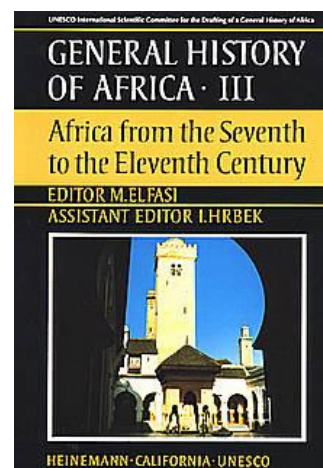
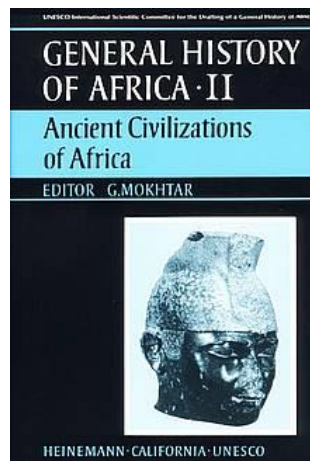
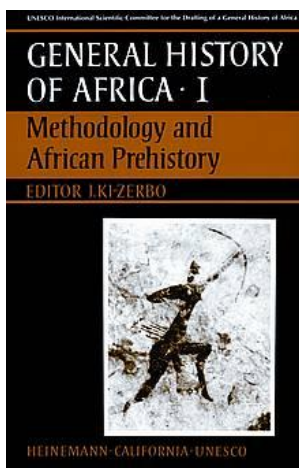


Africa's History Utilized for the Promotion of Regional Integration

Mervyn Claxton

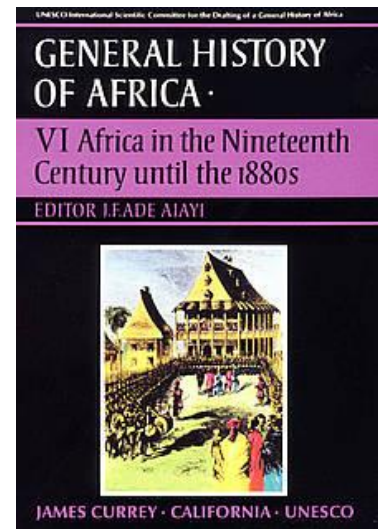
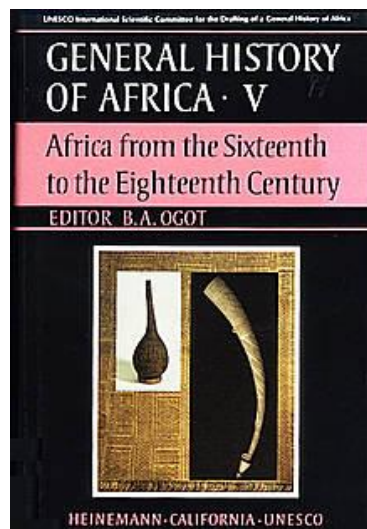
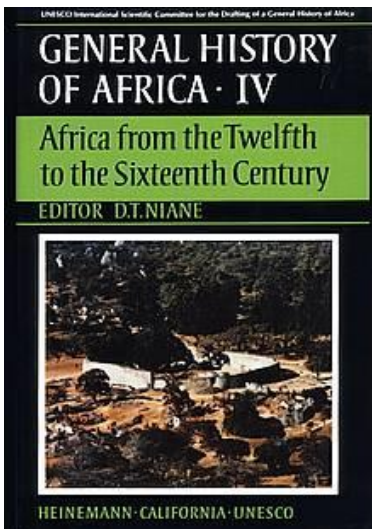
In 1964, at the request of newly independent African States, UNESCO commissioned the writing of an eight-volume history of Africa, the General History of Africa (GHA). But that history has not been sufficiently exploited. As far back as the early 1980s, a number of African specialists, and specialists on Africa, began emphasizing the importance and the relevance of Africa's past to the region's present problems and future prospects. Discussing the relevance of Africa's past to Africa's present problems, A. E. Afigho, the Nigerian historian, argued that the relevance of that past can be assured only when historians succeed in reconstructing a "*usable and problem-oriented past*" rather than being merely content with ferreting out more facts that attest to a glorious African past. (The Making of Modern Africa, 1986).



