memory (Sonderegger, 2007).

Memory and oral culture

Oral tradition and oral history are the two types of oral data. Oral statements may or may not include historical facts. Both are common in many African communities. The characteristics of oral tradition, how it is classified, and how it will be applied In African communities, oral tradition is generally regarded as merely literature that occurs in the form of amusement. Oral traditions are recreated in a variety of ways as a part of everyday activity. It is the entirety of what a man's life involves with relation to culture, traditions, and values that are present in a society. Whether conceptual or political, its execution and purpose are very much influenced by the context in which it is used. The presence of oral traditions in amusement makes it a particularly verbal and social activity. Therefore, it may be claimed that a historian wouldn't find it relevant. It is important to note that how history is viewed in different countries differs and is influenced by culture and society. As a result, despite being vocal and communicative, oral traditions have significant relevance to the study of history (Falola & Ade Ajayi, 1993).

In Africa, oral traditions can be clearly seen in songs, myths, stories, poems, proverbs, and other literary works. Oral tradition can be classified as folklore in all of its manifestations, according to Stevens (1978). In African communities, songs come in a variety of forms and serve a variety of functions. They may be used for socio-economic, political, cultural, or religious objectives. The composition of songs and their application need not always be implemented, and they might be audible or unheard.

Songs are frequently celebrated and associated with dance rituals in the majority of African communities. These are a few examples of the different types of music that can be used, depending on the situation. The character of the songwriter is important in the creation of songs since it is likely that the content was learned or created by an eyewitness to past and present occurrences. Songs are frequently collections of events that occurred over time. Warfare, economic breakthroughs, and other rituals that are significant in both the past and present are examples of the kinds of events that are celebrated in African communities. One may say that popular proverbs or popular history developed from customs. They are a synthesis of other oral traditions (Alagoa, 1990). The nature of a catchphrase varies from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. It is devoted to carrying out the daily activities that comprise a society's way of life.



After individuals within a community establish views and value judgments, it also contributes to the rules and traditions of the land. A myth is a historical story that focuses mostly on interpretations that include the originating legends. It provides information on the problems and characteristics that specific racial or ethnic groups are known for. It offers potential details about the inhabitants, their neighbours, and any potential connections that may have existed. It offers a thorough overview of the precise roles, locations, events, and most probable names connected with such an event. The songs and legends themselves make the language explanation relevant. For instance, in East Africa, the Maasai people of East Africa and the Yoruba people of Nigeria have a rich tradition of storytelling through legends and myths. These oral traditions play a vital role in passing down cultural values, history, and wisdom from one generation to the next.

African communities also place great value on the wisdom and knowledge of their elders, as they are considered a living library and sought after in decision-making processes and conflict resolution. Experiential learning through travel and experiences is also valued, as individuals who have experienced diverse challenges possess valuable knowledge. Knowledge is acquired through hands-on learning, observation, and apprenticeship, rather than solely through formal education. The use of proverbs and storytelling is essential in African cultures, as they encapsulate collective wisdom and guide decision-making. These examples demonstrate the diverse ways in which knowledge is acquired, preserved, and shared within African communities.

A very contentious subset of oral culture is myth. It is quite similar to African cultural and religious ideals. The formation and practise of foreign religions, however, render their substance ludicrous and irrelevant to modern culture, making them easy to dismiss. Despite this, myth emphasises the meanings and explanations that are attached to the sources of occurrences and focuses on the pursuit of knowledge (Vansina, 1985). As it depicts the interaction between the gods and humans, it might be disregarded in modern times. African myths hold deep symbolic meanings and cultural significance, often involving interactions between gods, supernatural beings, and humans. They play a crucial role in understanding the historical, cultural, and philosophical aspects of a society.

Myths can be dismissed in foreign religions due to a lack of understanding or perceived clash with their beliefs. However, they hold rich layers of symbolism and offer insights into the human experience, the natural world, and the mysteries of existence. Limit situations, as described by Karl Jaspers, are moments of intense human experience that challenge individuals' understanding of themselves and the world around them. Myths reveal the human psyche, emotions, and aspirations, revealing the universal human desire to seek knowledge and meaning in the face of uncertainty. To study myths with sensitivity and respect, scholars and researchers should approach them with sensitivity and respect, recognizing their cultural, philosophical, and psychological significance. Engaging in cross-cultural dialogue and fostering an inclusive approach to knowledge exploration can uncover the profound wisdom and relevance that myths hold for various societies.

A thorough scientific examination is frequently required to fully comprehend the substance and ideas based on the revelation. Its recreation is connected to conventional religious worship and advice. In order to act as a source of recall, designated members of society are supposed to repeat it as it applies. The fact that oral traditions are passed down through generations of social



systems and are heavily entwined is noteworthy. It appears modern in terms of popular history since it draws on the expertise of professionals like farmers, hunters, and others, and because variations in generations are reflected in it. The events witnessed during such professionalism are recognised implicitly or explicitly as part of the values of the politics and civilization in which they occurred. Nevertheless, the decision of the community as to whether or not to propagate history as time goes on determines whether or not it will survive (Cooper, 2005).

