

**LANGUAGE  
AND ITS EFFECT IN CONSOLIDATING  
AFRICAN UNITY (1)**

*By*

**Dr. MOHAMMED ABDUL GHANY SAUDI,**  
*Professor of Political and Economic Geography*

**and**

*Head of Geography Department  
Institute of African Researches and Studies,  
Cairo University*

**LANGUAGE  
AND  
THE MEANS OF CONTACT AND SELF-EXPRESSION**

Scholars find that the unity of language is one of the important elements of national unity, and it is the greatest factor that inculcates in human beings the will to organise into a single nation. If Man is distinguished from other animals in that he is civilised (social) and has the power of speech (a thinking being), so peoples are distinguished from one another in that language is the strongest normal link between individuals because it is the medium of understanding and the means of transferring the cultural heritage of the ancestors to the following generations. Whenever individuals understand each other in one language, their way of thinking becomes closer and there grows in them a feeling of sympathy; the like of which rarely springs up in individuals speaking different languages. And such a sympathy has been a great factor in driving those who speak a common language to constitute a single nation. Hence did the language of nation become the main target of the Colonialists. The Colonising States do their utmost to uproot the national language so as to spread their own languages and broadcast their culture because of the great impact that this process has in eliminating the national spirit, and in creating a feeling of satisfaction for the activities of the Colonisers. Very often has the difference in language and culture been the cause of revolutions and secession movements in Ancient as well as in Modern history.

---

This paper is submitted, to the All African Teacher's Organization (AATO) held in Cairo in December 1975.

In Belgium, for example, the linguistic split into Flemish and Walloon at some time threatened the unity of the State, because the Latin Walloon turned in sympathy towards France whilst the German Fleming looked towards Germany. The Walloon element got the upper hand immediately after the independence and the Flemings had to strive for equality with them. The two parties finally reached an equal footing, and so the bitter feeling that each group used to bear against the other was lessened.

The German minority in Alsace and Lorraine seems interesting in a way; and, on the other hand, offers a vivid example of the influence of language on the process of integration and unity. The Alsace and Lorraine region in France is near the German borders and is reputed for its Potassium, because of its being adjacent to Germany, the Germans and the French always used to exchange it in accordance with the balance of power between them. The exchange of the region continued for about four times since the year 1870, and in virtue of the Frankfurt pact of 1871, Germany annexed the region to its territory, to weaken France's defensive power and have access to Lausanne's iron. This was one of the surces of Germany's military power before World War I. The French were not pleased with this situation because they found a generation of Germans multiplying in a region they considered as part of their territories; but they could not do anything till they annexed it after World War I. Germany took it back after invading France in 1940, but when Germany came out vanquished in World War II, the region was annexed to France.

But what did France do with this German minority in the region to integrate them among the French people. The main thought turned to the language; eliminating the German language or decreasing it would, in due course of time, lessen the allegiance of these inhabitants to Germany so the plan was to allow the child who goes to school to learn the French language for the first three years, without being taught German, the mother tongue, during that period. After that, he learns French besides German, till he becomes perfectly fluent in French. When some of the population protested against this as an interference in the freedom of the language, the French logic argued that so long as Alsace and Lorraine were part of France, so it was in the interest of the sons of the region to be versed in French besides German because they would work in France.

The state very often acknowledges that minorities may have the freedom to use their languages and teache them in their schools not through anxiety to encourage such languages, but rather through fear of the demand for secession from the mother state if the exercise of such a right was denied. Hence, Britain recongnised the languages of Scotland and Wales, and France recongnised that of the Bretons.

But at other times the State does not grant linguistic freedom to the minorities through fear lest this might be a helping factor to encourage secession and thus weaken the nation's entity. We have, for example, the Austrian minority in Tyrol estimated at about 300,000 inhabitants to whom Italy denied linguistic freedom and, instead, changed the names of the Streets and compelled them to use the Italian language in the Schools and the Churches.

But why should we go that far if we have before us the attempts of France to «frenchify» the Arab States of Morocco generally and Algeria, specifically, were it not for the strength and resistance of the Arabic language. We, similarly, have in front of us the exploitation of the linguistic splitting in the other parts of the Continent and the imposition of every Colonizing State's language upon the peoples.

I have deliberately quoted two examples from Europe to know how Europeans deal with each other as regards the question of the language, and to know what they were aiming at in Africa. Language is not merely a means or an instrument for translating one's thought or for communicating it; it is indeed a confirmation of our main nationalities. Are we Europeans or Americans or Asians or Africans ?

### **The Multiplicity of African Languages**

When Uganda achieved its independence, Uganda's Radio was broadcasting in six languages, namely, in English, Luganda, Runyoro, Rutoro, Ateso and Lwo.

In March 1967, when the former President of Uganda was opening the symposium on «Mass Communications Media in East Africa», he said, in his opening address, that ten other languages were added to the previous languages in which Radio Uganda would broadcast; later, various other languages were added in September 1969 till the number reached 19 languages !!! These languages were English, Luganda, Lusoga, Lunyole, Lusamaba, Sobci, Runyoro, Rutoro, Runyan Kore, Rukiga, Lwo, Ateso, Karamojong, Madi, Kakwa, Lugbara, Alur, Comani and Hindustani.

In 1971, President Obote announced that the 14 languages in which broadcasting was made at that time were not completely essential, yet he added :

«and in spite of this, because of my being in a position of power and authority, I have to take into consideration the political feelings of the population, and to take this into account in planning the policy of the state».

All this mixture of languages is in an area of about 3/4 million square kms with a population of about 10 million inhabitants. So, what about the whole Continent with an area exceeding Uganda's surface by about 90 times and containing 37 times the number of people in Uganda ? you can, no doubt, imagine the magnitude and gravity of the problem.

Each of the two writers R. Bascom and Merville Herskovits have pointed to this fact in their book when they state «Continuity and change in African Cultures, Chicago, 1959» when they may :

«From the language point of view Africa is considered as one of the most complex areas in the world. It is perhaps unrivalled except by the inhabitants of South America. The number of languages in Africa is generally estimated at 300, though this estimate is, without doubt, less than the real fact.»<sup>(1)</sup>

Most writers hold that language is not only a fundamental aspect of nationalism, but it is also its accurate yardstick and criterion. So, where does the African states fall in this standard measure ? And what would you find if we shift from state to the Continent itself ? We have to conclude, unfortunately, that language might be the weakest point in the building of nationhood in the major part of the Continent because it comprises an innumerable number of languages and dialects. If some estimates reach the figure of 800, others nearly reach a thousand.