Observing that "[A people's] *provision for the future.....is implicit in the way they reproduce the present out of the past*", John Lonsdale declared that "*Africa's alternative histories are full of relevance to Africa's future. If only they are rediscovered.*" ("African Pasts in Africa's Future" in Bruce Berman & John Lonsdale, Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa, 1992). Discussing how the past continues to influence politics in Nigeria, J. D. Y. Peel, observed: "*What is so striking is that, while the material ends of politics are so contemporary, the framework of action within which they are sought should show such continuity with the past.*" (Ijeshas and Nigerians: The Incorporation of a Yoruba Kingdom 1890s-1970s, 1983).

Basil Davidson argued that any consideration of the possible contribution that African traditions could make to modern democratic governance in Africa would need to include an assessment of the lessons of the past, *“not as a futile attempt to renew the past but to consider what it can say about valid and enduring forms of government.”* (The Search for Africa: A History in the Making, 1994).

Such observations increased in number until they finally attracted the attention of African political authorities. The latter requested Unesco to formulate and implement a regional project, for the entire continent, which would, effectively, put Africa's past at the service of both its present and its future. Unesco organized three expert-cum-preparatory meetings to conceptualize the project (the Pedagogical Use of the General History of Africa), formulate it, and plan its implementation. A ten-member Scientific Committee of eminent historians and educationists was entrusted with the conceptualization and intellectual orientation of the pedagogical project. The first two meetings were held in Paris (March, 2009), and Tripoli (June, 2010). The third and final meeting will take place in Harare (4-10 September, 2011).

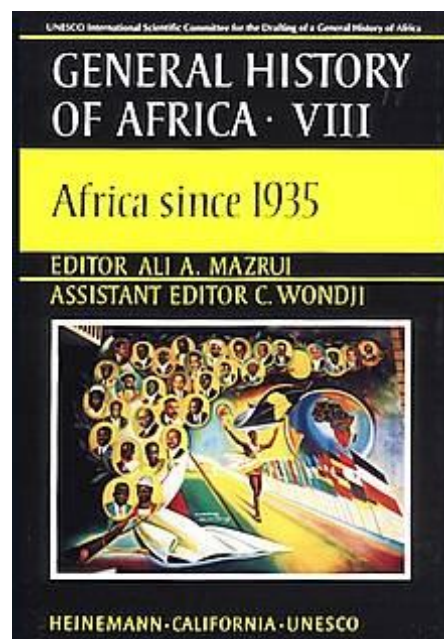
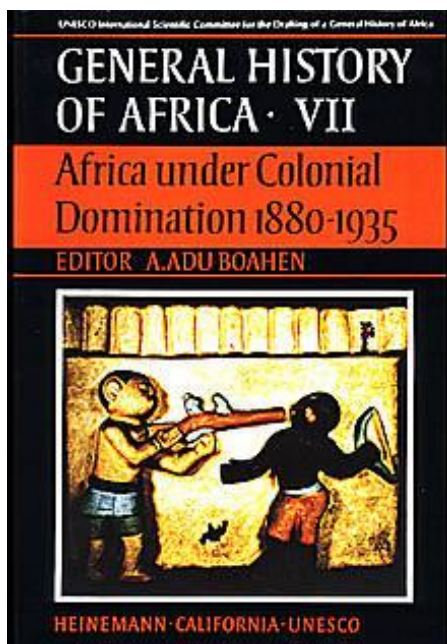


The strategic objective of the pedagogical project is overtly political - to accord African history and the teaching of that history a central role in the construction of African unity. That fundamental role is affirmed in one of the preambular paragraphs of the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance: *“The unity of Africa is founded first and foremost on its history.”* (African Union Conference, sixth session, Khartoum, January 2006).

The first two meetings clarified the various issues, aspects and main thrusts of the project, in

relation to African integration and to the renewal of history teaching in the region. They also analysed the principal challenges posed, and defined the approach to be adopted in meeting those challenges. The third meeting takes the form of two workshops which will examine and make recommendations on their respective subject matters. Their recommendations will be presented, discussed and adopted at a conference that begins immediately after the workshops have completed their work.