History and Orality in Africa

Writing is undoubtedly a crucial part of contemporary life, and many people believe that literacy—the capacity to read and write—is one of the fundamental life skills that everyone should possess in order to get by in society. This understanding of writing contributed to the Eurocentric assumption that since the oldest African cultures lacked written records, they had no history worth studying other than that of European settlers in Africa. Eurocentrism, influenced by European culture and values, influenced how Africa and its cultures were perceived and studied. This Eurocentric perspective perpetuated the idea that African societies were primitive or uncivilized compared to their European counterparts, leading to the marginalization and denigration of African history and heritage.

Oral traditions, such as myths, legends, proverbs, and genealogies, have been the primary means of transmitting knowledge, traditions, and historical accounts across generations in many African societies. These oral traditions convey a deep understanding of cultural identity, social norms, and historical events, and have been instrumental in preserving collective memory and cultural heritage. In recent times, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of oral history and a shift away from Eurocentric biases in historical research. Scholars and researchers have begun to embrace interdisciplinary approaches that combine written records with oral traditions to create more comprehensive and nuanced historical narratives. Efforts have been made to preserve and document African oral traditions through various means, such as audio and video recordings, written transcriptions, and archiving.

Writing and literacy are undeniably crucial in contemporary life, but it is essential to recognize that historical knowledge and wisdom have been transmitted through diverse means in different cultures, including oral traditions in Africa. By embracing a more inclusive and respectful approach to historical research, we can bridge gaps in knowledge and promote a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of African heritage and contributions to human history. While such ideas were prevalent, their proponents seldom paused to think about how their beliefs could affect other people. Before the encounter between Europe and the Arab world, for instance, writing was a tradition in several African communities. Oral and written literature in African languages, like Egypt's hieroglyphs, Ethiopia's Amharic, and a multitude of others spoken in West, Central, and Southern Africa, incorporated accounts of ancestry and peoples, human accomplishments, and occurrences that were not only maintained and relayed in written form but were also verbally transmitted (Jenkins, 1974).

These oral traditions, also known as oral lore, served as a means of communication between people. They included everything from folklore and songs to choruses and prose or poetry. They comprised information, works of art, ideas, and cultural items that were acquired, kept, and passed down orally or musically from one era to the next. Before they could be considered history, all of them had to be recorded in European languages and in ways that were understandable to Europeans. Rock art, archaeological relics, and other artefacts discovered in caves throughout Southern Africa, West Africa, East Africa, and Central Africa, as well as in



various North African desert regions, continue to demonstrate how advanced traditional African societies were in a variety of fields, including metal smithing, brickmaking, territorial expansion, etc. All of this evidence challenges the underlying presumptions of the European claim that Africa is an ahistorical continent, as well as the Europeans' perverse infatuation with written records as historical artifacts (Oyeniyi, 2021).

Writing evolved in certain regions of Africa thousands of years ago, whereas it emerged in others with the Arab invasion and subsequently the European invasion (Spear, 1981). Southern Africa, West Africa, and Africa have diverse writing systems, with ancient Egyptians developing hieroglyphics, Nubia developing Meroitic writing, and Ethiopia using Ge'ez script. European colonization introduced languages like English and Portuguese to Southern Africa, reflecting the continent's rich history and contributions to early communication and written expression. To provide one example, the ancient Egyptians were said to be the first people to create writing, the hieroglyphic script, in addition to having written records. Written literature in Hausa, Ajami, and Arabic was created by scholars from what are now northern Nigeria, Mali, and Somalia. Along with oral traditions, this literature covered current social problems. Whether it be in African societies where written tradition originated before the interactions between Europe and the Arab world or in those that interacted with the civilizations of the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean and, through these, ingested literacy traditions, historical heritage in oral forms not only occurred but coexisted with writing practice.

The rise of the Aryan model and the ideas presented in "The Stolen Legacy" highlight the historical distortions and biases that have impacted the understanding of African knowledge, including writing and literacy. The Aryan model, which claimed the superiority of the Aryan race, contributed to the marginalization and denigration of African civilizations, including their contributions to writing and literacy. The Stolen Legacy, written by George G. M. James, explores the notion that ancient African knowledge and philosophy were misappropriated and attributed to other civilizations, particularly ancient Greece. The book argues that much of the intellectual heritage credited to Greek philosophers actually had its origins in Egyptian and other African civilizations. Recognizing and correcting these historical inaccuracies is crucial for a more comprehensive understanding of African heritage and intellectual contributions. Acknowledging the early development of writing and literacy in African civilizations and the coexistence of oral and written traditions can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of African heritage and intellectual contributions.