If we relate this to number of people on the Continent, the average power of one language in Africa would not exceed one third of a million, if not less, and this in itself is enough to be a hindrance to unity and harmony. Though there, fortunately, exist widely-spread and forceful languages like the Arabic language, yet there are of necessity certain languages which unfortunately, are far less than this theoretical average.

### SOUTHERN AFRICA

The inhabitants of Africa, South of the Equator, speak one or another of the 350 languages spread there and known as «Bantu». This group forms one «Language family», all similar to each other in vocabulary and grammar. It seems as if all of them are originally derived from a common language prior

---

(1) In linguistic studies related to Africa, we have to remember the following :

- a. That experts on these languages have not been agreed upon the differentiation between what is considered «language» and what is considered «dialect» derived from some language.
- b. This leads to the inability of carrying out an accurate survey of these languages. This appears in the differences in the estimation of the number of languages, which shows the extent of mixing and confusion prevailing in the study of African languages.

to all of them and known as «Proto-Bantu». The word «Bantu» itself in this language means «people». Among the most famous Bantu languages, we have «Lingala» which is the main language in Zaire now; and Zaire has started considering it as the Official language. It is the vernacular of several millions. Originally, it was the language of the inhabitants of Central Zaire; it spread throughout the Country after the Belgians enrolled a large number of the native in the Army and they spread over the land with their language.

Among the Bantu languages, we also have «Ngoni» in the South-East of the Republic of South Africa. It comprises the group of Zulu, Xhosa and Swazi languages. There is also the «Bemba» language, which is spoken by a large number of Zambians in West Africa. The languages are numerous among the most widely spread is «Yoruba», the language of the inhabitants of South-Western Nigeria and spoken by around 15 millions; then there is the «Ibo» language, spoken by about 9 millions in south-east Nigeria. There is the «Mande» and its different dialects from «Bambara» and «Dyula» known in Guinea and the surrounding area, to «Wolof» in Senegal, and «Fulani» which spreads from Senegal to northern Nigeria. But the most widely spread language which has become the «Lingua Franca» in west Africa is the «Hausa».

As regards East Africa, there are various languages like Ankoli, Sukuma, Bemba and Tonga, though «Swahili» is the «Lingua Franca» there.

If we review the language distribution in a different way, the linguistic distribution and divisions will become more apparent to us. In Zaire, for example, there are 4 main languages in addition to more than 40 subsidiary languages. In Nigeria, there are three main languages besides 4 minor ones. In Tanzania, there are over 100 languages and dialects spread among 12 million inhabitants; and Liberia, there are 20 national languages for 1 millions. Thus, there is not a single State in Africa, with the possible exception of Somalia, which is linguistically united.

But a very important point crops up here. The multiplicity and splitting of languages has been greatly magnified, and the objective truth is that a great number of what has (inaccurately come to be called «language» is merely a «dialect». Only human and geographical isolation did render the tongues far apart; and because of that, the number of languages might appear less than this by far. This can be attested by the quick spread of the «lingua franca» in vast areas, and such spread is due to nothing but the similarity of the dialects in these regions.

All these languages are characterised by the fact that they are not written, with very limited exceptions; and they abound in tales and narratives. It is an established fact in Africa that oral agreements between individuals, for example, have the force of written pacts in other civilised societies and because of that a great part of the heritage depends on transmission from generation to generation because it is unrecorded. The responsibility of this work falls on a limited number of persons in the tribe. They are, usually, the aged ones; and among the «Mandeng», for example, they are known as «Griots». The previous heritage being thus unrecorded, the great danger now becomes very evident in cotemporary Africa, where events are, on the one hand, moving very fast and, on the other hand, the aged ones are passing away. As Gilbert Vielliard, the historian and social scientist at the French Institute for Black Africa, has put it: «When an aged person in Africa dies, this means the burning of a whole library».

Despite their being mostly unwritten, the African languages are rich in legends and stories, full of proverbs and wise sayings which are used in everyday speech<sup>(2)</sup>.

The people reserve a special respect for those wise men who preserve the proverbs and maxims and use them at the appropriate time. As regards the tales and legends, they are usually narrated in moonlet nights, as it happens among the Ibos in south-eastern Nigeria, the heroes of the story being mostly the clever tortoise and its enemy the panther.

These languages are, moreover, rich in poetry, which is recited on various occasions, the most important of which are social function like marriages, births and burials. Usually, the recitation of poetry is accompanied by dancing music appropriate to each ceremony.

In spite of their being unwritten, these languages are, however, rich in vocabulary. In the Ibo language, for example, in eastern Nigeria, there are four Verbs meaning «to eat», the use of each depending on the type of the food; and there are 20 words denoting «walking» (of the human being).

---

(2) In Africa, there were written languages before the age of Colonialism. Most of them were recorded in Arabic Alphabet, like the language of the Berber tribes, Fulani and Hausa in western Africa and Swahili in its eastern regions. The Missionaries began internationalising those languages, which used to be recorded in Arabic Alphabet, by re-writing them in Latin Alphabet and extracting from them some Arabic words which had crept in these languages, in the hope of eliminating the indicators of Arab culture in Africa. Westerman has taken this process of writing in Arabic Alphabet as a proof of the latent intelligence and intellectual ability of the native peoples in Africa.