The conference will be attended by members of the Scientific Committee of the GHA, the Scientific Committee of the pedagogical project, a number of experts from a broad range of disciplines - history, anthropology, archaeology, education, etc and, most importantly, a number of political and civil society actors from different African regions. The two latter categories of participants are very important. Participating, as they will be, in the final preparatory phase of the pedagogical project, political and civil society actors would be more likely to become stakeholders than if they were presented with a finished project document, as is usually the case.



In addition to the above-mentioned participants, the conference will be attended by the members of the three editorial teams, selected to supervise the drafting of new history textbooks for primary, secondary and tertiary education, as well teaching manuals. One of the two workshops will be concerned with methodology and related issues. The other workshop has a more unusual remit. The Tripoli meeting had identified the persistence of colonial concepts and paradigms in African education and in the wider society, at all levels, as constituting a major impediment to Africa's unity and renaissance. This second workshop (Workshop on the revision of concepts, paradigms and categorizations used in Social and Human Sciences and applied to Africa) will address that centrally important issue.

Among the stated objectives of the workshop are: *"to identify problematic concepts; determine ways and means of dealing with Euro-centric concepts; identify new "decolonial" concepts and categories; identify the educational implications of the decolonization of concepts and paradigms used in social sciences and applied to Africa."* The expected results of the workshop, are stated as follows: Defining a grid for the analysis and identification of problematic concepts; developing a strategy for dealing with problematic concepts and categories; defining a common stance on the conceptualization of African realities and on terminology used in African languages.

One cannot help but be struck by the similar nature of the problems and challenges which confront African integration and unity, as identified in the expert/preparatory meetings for the pedagogical project, and those that confront Caricom integration, as pointed out by a number of Caricom public figures and intellectuals. At the Caricom Summit Meeting (1-4 July 2011), St Vincent's Prime Minister, Ralph Gonsalves, declared that the international situation demanded greater, not lesser integration and deplored the tendency of Caricom member states to opt for the latter rather than the former: *"The very difficulties in the international political economy and their acute manifestations in our regional content ought to prompt greater, not lesser, integration. At the CARICOM level, we have missed opportunities since the financial and economic meltdown of September 2008, and continuing. Rather than strengthen our regional integration mechanisms, some CARICOM member-states have tended to opt for nationalist or even chauvinist solutions."*

<http://www.normangirvan.info/gonsalves-optimal-integration/>

Noting similar challenges that economic globalization pose to Africa, via the concept paper that emerged from the first of the three expert meetings, the experts reaffirmed the need for regional integration, which would enable Africa to cope better with those challenges. Underlining the fact that efforts to promote African integration have a long history, the experts inquired rhetorically: *"Why has this old pan-Africanist project, advocated by Marcus Garvey in 1924 and by Dubois, Lumumba, Padmore, Kenyatta and Nkrumah at the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester, not progressed as quickly as desired?"* ,

Observing that it would be hard to question the legitimacy and relevance of African integration as a political ambition, and still less the need for such integration if Africa is to develop in a world of great global economic blocs, two other rhetorical questions are posed in the concept paper, followed by an answer which leads to yet another question. *"Where, then, are the obstacles that must be overcome? And how can teaching the GHA contribute to their removal? The obstacle most often mentioned is undoubtedly the lack of political will. Can teaching the GHA carry the debate forward and heighten the awareness and determination of the African political leadership? Moreover, conflicts are tearing Africa apart rather than bringing it together. Can teaching the GHA not contribute to the elimination of the prejudice and ignorance that engender mistrust, incomprehension, intolerance and conflict between cultural groups, societies and countries in Africa by establishing the historical facts in collective memories and revealing the positive reciprocal influences between civilizations, societies, religions, cultures and languages in the historical development of the continent?"*