This cohabitation around oral tradition and written literature started to fade in the 20th century as European merchants, nomadic clerics, and explorers joined forces with missionary-educated African nobles to give European ancient legacies predicated on the written record an unwarranted amount of importance. Works by this eclectic group of educated elites, whether written in Arabic and African languages or in European languages, drove oral tradition and traditional written literature to the brink of extinction across North, West, Central, and East Africa as well as Southern Africa. European languages and writing systems, such as TOEFL and IELTS, have been framed and imposed by European influences, perpetuating a Eurocentric approach to knowledge production. This perpetuates a cycle of exclusion from mainstream academic spaces, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to knowledge production and communication. The first universities in Africa contributed to this growth as well.



These universities, established during colonial and post-colonial periods, promoted the dominance of written literature over oral tradition. European models of education and knowledge production prioritized European texts, leading to a decline in the importance of African oral traditions and indigenous knowledge systems. Language policies and hiring practices favored European-trained scholars, limiting access to higher education for African students without strong command of European languages. These institutions, which were created to provide labour for both the colonial government and the missions, gave preference to the predominating European historical traditions and their obtuse preoccupation with written materials. At this early time, it was customary to hear that, like pre-Columbian Americans, Africa had no history prior to the arrival of the Europeans (Phillips, 2006).

These esteemed scholars and renowned colonial leaders were worried that oral history could not be a reliable source of African history, even if they did not dispute the existence of historical events worth studying in traditional and pre-European Africa. They believed that in order for something to be considered history, it had to be recorded, and because they only understood what it meant to be literate in terms of Europe, they believed that Africans prior to the arrival of the Europeans were illiterate, rendering historical developments in Africa nonhistorical.

Africans, mostly teachers and pastors, had started to dispute the Eurocentric perspective of African history before the foundation of institutions of higher education in Africa in 1948. They discussed Africa's rich oral traditions in their books. They used them while they were writing the chronicles of their dynasties, empires, events, etc. Their primary priority was not only to save their ancestors' acts and activities from oblivion, but also to maintain these histories and legacies for future generations (Ngom, 2010). Their naive embrace of oral traditions as forms of African history and their use of oral traditions in their historical interpretations were among the main accusations levelled at these pioneers. Samuel Johnson (1921) not only gathered oral histories for the history of the Yoruba people but also balanced them against his own life's experiences. His writings included the origin tales of cities and towns as well as those of kings and kingdoms, as well as the practises and traditions of the Yoruba people. He also focused on the Yoruba War of the nineteenth century, an internal conflict that crippled the Yoruba country in the face of foreign assault, first from their Hausa/Fulani neighbour to the north and then from the European colonial powers to the south.

Johnson not only took part in a few of the occurrences he wrote about, but he also had the chance to interact with and get information from others who saw those occurrences that he was unaware of. Johnson mostly used oral traditions for all of his publications, with the exception of a number of contracts that the European invaders imposed on various Yoruba kingdoms. The different European countries were forced to look for other sources of income for the colonies because of the economic depression that followed World War II in Europe. To this purpose, colonial administrators were required to look for finances for improving the economy of the European colonies as well as funds for the daily management of these colonies. Tariffs and charges were raised across the colonies for the first time, subjecting African women not only to taxes but also to financially draining levies on their sources of income, particularly fabric manufacturing. The responses to the implementation of taxation and fees in these colonies varied from modest demonstrations to violent rioting. Women gathered in unprecedented numbers to oppose the new tax system in Abeokuta, Aba, and Accra, among other places (Johnson, 1921).

Contrarily, this development had a significant impact on how oral traditions and orality were used throughout Africa. Colonial officials gathered oral histories of the histories of the many



African cultures in an attempt to discover why Africans declined to pay taxes. This brought oral traditions and orality to the forefront of information creation and scholarship in Africa. Nevertheless, when more African graduates from European colleges started accepting posts at African universities in the 1960s, events took a different course (Vansina, 1985). They invested a great deal of time proving to their European detractors that, like information about the history of other peoples, understanding of the African past was not based solely on writing but could be gathered from archives of various types. These early African historians were trained in the European historical tradition. Additionally, they showed that Africa has the same characteristics as other individuals, as stated above. They provided verifiable evidence in both their doctrines and texts that history could be pieced together from a variety of sources.

They not only argued for their inclusion in historical reconstructions of Africa but also showed in their works how to blend them with other written sources, such as native African literature from Islamic cultures in West and East Africa. Early pre-human remains found in Eastern and Southern Africa provided a boost to these historians' works since, during the 1930s and 1960s, all of the materials they presented were seen as important historical relics that could be used to piece together the history of Africa. There is no longer any disagreement over whether or not Africa had a past before the arrival of the Europeans. There is no longer any way to dispute the weight of the facts. Orality, the very method by which oral traditions were transmitted from the past to the present, is still criticized. Preferences, distortions, and deficiencies in human memory were among the concerns mentioned. Whereas these problems may affect oral traditions, they can equally affect written sources. In other words, neither oral nor recorded historical sources are perfect. Early African historians portrayed African history as a reflection of European history by using European historical methodologies and procedures (Falola & Ajayi, 1993).