## THE «LINGUA FRANCA»

### A. Swahili :

It is one of the main twelve languages of the world, or one of the «million» languages (that is, used by a million persons). The word «Swahili» is derived from the Arabic word «Sawahili» plural of «sahel», here meaning the inhabitants of the «sawahel» (the coasts), implying the eastern coasts of Africa. The word is generally used for the inhabitants of these coasts and they are a mixture of Africans, Arabs and Iranians. This is due to the location of this part overlooking the Indian Ocean and lying opposite the southern coast of the Arab Peninsula and the Arab Gulf; and it is consequently due to the activity resulting from the contacts between the two sides, helped by the geographical factors in that area of the Indian Ocean. Swahili was thus one of the African Bantu languages, but it borrowed many words from other languages, the most important being Arabic and Persian. Its importance as an African language is due to the fact that it is the most important of the languages of East Africa; it is spoken by more than one million as a mother tongue, in addition to more than 12 million others who speak it as a second language beside their vernacular. Its importance increased after the independence era when it became the official (State) language of Tanzania and Kenya. Its geographical distribution extends to include Rwanda, Burundi and even eastern Zaire. On the coast, it extends from southern Somalia to northern Mozambique. It may also be added that it is understood in the ports of the southern part of the Red Sea along the coast of the Arab Peninsula and Oman. Because of this wide expansion, Swahili was the language that the Governments of Kenya and Tanzania agreed to take as Official national language after the departure of the British. It is used as the teaching medium in all the schools of Tanzania and it has its curriculum in the Universities of Kenya and Uganda.

It seems that Swahili, with the patterns and dialects that we know to-day, started coming into being since the 13th. century A.D. It afterwards took about two centuries to become the main medium of understanding in this vast expanse of the Continent.

Swahili is a language rich in vocabulary; it contained poetry ever since the beginning of the 18th. century. Arabic Alphabet was used to write it in the first place, though to-day Latin Alphabet is used. It is particularly famous for poetry or religious odes known as «tenzi». Some of the religious odes contain hundreds of verses. As for political poetry, known as «Mashiri», it is used in debates and discussions. Among the most popular «Mashiri» poets, is the national poet Muyaka bin Haj. al Ghassainy (1776-1840). Among the more recent poets and writers, we have Shaaban Robert who writes on self-behaviour and children's stories. We also have Sheikh Kaluta Amri Abedi.

In our contemporary history, let us remember those writers who are considered hall marks in the Swahili literature, like Ahmed Nasser who won the Kenyatta Award for literature in 1972; and Ibrahim Hussein who has written many plays. Nor should we forget President Nyerere who has translated some of Shakespeare's plays into Swahili.

Before I end my speech, I have to illustrate by examples the words which entered the Bantu other languages, specially the Arabic, and constituted the Swahili language.

### EXAMPLES

Arabic (Transliteration)	Meaning	Swahili
Adui	My Enemy	Adui
Al-fagr	The dawn	Alfagiri
Asal	Honey	Asali
Boustani	Gardener	Boustani
Amma	But	Ama
As-subh	The morning	Asubuhi
Alf	Thousand	Elfu
Baad	After	Baadi
Bidoun — Bila	Without	Bila
Daqqa	Minute	Dakika
Faida	Use	Faida
Ghali	Expensive	Ghali
Haqqa	Truth	Hakika
Jaraba	Try	Jaribu
Qabaly	Tribal	Kablaya
Qalam	Pen	Kalamu
Inglizi	English	Kingereza
Layyin	Soft	Laini
Lugha	Language	Lugha
(Rehla) Safar	Journey	Safari
(Al-Akhlak) Adab	Manners	Adabu
Sahha — Afya	Health	Afya
Arbain	Forty	Arobini
Ballur	Glass	Baluri
Dawa	Medicinal drug	Dawa
Al-dhuhr	Noon (mid-day)	Adhuri
Askari	Solder	Askari
Baad	After	Baada
Batta	Duck	Bata



Arabic (Transliteration)	Meaning	Swahili
Shai	Tea	Chai
Ehda-ashr	Eleven	Edashra
Fāras	Horse	Farasi
Haddouta	Story	Hadithi
Jaa	Come	Ja
Jumaa	Friday	Juma
Qahwa	Coffee	Kahōwa
Qitaa	Piece	Kata
Kitab	Book	Kitabu
Lazim	Necessary	Lazima
Maana	Meaning	Maana

### B.Hausa :

Etymologically, Hausa is the name of a language before becoming the name for a specific tribe or group. After that, it became an appellation for most of the inhabitants of northern Nigeria and what surrounds it of the Niger. yet, the wide diffusion of the Hausa language in West Africa cannot be understood without understanding the nature of the Houses themselves. They live on agriculture, depending on rain, in the first place. As there used to be long dry seasons, many of them used to turn to trade during that period. Because of this, they travelled long distances till they reached the coasts of West Africa. So you find them in Ghana as well as in Dahomey (now Benin) and Ivory Coast and elsewhere, living as private groups in areas specially reserved for them (Sabongari) in Ibadan, southern Nigeria. In trade, they have specialised in some specific commodities, like fruits, cola and cattle trade. In this way, their language spread with them wherever they went.

Their language is among the most important of the languages in West Africa as a whole. It is the mother tongue of between 15-20 million, in addition to another 10 millions who are not Hausas but yet speak the language the status of Official language in the northern region of Nigeria.

The Hausa language is rich in unwritten heritage... the memorised heritage. There are various stories of animals and legends which offer us an explanation of many historical events. The written Hausa started two centuries ago, using the Arabic Alphabet and was known as «Ajami», according to Haj Abu Bakr Imam's writings and sayings. It is distinguished from the Hausa written in Latin Alphabet and is used by some modern writers. It is known as «Boko». The Hausa language contains poetry, called «Waka», a word also used denote songs. It is customary to sing in poetry; this is one

of the Hausa's traditions. The types of poetry vary from eulogistic poetry (Yabu) i.e. praise to him who gives liberally; to comic poetry (Zambo) or other types related to hunting, agriculture or even politics.