Similar questions have been posed in Caricom and similar conclusions arrived at. In the inaugural G. Arthur Brown Memorial Lecture of the Bank of Jamaica, Sir Shridath Ramphal identified a similar lack of political will on the part of Caricom leaders. He pointed to *"the failure of Caribbean leaders to rise to the regional challenge, fixated as they are with retaining the vestiges of 'local control'—a hangover from the colonial era. Nearly 50 years ago, Philip Sherlock, writing in Foreign Affairs (1963) in the aftermath of the federal debacle warned that: Division is the heritage of the Caribbean....But history, not geography, he wrote, supplies the chief answer, for even those islands that lie within easy reach of each other turn their faces toward Europe and their backs on their neighbours."*

To underline Philip Sherlock's point that geography is not the obstacle to regional integration, Sir Shridath quoted the following passage from the account that Père Labat, a French Dominican monk, wrote in 1722 of his travels among the Caribbean islands:

"I have travelled everywhere in your sea of the Caribbean from Haiti to Barbados, to Martinique and Guadeloupe, and I know what i am speaking about... You are all together, in the same boat, sailing on the same uncertain sea... citizenship and race unimportant, feeble little labels compared to the message that my spirit brings to me: that of the predicament which History has imposed upon you. I saw it first with the dance... the meringue in Haiti, the beguine in Martinique and today I hear, de mon oreille morte, the echoes of calypsos from Trinidad, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Antigua, Dominica, and the legendary Guiana... It is no accident that the sea which separates your lands makes no difference to the rhythm of your bodies."

Sir Shridath cited Professor Gordon Lewis' view that the rhythm, which evidently enchanted Père Labat, was the rhythm of history - a rhythm that held all the Caribbean islands together in a common destiny. Similarly, the Tripoli meeting identified an underlying unity in Africa's geographical separateness and diversity which, like the rhythm of Caribbean bodies in Père Labat's conception, hold the continent together in a common destiny: *"It is important to stress the point that while African states were different, they had a number of things in common: affinity in language groups, cosmologies, and art forms. Population movements transcended ethnic boundaries, necessitated by factors such as nomadism, state expansion, drought and pestilence. Such movements, cooperation and integration were possible because the infrastructure existed, for example, routes, rivers and pack animals, and the states created no human barriers to communication. So extensive was the interaction pattern that international trade such as that across the Sahara developed to connect West Africa to the North and the wider world."*

General History of the Caribbean



This six-volume UNESCO History of the Caribbean attempts to integrate the historical experience of its peoples and societies from the earliest times to the present. The region it surveys includes the coasts lapped by the Caribbean Sea wherever a historical explanation of activities of the societies in the islands compel an extension of the boundary to the south or west.

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dialogue/general-and-regional-histories/generalhistoryofthecaribbean2/>

Like Philip Sherlock in his 1963 article, the authors of the concept paper noted a similar trend for African countries to turn their backs on their neighbours, not by looking towards Europe, as Caribbean countries were accused of doing, but by turning inwards: *"a worrying trend has emerged in recent years as curricula developers in some countries have been moving towards the "nationalization" of history, overlooking the common roots and interactions of the different African cultures and civilizations."*

Again, like Philip Sherlock, the authors of the pedagogical project's concept paper consider that *"history, not geography supplies the chief answer"* to the problem of regional integration and political unity: *"The premise underlying the project, namely that knowledge of the history of Africa can contribute significantly to the establishment of pan-Africanism and African integration on the basis of shared and enduring political, social, cultural and ideological foundations and values, cannot be ignored."* An impressive list of constitutional milestones were cited in the concept paper, as marking Africa progress towards regional integration over the past decade: **The Constitutive Act of the African Union (2000); the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2001, the Vision for African Union and Commissions for the African Union (2004); the 2004-2007 Strategic Framework of the African Union; and the Charter for African Renaissance (2006).**

Nonetheless, the experts considered progress to be more apparent than real, the remedy for which, they suggested, is history: *"Is the absence of broadly based political, social and cultural support for the construction of African unity not reflected in the lack of urgency among political leaders? Can teaching of the GHA help to raise among the peoples of Africa, the ones primarily concerned in this regard, awareness of a shared history and heritage, a pan-African consciousness, a feeling of common belonging, in short an African identity underpinning determination to work in solidarity towards a common destiny?"*