African history, like European history, was centred on topics such as politics, the economy, conflict, commerce, ties between and among states, and so on. This strategy allowed them to support their arguments about Africa and African history, but it didn't provide any new insights into those topics. In other words, early African historians were happy to just demonstrate that Africa had its own history prior to the arrival of the Europeans, rather than demonstrating the dynamic aspect of African history. Oral traditions, the very backbone of African history, are fluid and active in contrast to text. Oral traditions that were gathered, analysed, and limited to text to try to emulate European history became oral history as a result. European influences and Western models of historiography influenced African oral traditions, which are the foundation of African history. However, the transformation of oral traditions into written texts, known as "oral history," lost their dynamic and interactive qualities, leading to oversimplification and misinterpretation. The authentic essence of African history lies in the continuous and evolving nature of oral traditions within their cultural context. Written records are essential for historical research and documentation, but they should complement the living and fluid nature of African oral traditions. Advocates of African oral traditions were compared to mediaeval European storytellers like bards and griots.

Traditional African historians are more than just storytellers; this fact should be acknowledged. They performed a wider, more varied, and more important function than a simple narrator in the medieval European tradition. They served as the monarchs', chiefs', and other state authorities' top political counsellors. They served as top legal advisers, and no country would engage in hostilities without first consulting them. In other words, they served as secretaries or advisers for national defence. They were conflict arbitrators who mediated at all levels of



relationships, including those between states, between ethnic groups, and locally inside their own states. They represented their countries in adjacent countries as envoys and officials knowledgeable in the histories of their various governments. They acted as primary negotiators for traditional marriage and wedding agreements (Falola & Ajayi, 1993).

Traditional African historians were trained at home by their parents; as a student historian, they would have gained extensive knowledge of the socioeconomic, political, and cultural histories of his or her town, family, and personal life by the time they were adults. These young adults were then required to travel extensively in order to study the histories of various individuals, families, communities, kingdoms, and empires. They could be working with well-known historians. Some people may work for these masters for ten to twenty-five years. After completing their apprenticeship, they would have mastered spoken language on their own and be prepared to serve their states as musicians, actors, social and cultural anthropologists, and archivists, as well as historians and genealogists. They would have gained knowledge of politics, art, genealogy, history, and both culture and society. They could have been proficient in a variety of musical instruments, oratory, singing, dancing, and theatrical performance, among other things. These "walking librarians" were more than just storytellers, despite the fact that they made a living by using narrative skills and gadgets. They served as the archives for personal and societal history, but their breadth of knowledge distinguished them in the field of African historiography. There was no distinction made in their professions between the person and society, the intellectual and the artistic, the physical and the spiritual, and the secular. Orality was the primary means of communication in each of these realms (Falola & Ajayi, 1993).

This experience highlights the impact of external influence, particularly the dominance of European languages, on African societies and intellectuals. It raises concerns about the politics of assimilation and the suppression of indigenous languages and knowledge systems in favor of imitating external models of thinking. The traditional African apprenticeship practice allowed individuals to master spoken language, artistic, cultural, and historical disciplines, preparing them for diverse roles. However, the introduction of European languages and education systems brought about a politics of assimilation, with those with good command of these languages gaining privileged access to education and power. This marginalization marginalized African intellectuals and scholars, suppressing their unique linguistic and cultural identities.

The consequences of this politics of assimilation are profound, perpetuating cultural colonization, hindering the development and preservation of indigenous languages, and creating a divide between those with access to education in European languages and those who do not. To address these issues, it is essential to recognize the value and importance of African languages and knowledge systems. Emphasizing multilingualism and promoting the use of indigenous languages in education and intellectual discourse can empower African intellectuals to express their ideas authentically and contribute to the global body of knowledge. A pluralistic approach to education that respects and integrates diverse linguistic and cultural traditions can foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

Given the above, there is no need to argue that oral traditions have always been important to African historical traditions. Orality is the name for the way that people in African cultures and civilizations think and talk. Whether or not writing evolved in these African societies was of little consequence; orality is "speech documentation" that is made accessible to people in a



variety of ways. Orality has an impact on social politics, economy, organisation, and human progress, as was made obvious by the accounts of traditional African historians. Vansina (1985) remarked that oral tradition was the means by which memorised speech, narratives, stories, and proverbs, were transmitted. Many of them were expressive, but they also had societal benefits that served as traditions, serving to evoke memories of the past. They are actual, aware, and reachable as recalled knowledge. To this end, it may be said that oral tradition in Africa, whether exhibited or passed down, is inextricably linked to African history.