The one who recites poetry uses some musical instruments which accompany songs, like the drum and the violin. The cultural influence of Arabic and Islam on the Hausas and their language is, indeed, very great. This is particularly reflected in the language, because Arabic is the language of the Koran and of Islam, which is the religion of all the Hausas. This is evident in some words like :

<b>Arabic</b>		
<b>Transliteration</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Hausa</b>
Al-aada	Custom	Alada
Al-khamis	Thursday	Alhamis
Al-tajer	Merchant	Altajiri
Alif	A (the alphabet)	Alif
(Khamsoon) Khamisin	Fifty	Hamsin
In Sha Allah	} By the Grace of God	In Sha Alla
.Sub		Pour
Al-adl — Adala	Justice	Adali
Alama	Sign	Alama
Allah	God	Alla
Al-bashir	Missionary	Albashiri
Arbain	Forty	Arbain
Khosara	Loss	Hosara
Jumaa	Friday	Jumaa

### NORTHERN AFRICA

The situation is different in northern Africa. Here, we find Arabic as the most widely spread language on the Continent as a whole, covering almost the whole of northern Africa, a huge expanse from the Great Sahara to the Savanna, thus reaching the banks of the Niger and the Senegal rivers. It is spoken by nearly one hundred million persons, or about a third of the inhabitants of the Continent, spread over one third of its area, while the remaining languages, already referred to, are spread over the other two-thirds. From this starting point, we do not find a national language for every political unit; a common linguistic blanket, however, covers this area. Arabic is one of the Semitic languages which spread in the Arab peninsula and that side which lies opposite to Africa. The Amharic and the Tagrini in Ethiopia are of the Semitic group; and it seems that the Ancient Egyptian

language was, in its turn, tinged with the Semitic colour since very ancient times, as a result of ancient migrations and inter-marriages. So, it can be said that Africa used to know the Semitic languages, Arabic included, before Islam to the Continent. It goes without saying, then, that this unity of language has been the nucleus of the idea of Arab unity. Its diffusion goes back to the spread of the Arab and of Islam over the Continent, because Arabic is also the language of Islam. Thus, we find the Muslims who do not speak Arabic, repeating the Koran in Arabic during their prayer. As a rule, they know Arabic besides their vernacular as is the case among the Biga tribes in Eastern Sudan, Northern Ethiopia and among the Berbers of Algeria and Morocco.

It is the principal language in Somalia where the children learn it besides the Somali language in schools. Similar is the case in Mauritania where it is learnt besides French. If the Arab part of Africa is a homogeneous linguistic entity, this does not mean that it is completely devoid of linguistic minorities. Such minorities, however, are insignificant in number and are marginal in distribution; they are found along the border or on the islands, withdrawing in front of Arabic, as is the case with the Berber language which sometimes appears in the desert oases, or on the islands Garba in Tunisia or on the tops of the heights, as on the Auras mountains and among the tribes. In Tunisia, 1% of the total population speak the Berber language; in Algeria, the proportion reaches 15%, going up to 20% in Morocco, besides 14% who speak both Arabic and Berber. Apart from the Berber, there exist along the vast Moroccan border other linguistic minorities like the Touaregs, (the Tefnagh language) some few hundreds of thousands along the border of Algeria and southern Libya. There are also some Tabbo groups who live along the border of southern Libya and the Nilotic groups in southern Sudan.

Colonialism has played a dangerous role in hindering the spread of Arabic, as it happened in southern Sudan when the Colonialists prevented Arab migration and trade activity towards the South. They thus constituted a barrier in front of the spread of Arabic to pave the way for their scheme of division, being given that language is one of the basic pillars of nationhood. They sometimes advised that Arabic is not fitting as a scientific language; the language of Science and Culture, according to them, is the European languages; because the Arabic words — so they say — will never be of any help. Consequently, if the non-Arabic speaking African States wanted an Official language, the Colonialists hold that it would be best for them to go back to the European languages. But we would like to ask ourselves : From where does the modern European culture take its original root and

support which led to its growth and development till it has reached its present standard ? How did the West know about the Greek thought and the civilisation of India and Persia ? These were transmitted to them only through Arabic; and the Arabs were not merely transmitters of civilisation, they also made many contributions. If, in passing, you consider Algebra; it is enough to know that it is named after Khawarizmy; it is also enough to refer to Hassan Ibn Al-Haythem in Physics and to Gaber Ibn Hayyan in Chemistry, among so many others. Thus is quashed the allegation that Arabic cannot be a scientific language.

Arabic has been even influenced the European languages. The word "Algebra", for example, is «Al-Gabr» in Arabic; but it goes beyond this to some Proper Nouns, like «Andrew» which is «Idris» in Arabic; 'Joseph', is 'Youssef'; 'Jacob', is 'Yaaqub', which, in turn, has undergone alterations to become «Yakubu» in the Hausa language. We have previously spoken about how some African languages have been affected by Arabic. Now, in order to close our talk about Arabic, let us borrow what one of the most consistent scholars on African Linguistic Studies, Joseph Greenberg, has said in his book («Africa as a Linguistic Area» in W. Bascom, Dr. Herskovits, p. 25) about the effect of each of Arabic and the European languages on the languages of Africa, South of Sahara.

The Islamic influence continued to play its part without break for a long time till it tinged to great extent the trend of culture of the negroes in the whole of Sudan (Negoland) and in many parts of East Africa extending to other parts, South of these regions. This has been reflected in many words borrowed from Arabic, even among non-Muslims. The question now is, how does European influence get reflected on the language, as Europeans have been in touch with Africans in the last centuries ? Most probably, a minor influence compared to the influence of Arabic.»

Gentlemen, we should not forget that Arabic enjoys a combination of the world, namely, what is considered «national» language, and what is considered «cultural» language.

The first category applies to languages of specific peoples, like the Swedish or the Norwegian or the Rumanian language. Most languages of the world belong to this class. The second category is characterised by the abundance of human knowledge recorded in it a factor that attracts others to study it. And Arabic forms parts of this category, too.

**BACK TO AFRICANISM, AFRICAN SOLIDARITY**  
**and**  
**THE NECESSITY OF LINGUISTIC UNIFICATION**

The greatest common denominator among the African Countries is that they have been through the stage of liberation, they have tried independence, and they have succeeded in repelling imperialism. They have strived to writers that the basis of the African Nationalist Movement is spirit of reaction and self-consciousness against White Imperialism. This view is shared eradicate it to such an extent that there is now a general agreement among by African as well as foreign writers. The African Leader, Sithole, in his book «African Nationalism, Capetown 1959» says that «Africa is indebted for its national or pan-national spirit to the European Colonialist who has roused the feelings of the Africans and created the spirit of self-consciousness among them after welding together the scattered tribes with a common objective. In fact, the mere existence of the European was the first outburst of African Nationalism and, as a general rule, self or group-consciousness does not crop of seriously except when the group suddenly finds itself face to face with a foreign, totally different from itself. The early resistance that the history of the Continent has recorded of some tribes or tribal groups are, indeed, the first seeds of Nationalism here, like the resistance of the Dahomey tribes in the nineties and in Rhodesia, also in the nineties, under the leadership of the Mitabele.