A similar lack of urgency on the part Caricom political leaders has been identified as constituting a major obstacle to Caribbean regional integration. The organizers of a public forum held at UWI, St. Augustine (June 30th, 2011) on the subject of The Future of Caribbean Regional Integration sent the following communiqué to the July 2011 Caricom Summit Meeting: *"Participants at the forum reaffirmed that the people of the Caribbean view integration as crucial for the region's survival and development; yet there is a strong sense that the process of integration is in decline and is in need of renewed leadership. We are taking this opportunity to call on the leaders of CARICOM to re- invigorate and re-energize the integration process by taking account of the deeply felt desire for a renewed leadership."* <http://www.normangirvan.info/message-to-the-caricom-summit-cmce/>

The authors of the concept paper drew attention to the colonial residue in African educational systems: *"Most education systems in Africa are a legacy of colonization, which implemented policies designed to "tame" and "assimilate" indigenous peoples and bring them into "partnership....Although one of the goals initially set for the GHA was to use it for the production of school textbooks, children's books, and radio and television programmes, it is not yet sufficiently exploited. In the vast majority of African countries few history textbooks actually correspond to the political commitment of the African states and a certain Euro-centrism still prevails."*

A similar Euro-centrism was noted in the school textbooks of at least one Caricom country. In a courageous public address delivered in 2009, Reggie Dumas drew attention to such a residue, underlining its negative impact on national unity: *"At bottom, our education system has not confronted our diversity and sought to make it a core element of mutual comprehension in the society. To the contrary, we persist in the old ways. For example, the First and Second Primers of Nelson's West Indian Readers, which I used in colonial Trinidad and Tobago nearly 70 years ago at the Chaguanas Government School, are still around in 2009. In republican Trinidad and Tobago, only a few years short of our 50th birthday, "q" still stands for "queen". And in this multiracial country, every child shown in the First Primer's illustrations, every single one, is not only white but blond. Tell me, is this the way to build national unity?"* (The Tarnished Quality of Governance in Trinidad and Tobago, <http://www.normangirvan.info/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/dumas-the-tarnished-quality-of-governance.pdf>)

Like Philip Sherlock, the authors of the concept paper suggest that history supplies the answer to the problem of residual Euro-centrism in school texts and, also, to the lack of

correlation with the political commitment of African states. *"With particular regard to the priority given under the project to investing in primary school children and young people in secondary education, might now not be the time to open up a long-term but more ambitious prospect for these rising generations: teaching the GHA as part of the development of strong civic awareness and active African citizenship, as the bases of the future United States of Africa?"*

Finally, the concept paper identified the following stakeholders who must emerge *"to take up this [regional integration] project and carry it to a successful conclusion."*

- a State political leadership that is deeply committed to dialogue, cooperation and solidarity among African countries;
- a large, active grass-roots base that is committed to the goals of integration (parliamentarians, political parties, economic agents, civil society organizations);
- citizens who are aware of their role as stakeholders and beneficiaries of integration;
- young people who are inspired to act as standard-bearers for the ideals of a renewed pan-Africanism;
- peoples that are determined to achieve effective unity and solidarity.

The list of stakeholders who will need to emerge for the Caribbean Regional Integration Project to be carried to a successful conclusion is exactly the same as those identified for the African regional project. Indeed, if the term "pan-Africanism" is replaced by an appropriate Caribbean one, advocates of Caribbean regional integration would easily be persuaded that the list was drawn up in the Caricom region. With such striking similarities between the analysis made by African experts and political authorities, on the one hand, and that of Caribbean experts and political authorities, on the other, of the problems and the obstacles that prevent regional integration, might not the answer to those problems, as identified by Africans, namely, their history, be the answer for Caricom's regional integration problems?

Related documents

Unesco has also completed a six-volume **General History of the Caribbean**

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dialogue/general-and-regional-histories/generalhistoryofthecaribbean2/>

Pedagogical Use of the General History of Africa

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dialogue/general-and-regional-histories/general-history-of-africa/pedagogical-use-of-the-general-history-of-africa/#c224451>

General History of Africa - Online version

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dialogue/general-and-regional-histories/general-history-of-africa/volumes/#c181073>