African and Africanist scholars have made significant contributions to oral history by converting oral traditions into accessible and preservable forms. This process involves interrogating and documenting oral traditions, recording and analyzing them, and conserving them in digital formats. This process enhances scholarly understanding of African history and culture, ensuring their preservation for future generations. Several history departments today offer a variety of courses designed to educate historians in the discipline of creating oral histories. These universities and institutions, include Columbia University, University of Manchester, University of Cape Town, University of Sydney, University of Ghana, and University of the Western Cape. These institutions recognize the importance of oral history and offer training on interviewing techniques, ethical considerations, and archival management in oral history projects. These initiatives unquestionably helped to preserve "verbal records" and produce them in formats that are easier to access. These initiatives have probably had the most effect on driving oral traditions to the brink of irrelevance. How much has the role of oral tradition and culture in African history and culture been diminished by the country's low literacy rates since independence? Most importantly, it should be underlined that tools for the collection, translation, and maintenance of oral traditions are now present in the majority of history departments. How have these initiatives impacted orality? The next part contains the answers to these and other queries.

The 21st Century's Oral Tradition, Oral History, and African Historians

The historian plays a crucial and important role in reclaiming African history. Given Europeans' statements about African peoples, it may be perceived as unbending on the part of Europeans to urge any African or non-European to begin efforts to change the perspective. It was said that Africans lived in abject poverty in the modern era and that, before the arrival of the Europeans, the majority of the continent was devoid of the wheel, the plough, and almost all dwellings, as well as writing and, therefore, history (Falola, 2000). This perspective, along with others, had an impact on the kind of material that made up the curriculum to be taught at Africa's colonially founded educational institutions. At the University College of Ibadan, Professor Kenneth Dike became known as a pioneer in dispelling all preconceived notions about African culture and civilization. After finishing a PhD thesis on Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830–1885 in 1950, the desire and necessity to write about Africa utilising oral traditions and oral testimonies increased. The chance to do research on such a subject was not handed to Dike on a silver platter since he was required to write on Imperial history, probably "The British Policy Toward." When the dissertation was finished in 1950, his persistence paid off (Falola, 2000).

According to Ade-Ajayi (1990), the African history curriculum was available at the University of London. The only subject not related to English, European, or world history was A History of Africa. since 1450, which covered topics such as the evolution of the Commonwealth and the British empire. At the time, understanding the history of Africa was uncommon, and persuading foreign professors to make a difference was a challenge. African history classes



had to be created at the University College of Ibadan as a result of Dike's success in producing a thesis using oral tradition and oral histories, which are essential to Africans. Europeans wanted to educate Africans about how they were colonised by other races. Nevertheless, the curriculum's demands did not result in altering the make-up of classes, so further measures were used to get the intended outcomes. In order to accomplish the intended aims, several strategies for gathering oral histories and customs regarding the history of Africa were put in place. Dike looked at a comprehensive framework that included the founding of the West African Institute for Social and Economic Research (WAISER) in Ibadan, which is today known as NISER. The findings of the study at WAISER, which is a research institution, prompted the need to additionally build other research processes. Dike had difficulties because, unlike imperial history, much of African history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries included interactions between Africans and Europeans. This was a problem because the perspectives on understanding African history differed. Therefore, research on oral tradition and oral histories was crucial for comprehending African history. This highlighted the creation of national archives in Ibadan (Ade-Ajayi, 1990).

There were several obstacles to using oral sources because of the pressing necessity to combine the WAISER and National Archives projects. It was obvious that there would be study plans based on linguistic and cultural similarities. The Benin research programme was established to enhance the exploration of oral traditions. All of this has previously improved Prof. Dike's reputation as a top historian at the University of Ibadan. Consolidating the works from this research strategy became necessary to reinforce the emphasis on African history. The Ibadan History Series became well-known for monograph compilations (Ade-Ajayi, 1990). At this point, it is crucial to emphasise that Dike's efforts in developing the medium for the use of oral sources and the technique for historical research could not have been successful on their own. It became necessary to pursue a multidisciplinary strategy. Dike helped create the University of Ibadan's Faculty of Social Sciences by laying the groundwork for research on the social and economic elements of African culture. The establishment of this faculty made it easier to achieve the necessary goals in African history by addressing interdisciplinary needs. In order to gather various humanities specialists, including linguists, social anthropologists, historians, and archaeologists, among others, worldwide seminars took place in 1953, 1957, and 1961.

A seminar that exposed educational research projects produced outcomes for the interpretation of African history. Additional research initiatives, such as the Eastern and Northern Historical Research Programs, were launched during the late 1950s under the direction of Prof. Dike. Arabic-language oral historical materials have become important in African history studies as a result of multidisciplinary initiatives. In 1961, with the help of Prof. Hunwick, the study of Arabic and Islam was placed in the context of African studies. Professor Dike stated, "The key to unravelling the mysteries of the history of Africa will be provided by Arabic writings now being unearthed, as well as papers written in African languages using the Arabic alphabet."

The ancient Arabic academics will be able to recount historical occurrences for us and assist us in creating a history that we can legitimately claim for ourselves (Hunwick, 2008). As a result, the Prof. Hunwick-founded Center for Arabic Documentation at the University of Ibadan's Institute of African Studies became a cooperative agency for the study of African history. History and historians evolved as a result of the need to integrate the findings of various research programs. *A Thousand Years of West African History*, edited by Ade-Ajayi and Espie, and *Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, edited by Anene and Brown, are two volumes that are helpful for teaching in addition to the monographs from the Ibadan History



Series. Various volumes about East Africa, Southern Africa, and Ajayi and Crowder's West Africa were also released. Others were released with support from Cambridge and UNESCO. Without the Historical Society of Nigeria, the historians' synthesis would have been lacking. Dike and H.F.C. Abdullahi (Abdullah Smith) founded the organisation in 1956 to offer a steady and trustworthy platform for disseminating historical facts (Ade-Ajayi, 1990).