This is no shame, anyhow. As the British Geographer, Sir Halford Mackinder, has said in «The Geographical Pivot of History» London, 1951 :

«Medieval Europe did not shift from the stage of tribes to that of nations, nor were the feelings of nationhood and self-consciousness created except after the three external dangers that hit the European Peninsula, namely, the Tartars from the East, the Vikings from West and the Arabs from the South».(8)

Thus has North Africa been one of the factors which had the credit of creating the European Nationalism.

If the European presence has disappeared, politically at least there no longer exists any White Sttler centring around a White Administration, constituting a gross challenge o he African, so wha next ?

The American Geographer, J. Kimble, says in «Tropical African, Vol. II, New York, 1962» :

«Hostility ot Imperialism does not, in itself, represent a basis for building a National State. The establishment of such a State rather eliminates out frothwith the basis upon which it has been built»

What the African States were striving for, before Liberation, was «restoration of political, economic and cultural consideration». If the political consideration has been won, the restoration of economic and cultural consideration is not less important. In other words, the cleansing of the European tinge and the return to the original colour, the re-assertion of the African character and personality that is, the re-Africanisation of Africa!!!

Perhaps the most distinguishing features in the efforts for re-Africanisation, from the cultural point of view, lie in researches in the National History and the re-writing of African History by Africans. At the International Scientific Committee formed in 1971 under the auspices of the UNESCO, it was agreed to compile eight volumes on the General History of Africa. African Historians constituted two-thirds of the 30-Member Committee. The Committee also chose eight African Scholars and Historians to write the Volumes, so that they can look at this History from within. In other words, this History will, to a History from within. In other words, this History will, to a great extent, be an expression of the African Scholars' assessment of their Culture and in this way one can discover the true face of Africa. In the same way, the re-assertion of the African Personality has been manifested in the suppression of the Colour-complex, taking so much pride and enjoyment in it that the forthcoming «African Festival of Arts and Culture», has been called the «World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture». This is, indeed, a confirmation of the fact that there is nothing that can bring shame to the Black Colour. To this re-Africanisation process, we can add the question of eliminating the Coloniser's language and the quest for an African language or languages.

The Continent used to look more to the exterior than to the interior in matters of politics, economy and culture. The Coloniser used a direct the African to serve his own Colonial interest, isolating him from the external world, which, to the colonised African, was but the so-called «motherland», although she was but an illegitimate mother! In fact, the development of the Continent has taken an opposite direction in History. Most of the Continental States have started first with good neighbourly relationships among each other, then, after reaching some cohesion, they have moved to a more expansive stage. This is exactly opposite to what the African Political Units are doing. They are giving their backs to each other and turning their face towards Britain, France, Spain, Belgium or Portugal, etc...

If this has been true politically and economically, it has been much more so and more effective, culturally, and, in particular, linguistically. It has been seen that when a Colonising State occupied any region, one of its first objectives used to be the spread of its language by making it the language

of the Colonial Administration of the new region, to obtain some Clerks and small Employees to assist the High Officials who, naturally, were recruited from among the foreigners. In this, the Coloniser used to depend upon the Evangelising Missions. Education in Angola, for example, which used to be catered for by the Missionaries, known as «Ensino de Adeptacao», used to offer an elementary 3-years Course in the Portuguese language. It is worthy of note that the Portuguese, used to divide the population of their Colonies into : Natives, «Indigna»; Portuguese, and a third group of Mixed Natives, known as «Assimilado». The latter were Natives who could become Portuguese Citizens after fulfilling certain conditions, one of them being, «knowledge of the Portuguese language».

The Coloniser's controlling power was such that he could impose his language as a compulsory subject. Let us take an example from the British Colonies. If a Student at the Secondary Level happened to fail in the English language, he was considered as having failed in general and he would not be entitled to have his Academic Certificate even though he could be outstanding in the remaining Subjects. All this is only meant to make him concentrate all his attention to the English language.

Thus did Africa become like a vast empty plane for the dissemination of European languages. We saw Portugal spreading her language in her former Colonies of Mozambique, Angola, Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe. Similarly did Spain impose her language upon the Saqia al-Hamra, Rio Mone and Fernando... We saw France and Belgium spreading French as the language of education and administration in Rwanda, Burundi, Congo (Zaire), Maurinania, Ivory Coast, Togo, Dahomey (Benin), Mali, Niger, Upper Volta, Cameroon, Senegal, Mauritius and Guinea. As for Britain, we find her spreading her tongue in Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Rhodesia, Malawi, Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho. Finally, we find Italy busy spreading her language in Somalia and trying to spread it in Libya where it has met with strong resistance from Arabic. (1)

The matter became so strange and contemptible that in a single region two European languages came into conflict, and this did not occur in a European territory, but on African soil... in South Africa. A conflict flared

---

(1) One has to be careful regarding the spread of European languages ? The fact of English or French being the Official language in an African Country, does not mean that all the inhabitants of that Country speak the language. Only the educated classes, who constitute an insignificant percentage of the population, do in fact speak it.

up between the Boer (Ancient Dutch) language, which has been called «Afrikaan», and the English language. The conflict ended by a compromise between the two and a recognition of both as Official languages while none of the Bantu languages, the tongues of the majority, has been given any care !!!

### THE CULTURAL DISPERSION

Gentlemen, we have thus found that the linguistic divisions affect not only the Continent's vernaculars but even the languages of the individual states also. In countries like Gambia, you find English spreading everywhere, but it is surrounded in the North and the South by Senegal, where French prevails; Anglophone Sierra Leone has francophone Guinea as her neighbour, Ghana borders Ivory Coast, and so on... Thus, have the foreign languages come to stimulate the linguistic carnivals, making every State turn her back to her neighbour, linguistically. The effect of this goes further than to affect the curriculum of the schools and the syllabus of the Universities. Some books are printed in London, whilst others are published in Paris or Brussels, and a third group comes from Lisbon and so on.