The two books—Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries and A Thousand Years of West African History—that were mentioned previously were published thanks to the workshops that this association sponsored. The association's sponsorship of workshops and publications is commendable for providing financial support, academic development, knowledge dissemination, support for African historians, collaborations, preservation, and promotion of African perspectives. These books contribute to the advancement of African historical research and the dissemination of valuable knowledge about Africa's past. With the introduction of the Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN), it became necessary to regularise the publication of historical facts in journals. In the 1960s, this led to the creation of the Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria (JHSN). The JHSN evolved as a group for historians to set historical studies apart from other fields of study. The JHSN began a project in 1971 to portray national history with the goal of creating a complete book that would contribute to national history. This initiative resulted in the 1980 publication of the well-known *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, edited by Obaro Ikime. The purpose of the literary descriptions is to illustrate the connection between oral tradition, oral history, and African history rather than to provide a biography of Prof. Dike's work career. The duties and responsibilities of the historian cannot be ignored if one wants to be impartial about the connection. The interaction of oral traditions and oral histories is largely responsible for the preservation of African history.

African Orality and Historical Rebuilding

The history of Africa is enormous, much like the African elephant. It is made up of several unique yet connected pieces. So far, the various academic fields—from anthropologists and archaeologists to linguists to geographers and historians, etc.—each with its own area of expertise, are comparable to blind people tasked with explaining and auditing the various portions of the elephant they can interact with. Even though these blind people claimed to know everything about African history, they all had to elaborate on the various topics they discussed. Even though these shows were excellent, they all told an aspect of one story. Written records, a mainstay of European history, were not flawless, and, to the degree of their human discourses and prejudices, they were as culpable as oral sources, as several African and Africanist historians have previously shown. Concrete remnants are objective testimony to events, but other than the fact that they were made from the minds of their creators, they say nothing of the language, culture, traditions, etc. of the narrators (Schmidt, 1983).

Orality endures irrespective of human improvements in turning oral tradition into oral history, as stated earlier. It continues to be one of the many ways that even in the twenty-first century, the core of African history and cultures are conveyed and perpetuated. Unlike some other sources, oral tradition connects the present with Africa's past, making it the best source for connecting written documents and physical remnants with African history and culture. Oral traditions and literature in Africa are not only vibrant but also alive and in motion. It is not in danger of disappearing, as was shown in the preceding section, despite increased attempts to do so. Its writings and stylistic elements are influenced by many African languages and customs. Its primary means of communication, spoken language, is performative in a manner that binds it unbreakably to the past (Spear, 1981). A lot of conclusions about orality and



historical interpretation might be drawn from the selected oral traditions mentioned above. For example, Aduke Abiola's wedding poetry contains allusions to things and events like rice, taxes, and levies that are crucial for recreating both his own past and Yorubaland's social history. One merely has to compare the resources cited in Aduke's interpretation with other sources to demonstrate this, since doing so will help one create a visual that goes beyond what is shown in the wedding poetry.

Despite the fact that neither the date nor the identity of Aduke Abiola's father are known, the mention of incarceration as a penalty for tax fraud indicates that the monarch must have been Oba Samuel Adeleye Adenle I, who reigned from 1944 to 1976. Tax evasion was never punished in Yoruba history with jail time or in such a harsh manner as Aduke's companions claimed. Following the destruction of World War II and the necessity to support the Nigerian colony, imperial Britain organised this emergence. In order to do this, colonial officials were required to raise money inside the colony for their daily operations. Tax hikes were added along with increased charges. The revised tax structure received an immediate and broad reaction. Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, a school principal, rallied market women in Abeokuta to oppose the colonial government, which resulted in the abdication of Oba Ladapo Samuel Ademola II as monarch in 1948. Due to the dire circumstances, a large number of people who chose not to pay taxes either landed in prison or paid a penalty (Byfield, 2002). Aduke Abiola may have been awarded to either Alaafin Siyanbola Oladigbolu I (1911–1945) or Alaafin Adeniran Adeyemi II (1945–1955), the latter of whom was deposed in 1955.

Meanings may be extracted from African puzzles and comedies, sayings and customs, legendary poems and classics, etc., just as any poetic verses can infuse life into even more quiet material uncovered by archaeologists or data discovered by linguists. The statement emphasizes the importance of diverse sources in understanding African history and society. It highlights the richness of African cultural expressions, including puzzles, comedies, sayings, customs, legendary poems, archaeological discoveries, and linguistic data. By combining these sources, historians can gain a comprehensive understanding of African history and culture, preserving and valuing the continent's cultural heritage. It is true that the way the images in African oral literature and classics interact with African history is similar to how metaphors were used. Metaphor often includes and inspires contradiction, much as in puzzles and folklore. Insights and perspectives on all facets of African life are condensed into oral poems and legends. These and other cultural activities and artefacts are resilient, which emphasises their significance and survival. Poetry's connecting lines weave symbolic themes, words of wisdom, society norms, and parenting instruction into the poem's overall structure. None of these elements could be separated from a poem's overarching purpose. Poems gave the listeners a close-up, intimate feeling of the core, levels of significance, and historical evidence (Schmidt, 1983).

Orality enhances the performing elements of poetry and offers an experiential cue to the poem's core shape. It can be contended that these efforts to convert oral tradition into written historical tradition were not restricted to professional historians but also came from ancient Egyptian scholars, Swahili scribes, and Hausa scribes. From another perspective, these efforts by historians and other authors to popularise historical works by interpreting and portraying historical progress from a culture and language into formats understandable to others are harmful to the critical significance of oral tradition in African history (Scheub, 1977).

The Sustainability of African History through Orality



It is impossible to overstate the value of oral tradition in African history. It is the primary means of understanding the real history, culture, and traditions of African cultures. Orality is unquestionably significant in understanding African history since it is the primary means of transferring African oral heritage. Orality, as a means of transmitting oral tradition, has been relegated to the sidelines throughout time as a result of attempts to make African history, society, and traditions understandable to outsiders. Oral history, which is the gathering of historical data via audio recordings, video clips, or excerpts of scheduled interviews, has largely replaced it (Adegbola, 2012).

Orality still exists, as seen by the many instances cited in this article, notably in native courts and monarchies and in public settings—the same places where African communities undergo change and continuity. Orality's continued use in the face of deliberate attempts to downplay its significance in the dissemination of African history, culture, and traditions demonstrates that African people recognise the significance of oral tradition in the dissemination of African history and culture. In other words, orality remains a vital means of preserving African history and culture, despite colonial and Eurocentric influences. Its resilience and persistence are attributed to its cultural continuity, accessibility, multifaceted expression, preservation of indigenous knowledge, and resistance to cultural erasure. Orality connects past, present, and future in African societies, showcasing the enduring value and recognition of oral traditions. In addition, it highlights the tenacity of oral communication. Orality continually prevails as the primary means by which African history and culture may be comprehended, as evidenced by the illustrations provided in this article for folk etymology and poetic verses, humorous expressions and maxims, legendary eloquent prose and compositions, etc. Orality will keep being beneficial to African communities as long as they appreciate and maintain their oral traditions (Finnegan, 1970).

The foundation of African history, cultures, and customs is oral tradition, even if a few transcriptions of these many oral traditions have been published in other languages. Before the twenty-first century comes to a conclusion, African and Africanist historians must devise strategies for preserving the essence of African history, cultures, and traditions digitally without changing their outward manifestations. The concern ought not to be if or when we have the innovation to record oral tradition in its natural state, but rather when we will establish the determination to do so. Given the existing technological advancements, it would be possible to maintain the histories, cultures, and customs of various peoples all over the world without changing or modifying them to fit European interpretation. This would allow us to record oral tradition in its authentic state. Whatever request for reconsidering how we respect orality should not be interpreted as primarily withdrawing from the field of global awareness given its importance in African history and historical renovation, but rather as recognition of the true unique partnership for both oral histories and printed language (Schoenhoff, 1983).

Conclusion

The need to assert oral tradition and memories as references for modern history is critical, especially for African/Nigerian historiography, which must be comprehensive or thorough, because they allow us to recognise the perspectives of those who are excluded from approved or global history and introduce the unexplainable facts by uncovering what is not printed in representative or "canonized" records. This essay proves pertinent for historical research as well as the assertion of African history in contemporary historiography in this context. In many African nations, like Ghana, Senegal, Mali, Kenya, South Africa, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. Griots, known as "oral historians," preserve and pass down history, traditions, and genealogies through storytelling, songs, and rituals. These oral traditions continue to be



essential for preserving and celebrating African history, culture, and traditions —and are the principal communications channel, the mechanism that ensures the transfer of historical memory. Major metropolitan areas continue to enjoy the benefits of text, but that does not imply that oral tradition is not present in metropolises. Once oral tradition is discussed in reference to African history, we aim to emphasise that no effort to understand the history and essence of Africans will be successful if it fails to draw upon this source of information of all sorts, diligently conveyed orally. It must be understood in this context that we are no longer attempting to achieve or portray history as absolute truth when using oral sources, as we would with any other source. However, this does not negate the need for a historian who depends on oral history to take even more care in identifying the parameters and pathways for a thorough examination of its sources. Oral histories are accounts of recollections, as was previously said. As a result, when working with oral sources, one has to be more careful and try to grasp what the respondent is trying to convey when they share their recollections, as well as how they are also interpreted and externalised at the time of the conversation. By using oral history, the historian is able to address his topic from a more interactional perspective. We shall be able to comprehend how those facts were contextually formed by the historical subject if we have this human experience with the topic. Oral history and memory have the same fundamental component: both are remedies for amnesia. As a result, they provide longevity and also function as areas of influence.