The student in Nigeria has come to know about William, the Conqueror and Queen Victoria; the student in the Ivory Coast knows about Louis XV or XVI and the French Revolution. But at the same time, both of them do not know, for example, that the oldest Civilisation not only in Africa but in the whole world, was an African civilisation... the ancient Egyptian civilisation. Nor do both of them know that investigations tend to show that, according to references, the first Man was found in some spot in eastern or northern Africa... As the African derives his information and culture through a specific language, this language has come to be only a window through which he can have a glimpse of the world. He did not make the window, but the person, who has made it and placed it in that particular location so that he can look at a specific scenery, is foreign to him and is a stranger in his home. So the window «has been placed» there for him; he is not the one who placed it there. Because of that, if he comes to know something, that knowledge is destroyed to serve specific aims, like charging the Arabs and nobody else in the world with the allegation of the slave-trade! As if this activity was not first known among the Africans themselves! As if it was unknown among the Greeks and the Romans!!! As if every European State in Modern History did not take part in it, from Portugal and Spain in the South, to France, Holland, Belgium and Britain, after which the trade went beyond the European States to the United States of America and Brazil (4)!!! It is here worthy to refer to what Greenberg has said in this respect. It is true



that the European languages, especially English and French, have been used as a medium for establishing wider contacts, but at the same time they have been, to some extent, barriers blocking understanding among the Africans themselves. So Africans who studied English acquired cultural values different from those who studied French...

- 
- 4) Africa and the world know slavery a long time ago. The States of Ancient Greece were the greatest classic example of the great number of slaves, to such an extent that scholars estimate the number of slaves in Ancient Greece to more than 60% of the population of the Greek Cities. The Roman State also legalised slavery. The slave-trade that the Arabs carried on Khartoum or Cairo or Baghdad or were Khartoum or Cairo or Baghdad or Basra. The slaves were used for domestic purposes or to act as body-guards. They were, thus, a symbol of opulence and so, none but Princes and the wealthy people could keep them. What is worthy of note is that the slaves were not from Africa only, but there were also White slaves from among the Seljuks, Turks and others. So, the Arab slave-trade was limited and did not affect the number of the population : nor did it annihilate whole tribes nor and it bring dissensions and decay to other tribes.

See R. Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement, London 1933.*  
and

Mohamed Riad — Kawthar Abdel Rassool : *The African Economy, Cairo 1962.*

«This trade did not reach its climax except the Europeans indulged in it. The huge demand for slaves in the Americas and the West Indies were like strong impulses to this trade. If the number of slaves they brought for work in Spain and Portugal before the 15th century were estimated at a few thousands, the numbers increased in the 16th century, and reached its climax in the 18th century, till the slave-trade was forbidden in the mid-19th century. The volume of such trade is approximate. An East African source estimates that in the beginning of the 19th century it was about 15,000 per year, then it grew to about 40,000 in the 3rd decade of that century. As for West Africa, losses from the European slave-trade in the four centuries referred to are estimated to vary between 30 and 40 millions and these comprise those slaves who reached the New World alive — in addition to those who died because of the difficulties of transport and because of diseases, besides those who were killed in Africa itself as result of raids and the man-hunting processes. It is difficult to know in an accurate way the share of every part of Africa in this trade, but it is most probable that two-thirds of the slaves came from the Gold Coast and Angola in equal proportions, though there were certain areas which became notorious for the provision of slaves, like the Congo in the 16-19th centuries. Despite the variation in the number of slaves from century to century, yet each of Britain and Portugal transported about a third of the consignments. Holland carried about 18%; France, about 12%; while the share of the U.S.A. was 5% Portugal controlled the trade in the 15th and 16th centuries; Holland, during  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the 17th century; and Britain, between 1672 and 1808. After that, the superiority passed over to the ships of the U.S.A., Brazil, Spain and France. In truth, there was no commodity in West Africa as profitable as slavery during the 17th and 18th centuries. Neither gold, nor ivory nor the spices could yield profits matching the gains from slavery. The urgent demand was among the factors that raised the price per head and further encouraged the African tribes to attack each other through the distribution of fire-arms to them. The other =

## THE EDUCATIONAL BLUNDER

Gentlemen, let us now consider the burden that used to fall on the shoulders of a child in a Country like Kenya. If he was learning the mother tongue at home, whether that was the Kikuyu or the Kamba language, he also had to learn the Swahili which was the «lingua franca» among the tribes. Thirdly, he had to study English also. This is, no doubt, a burden too heavy to bear in the early stage of learning.

The researches of Educationists throughout the world (in whether Europe or the Arab world, have proved the mistake in this system of education. Finally, let us quote from the Report of Professor Babs Fafunwa and his Colleague, Bliss, of Ife University, Nigeria, on «The Effect of Bi-lingualism on the Abstract and Concrete Thinking Ability of Yorouba Children (1967)» :

It has been found that the child who has acquired knowledge in the Yorouba language is better able to recall in the same language than if he were to recall in English. The two Scholars came out with another conclusion, that the child who completed his primary education during which he has been taught two languages, completes the stage without having acquired a reasonable competency in either of the two, as opposed to the child who restricts himself to a single language; because the child learns better in his own language. The inclusion of other languages at such an early stage removes the child from his environment, his family, his group and his community. Thus grows in the child (who has ended six years' primary education and has known the rudiments of a foreign language and has left school) a dislike for manual labour, like agriculture, fishing or weaving... In other words, the child is prepared to become Member of a specific Society through a strange language and a foreign culture.

---

= reason was also the fiery competition among the European traders ... British, French, Dutch, etc... Before the end of the 17th century, the Masters of ships used to offer five pounds per head; it increased to 17 pounds in 1712.

(See: *Saudi, Dr. Mohammed Abdul Ghany, «African Economy and International Trade : Cairo 1973, PP. 20-25;*

*Neumark, D. «Foreign Trade and Economic Development in Africa», Staford, 1964, PP. 51-54.*

*Hopkins, A.G., An Economic History of West Africa, London, 1973, PP. 87,112.*

This shameful trade used to receive the support of the great Statesmen of Europe. In England, for example, the Minister of Colonies, Lord Dartmouth (1675) opposed the anti-slavery movements.