To foster a more inclusive and balanced approach to studying and understanding non-European thought systems and philosophies. By embracing multilingualism, adopting comparative frameworks, promoting collaborative research, challenging Eurocentrism, emphasizing contextual understanding, recognizing diversity within non-European thought, and encouraging critical reflection, historians can contribute to a more equitable and inclusive portrayal of world history. By engaging with original sources and texts from non-European cultures in their native languages, historians can gain a more accurate understanding of the context, nuances, and subtleties of the ideas and philosophies expressed by these cultures. By fostering collaboration between European and non-European scholars, historians can bring together diverse perspectives, expertise, and cultural insights, contributing to a richer understanding of global philosophies.

References

- Ade-Ajayi, J. F. (1990). *History of the nation and other address*. Spectrum books.
- Adegbola, T. (2012). Multimedia and signed, written or oral languages. In L. Vannini & H. Le Crosnier (Eds.), *Net.Lang: Towards the Multilingual Cyberspace* (pp. 311–325). C&F Editions.
- Alagoa, E.J. (1990), *Oral Tradition and Oral History in Africa and the Diaspora: Theory and Practice*. Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, Lagos.
- Byfield, J. A. (2002). *The bluest hands: A social and economic history of women dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940*. Heinemann.
- Cooper, B. M. (2005). Oral sources and the challenge of African History. In J. E. Phillips (Ed.), *Writing African History*. University of Rochester Press (p.191-215).
- Dasylva, A. O. (2017). Folklore, Oral Traditions, and Oral Literature. In T. Falola and A. Akinyemi (eds) *Culture and Customs of the Yoruba* (p.139–158). Pan-African University Press.
- Falola, T. (2000). *Ibadan school of history in the Essay in Honour of J.F. Ade-Ajayi*. Africa World Press Inc.



- Falola, T., & Ajayi, J. F. A. (1993). *African historiography: Essays in honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi*. Longman.
- Finnegan, R. (1970). *African oral literature*. Oxford University Press.
- Finnegan, R. (1992). *Oral traditions and the verbal arts: A guide to research practices*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203397237>
- Foley, J. M. (1998). *Teaching oral traditions*. The Modern Language Association.
- Halbawachs, M. (2011). From the Collective Memory. In J. K. Olick, V. Vinitzky-Serouss, & D. Levy (Eds.) *The collective Memory reader*. Oxford University Press.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511841057>
- Hunwick, J. O. (2008). Islam and Arabic into western Africa University of Ibadan 14th exchange lecture series.
- Jenkins, J. J. (1974). Remember that old theory of Memory? Well, forget It. *American Psychologist*, 29(11), 785–795. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0037399>
- Johnson, S. (1921). *The history of the Yorubas: From the earliest times to the beginning of the British protectorate*. Cms bookshop.
- Mweti, C. (1999). The use of stories and their power in the secondary curriculum among the Akamba of Kenya [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Wisconsin.
- Ngom, F. (2010). Introducing the Ajami literatures of Islamic Africa. In African language literature in Ajami script.
- Okpewho, I. (1992). African oral literature: Backgrounds, character, and continuity, 710. Indiana University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2979/1034.0>
- Okpewho, I. (2007). Introduction. *Research in African Literatures*, 38(3), vii–xxi. <https://doi.org/10.2979/RAL.2007.38.3>.
- Oring, E. (2012). *Just folklore: Analysis, interpretation, critique*. Cantilever Press.
- Oyeniyi, B. A. (2021). Orality, history and historical reconstruction. In A. Akinyemi, T. Falola (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of African oral traditions and folklore* (pp. 83–104). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55517-7_4
- Phillips, J. E. (2006). *Writing African history*. University of Rochester Press.
- Scheub, H. (1977). Performance of Oral Narrative. In W. Bascom (Ed.) *Frontiers of folklore* (pp. 54–78). New York."
- Scheub, H. (1985). A review of African oral traditions and literature. *African Studies Review*, 28(2–3), 1–72.
- Schmidt, P. (1983). Cultural Meaning and History in African Myth. *International Journal of Oral History*, 4(3), 167–83.
- Schoenhoff, D. (1993). *The barefoot expert: The interface of computerized knowledge systems and indigenous knowledge systems*. Greenwood Press.
- Sonderegger, A. (2007). On writing African history: Schools of thought and their (Mis) representation. *Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien*, 13(7), 49–78
- Spear, T. (1981). Oral traditions: Whose history. *History in Africa*, 8, 165–181. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3171514>
- Stevens, P. (1978). The uses of oral traditions in the writing of African history. *Tarikh*, 6(1), 21–30.
- Vansina, J. M. (1985). *Oral tradition as history*. University of Wisconsin Press.