It was said that the slave-trade is nothing but an economic necessity (one ship gains in single consignment a profit of £ 60,000). There were also admiral-like Admiral Rodney Wilson, who found in the slave-trade a training for the thousands enrolled in the British Navy, and, consequently, that was a stimulus for maintaining the glory of the British Fleet.

It has also been found that most of the parents, who do not know these foreign languages, lose interest in what their children are learning, even though the parents might be knowing much about their subjects of study; but the foreign language constitutes an obstacle in front of the participation, assistance and, consequently, co-operation between the home and the school in the educational process.

### ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE

An analysis of the export figures of the Yaoundé Convention Countries with the European Economic Community (EEC) shows the association of the francophone Countries with France from the economic side. Political independence thus did not bring in any change in their economic situation and in the direction of the bulk of their exports.

In truth, it was expected that after the Convention (between the Six and the Eighteen) that the relation between France and the francophone Countries would be weakened for more than one reason, among others :

- 1) That transactions with the markets of Germany, Italy, Belgium, Holland and Luxemburg would be on the same basis as the transactions with France.
- 2) Concessions granted to French exports to these Countries would not exceed concessions to other Countries.
- 3) The other five States were to enjoy exactly the same rights as France regarding the exports of Capital goods to the francophone Countries
- 4) These Countries would participate in offering tenders for development in the Associated Countries and there would be no preference to France.

But in actual practice, it appeared that the economic control of France was not much affected. Most exports continued to be directed towards France, the traditional market of these Countries. Even most of the agreements and Projects were being undertaken by France Organisations. T. Soper says :

Soper, T., *European Trade with Africa*, Aff., Vol. 67, No. 267, 1968, p. 146).

It is not difficult to explain this. It is due to the power of the French language, and the reliance as well as the fact of being accustomed to the French legislative and administrative procedures, besides other factors.

(See also :

**Saudi, Mohamed Abdul Ghany :** The African Export Markets, Magazine of the Egyptian Society for Political Economy and Legislation, . 345, July 1971;

**Saudi, Mohammed Abdul Ghany :** The Expanded European Market and its Politico-Economic Effects on Africa, The Egyptian Geographical Society Magazine, No. 6, 1973).

### **FOREIGN PROPAGANDA**

Gentlemen, going back to the African personality or African solidarity does not just require the discarding of the linguistic apparel made in Europe. It also necessitates chanting those foreign Names by which Streets and Institutions are called, like «Victoria Island», «King's College», «Queen Elizabeth Hall» in a University like Abadan University.

In Britain, one cannot find any Hall bearing the name of, for example, Nkrumah, Abdel Nassef, Senghor or Kenyatta. So, why are the foreign Names still existing in these Countries ? As if are the foreign Names still existing in these Countries ? As if the Africa States have become sterile and have no distinguished sons, worthy enough so that buildings and institutions could be called after their Names.

### **SHORTAGE OF TECHNICAL AND MATERIAL ENERGY IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

The African States have their economic problems that make them unable to teach every child in his mother tongue, and we have seen how numerous and varied these mother tongues are. Nor do the States have the economic and technical means to develop this diversity of languages so that they may become a medium of teaching in the various academic subjects. It is evident, then that one has to choose one or two African languages and improve them so that they can replace foreign languages — English, French and others — as the medium of teaching in the African schools. But this is not practical. A better, South of the Sahara into blocs-eastern, western, and central. A language could be chosen in each bloc and considered as the language of teaching at all levels.

And the African language that would serve the whole Continent, or a major part of it, will have a big chance of becoming an international language; but this, undoubtedly, need longterm planning.

At the same time, however, this does not go against the study of foreign languages in our Institutes. Africa would not be inferior to China

or Sweden if she wanted some of her sons to become well-versed in one of the foreign languages. So, the State has to offer them the necessary facilities. But the preference of some African to become «fluent» in a foreign language rather than in an African language is, indeed, a vivid example of how colonialism has sometimes reached its ends through the colonial mentality.

### **CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE NEW LANGUAGES**

From here, I join my voice to that of Dr. Kole Omotoshe, the Nigerian Author and University Professor who said, after the opening of the first meeting of the African Writers Union held in Accra, that the Union «believes in the need for Africans to express their personality through a single language.

We regret that those who planned the «World Black and African Festival and Arts and Culture» paid attention to nothing but the arts, folklores and dancing». As if language has nothing to do with culture or is not itself the very foundation of culture !

Hence, Something has to be done in this field. Unification is a must. But at that level ? This is the topic for discussion. Should one language be chosen; or else come few languages which may be counted on the fingers of the hand ? Whatever be the decision, whoever tackles the problem of substituting one language for others, must have to keep in view the following :

- 1) That the function of language is to strengthen contacts.
- 2) In view of the fact that the question of wiping out some languages and replacing them by others is peculiarly sensitive. The process has to be gradual and the timing should be appropriate; and the aims behind the substitution process must be clearly explained to the people beforehand.
- 3) The implementation of this programme requires a long time, during which fundamental changes have to be brought about by building roads, facilitating communications and all means of contacts and mixing together so as to minimise the isolation among those speaking the different dialects, and thus alleviate the linguistic differences among them. Naturally, this will take more than one generation.
- 4) The African States are developing countries having their problems and expenditures. Their energy and resources should not be wasted in projects unacceptable to the people, because the latter will seize the first opportunity to go back to their ancient habits.

- 5) The language chosen to replace others should be characterised by wide dissemination, having crossed the borders of one tribe, and perhaps even a State.

If I had to propose (personal point of view) a different map for the languages in Africa to replace the current complex one, the following could be suggested :

- 1) **Arabic** : in the northern part, the area in which it has spread. There is no problem in this region because it is a single language. I can extend beyond its present borders to the area behind it which is considered its shade, and where Arabic words are interspersed in the vocabulary of the other local languages.
- 2) **Hausa** : In West Africa, where it has wide dissemination in the West African Countries, anglophones and francophones alike, which thus qualifies it for this function.
- 3) **Swahili** : In Eastern Africa. This has already taken place in Kenya and Tanzania, and it could extend to Uganda and Mozambique, at least.
- 4) **Bantoid Language** : In the Southern heights because all the different languages and dialects in that area belong to the Bantu language family.

Some might ask, and about the European languages — English, French and the rest — will they be scratched off at a stroke of the pen ? We would reply. No. Keep them; but, temporarily, as second languages, not to be taught at the primary level.

Owing to the fact that subject is not as easy as some may imagine, a technical or academic body be constituted in more than one African State to study the proposals, with the nucleus of the body in Egypt, at the Institute for African Research and Studies, Cairo University. It should be noted that such (Academic) Institutions should comprise experts in the common languages, in phonetics and in structures, in addition to experts in African Studies, generally; because the subject has other aspects besides the exclusively linguistic side.

If we have lately set up a Department for African Studies at the Institute of African Research and Studies, we would suggest that the African States set up Chairs for Arabic language and literature at the African Universities so that contacts, exchange of knowledge and (rapprochement) could take place, as we said before. The strange thing is that some African

Universities have deputed British Orientalists for Arabic at the Institutes of African Studies that some African Universities have established, to help studies in the study of references dealing with African history.

### PROBLEMS

Some problems might appear to have brought up here and there. But the question of the linguistic unification can be summarised in full, or at least in part, as follows :

- 1) Opposition to the use of a local African language instead of a European language. This is an extension of Colonialism and the Colonial concept which, we have noted are inclined not to use the most widely spread local language even as a second language, describing this as a «waste of time and effort» as it came in the East Africa Royal Commission Report regarding the use of Swahili. It reads :

«We regard the teaching of Swahili as a second language to children whose early education has been in other vernaculars, as a complete waste of time and efforts». East Africa Royal Comm. Rep., 1955, P. 154.

The Evangelizing Missions were against Swahili and Hausa, for example, because they were afraid of the spread of Islam. But this opinion does not hold good, because not everyone who speaks Arabic is Muslim; nor does every Muslim speak Arabic. There are the Chinese and the Pakistani Muslims who do not speak Arabic. So, here there has been a mingling between Language and Religion... something, which is not based upon any scientific foundation. If some Arabic words have been adapted by Swahili, this shows that living Languages are subject to the process of «give and take»; and it also shows that those who speak them are moving, not stagnant and isolated. We have already seen how Arabic words have been taken in by the European languages, and so on. Swahili, for example, is an African language, but English is not so. Gentlemen, is not more honourable that we use an African language instead of paying attention to certain diseased proposals which suggest the use of Pidgin English ? Let us not forget that in the days gone by, it was the Colonial administration that used to take the decisions, but to-day it is the African Administration who decides.

- 2) **Problems of Translation** : especially modern technical expressions. It would be interesting to give you a picture of the press campaign against the Broadcasting Services in Kenya around the translation of some expressions, like «Gross National Income» which the radio translated into «Pessa Toliozpata» in Swahili, «pollution of the environment» Talakala Hewani, etc... But such a campaign or criticism has its significance in

Linguistic research and leads to the enrichment of the language, as well as accuracy in the translation. So, it is constructive criticism and creates the feeling of self-confidence in a person, who can express in his own language and not in the language of the Europeans.

- 3) **Tribalism** : Cultural and political fanaticism or rivalry among the tribes in Africa plays its part in complicating the task or the problem of choosing one of the languages to replace the others as a national language. For example, when the Kakwa tribe asked for the use of their language in Radio Uganda, among the reasons for such a wish was their feeling of wounded pride when forced to listen to radio programmes in the language of their neighbours, the Lugbara, despite the fact the Kakwas understand the Lugbara and their children learn the Lugbra. Such an action, according to them, hurts their feelings places them in a lower disposition than their neighbours and raises their neighbours to a higher status. Thus did the Kakwa language appear in Radio Uganda.

In fact, the most disastrous characteristic of the Continent is the tribal society and the tribal feeling, implying allegiance to the Tribe before the State. This is one of the stages of political development we should hasten to cross to enter a higher stage. So, the stage of holding (through fanaticism) to the group to which an individual belongs does not suit any but primitive age. But if we leave that age behind, the affiliation of people then turns to the place in which they live, that is, to the State. Perhaps what calls for optimism regarding this phenomenon in Africa, are the developments through which the African peoples are passing, besides the emigrations and movements that are taking place and from the Cities. So, the link is cut between the individual and the remote fatherland where the tribe stays. And it does not take long before the person starts relating himself to his Country, rather than his Tribe.

This stage should be quickly crossed, because its effects are catastrophic not only culturally, but politically as well. We will not go to remote examples. Let us see consider the conflicts in Angola now. If we take out the mask, we can find that tribalism and the exploitation of the tribal spirit are at the root of all the problems; that is, look for the tribe behind many of the African problems. We do not want to hear of Mugandi, Ashanti, Bankongon and Sokoma... We rather want to hear of Ugandans, Ghanaians, Zaireans and Tanzanians.

Let us thank God that the Africans have to-day felt the burden of the tribe. Hence, the recommendations of the intellectuals not to encourage



even the use of this word. We find Cannon Berge Carr, General Secretary of the African Churches Council, stating that the African Churches have issued recommendations not to use this word, or even the mere encouragement to use it. Similarly, the Preliminary Committee for the History of Africa, under the auspices of the UNESCO, is facing the problem and, in discussions, is striving to find another word to substitute for the word «tribe».

- 4) Finally, who has the decisive opinion in making this choice? And who has final word in deciding the approval of this language or that one? Will it be the African Governments (that now number 46), or the organisation for African Unity, or those who speak these languages themselves — and everyone cherished his own language and prefers it to any other one — or again, will this matter be decided by experts on African languages from among the Europeans and Americans, who, despite their deep understanding of these languages from their studies, yet very often miss the secrets of their rhetorical beauty and perhaps become biased to their own European languages?

Let us not forget that when China, India, the Soviet Union or Indonesia decided to use any specific language as the Official language, the Official language, there used to be an Executive Body, and it is the Government which, in every Province, decided and undertook the implementation.

Could it, then be possible that all the Governments of West Africa, for example, would come to an agreement to use some particular language as the Governments of East Africa have done, and so on?

All these are topics which are surely worthy of discussion and need and exposition of views. But what is beyond doubt is fact that the unity of language consolidates the African integration.