

7.

Goff, Barbara (2013) *Your Secret Language: Classics in the British Colonies of West Africa. Classica Diaspora*. London & New York, Bloomsbury. 239 Pp. ISBN HB 978-1-7 8093-205-7. Price: UK £65.00; US \$130.00.

This book reconstructs the background history of Western education in the British colonies of Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast. *Your Secret Language* is the first book to focus on the importance of the Classics as an instrument of liberation, education and enlightenment on the one hand; and, on the other, perhaps, a tool of enslavement and disenchantment, both in the hands of the British colonialists as well as West African nationalists. It covers various contributions of Classics to the making of the Elite West African Nationalists and Intelligentsia during the nineteenth century as well as the role of classics in the colonial ideological struggles of the twentieth century.

Barbara Goff, a Professor of Classics at the University of Reading, UK, among other areas of interests, specialises in postcolonial Classics and reception of classical political thoughts. She is, therefore, more than qualify to write on the cultural history of Classics in the British colonies of West Africa, following the works of Gauri Viswanatham,¹⁰⁰ Sanjay Seth¹⁰¹ and Emily Greenwood¹⁰² on India and the Caribbean literature.

The book, spanning 1827 to 1957, asks and answers questions surrounding colonial West Africans' reactions to education in Latin, Greek and other aspects of the Classics; the extent of such education as instrument of 'colonialisation of consciousness'; the use of the classical tradition for social, personal and political advancement; classical education as cultural capital; among others.

Your Secret Language has four chapters. It begins with a concise and apt introduction (pp. 1-19) covering the aim (investigating 'the cultural politics of classics in the British colonies of West Africa'), theoretical leanings (classical reception studies, postcolonial classics and colonial domination et. al.), scope and chapters previews.

¹⁰⁰ Viswanathan, Gauri (1989) *Masks of Conquests: literary study and British rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press).

¹⁰¹ Seth, Sanjay (2007) *Subject Lessons: the western education of Colonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).

¹⁰² Greenwood, Emily (2010) *Afro-Greeks: dialogues between Anglophone Caribbean literature and classics in the twentieth century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Chapter 1 (Colonial Contradictions, pp. 21-64) begins with a Map showing the British Colonies of West Africa around 1918,¹⁰³ and examines contradictory reactions to the study of classics, acceptance and resistance on the cultural politics of education, (classics in particular), emergence of Christianized Europeanised professionals and elite nature of classical education in the British West Africa. Since education went hand in hand with the introduction to Christianity, all education initiatives were by Christian missions - teaching Latin and Greek - so that converts could read the Bible in the original languages. Sections include *The freetown experiment*, (pp. 26-34) where schools were established for freedmen and 'recaptives'; *The multiple significances of Samuel Ajayi Crowther* (pp. 34-45), a 'recaptive' classically educated and a 'major evidence' of the success of 'the Freetown Experiment' who, ironically, found less educated men better in missionary works (p.36); and *African responses to missionary classical education* (pp. 46-58) as 'sign of aspiration and effort, and a passport for further opportunities...' (p.54) with Christians educated West African taking, not only English, but classical names (p. 55), among other responses.

Chapter 2 (Classics and Cultural Nationalism, pp. 65-98) discusses the Nationalists and Pan Africanists actions and reactions, with educated Africans now abandoning European attire and names (p.67); and newspapers criticizing excessive concentration on the classical languages in schools. Goff, in this chapter, introduces four African writers (cultural nationalists) whose works applied the classics as 'cultural capital', asserting ancestral relationships between Africa and ancient Greece, using classics to resist colonial incursions (p.91): James Africanus Beale Horton, pp. 68-75; Edward Wilmot Blyden, pp. 75-86; Kobina Sekiyi, pp. 87-90; and Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford, pp. 90-95.

Chapter 3 (Twentieth-Century Struggles, pp. 99-154) concerns the early decades of the 20th century vis-à-vis the struggle over classical education, with the British authority's systemic attempts to withhold the classical education from Africans; and opposition from Africans, insisting on classical education. Sources include Phelps-Stokes 1922 Report as well as autobiographies of Africans, among others. The chapter has sections on *The educated African* (pp. 103-117); '*Classics*' versus '*agriculture*' (pp. 117-123); *The Phelps-Stokes Commission: classics as educational slavery* (pp. 124-135); and *Responses in the schools* (pp. 135-150)

Chapter 4 (Classics and West African Modernity, pp. 155-212) considers 'the roles of classics in the secondary schools and universities as the countries prepared for independence, and examines two (Robert Cole and Joseph Appiah) autobiographies by prominent West Africans...' (p.157). Sub topics include *Technologies of the self* (pp. 157-163), *Kosoh Town Boy: Latin and Greek, Father and Nation* (pp. 163-169), *Joe Appiah and the Ghost* (pp. 169-180); *Classics and*

¹⁰³ This is adapted, as noted by Goff, from J. F. Ade-Ajayi and Michael Crowder's (1974) *History of West Africa*, vol. 2 (London: Longman) pp. 426-7.

'Western' Culture (pp. 180-187), *Classics in the new universities* (pp. 187-199) and *To have loved and lost: "The Devil at Yolahun Bridge"* (199-212).

Each chapter has ample endnotes with useful comments and references. The book has a comprehensive bibliographic section (pp. 213-231) and a fairly exhaustive index (pp. 233-239), both especially useful for scholars and students interested in the history of education in precolonial and colonial West Africa.

I observed that the Map labelled No. 1 (p.21) is the only map in this book though looking forward to others on account of the numbering as Map 1. Another minor detail is the existence of Figures 3.1 (p. 116) and 4.1 (p. 198) without any previous figures 1.1 or 2.1. (Perhaps numbering retained from the original sources).

In a way, I had expected a sentence or two, within the introductory section, on why Gambia, the fourth British West Africa, could not have been part of this study. With the very apt introductory section, a concluding section was equally half expected, summarizing the main arguments of the book, notwithstanding that summaries of main points have been part of the last paragraphs of each chapter.

Admitting her inability to discuss the prevalence of Islam in the Northern part of West Africa, and its influence on the British government policy, (p.16), which I find highly commendable, Professor Goff has challenged classical scholars, especially those in reception studies, to grant more attention to 'the relations between the classical tradition and the Islamic' (p.17). Her note 17, referencing the works of Pormann,¹⁰⁴ is instructive and underscores an area that has not received sufficient scholarly attention.

Your Secret Language: Classics in the British Colonies of West Africa, is a deep appreciation of the history of classics in the British West Africa, with veritable resources for all scholars and students of West Africa history. We certainly need more of this service from other scholars. This book deserves better attention from all.

- **Idowu Alade, University of Ibadan. (E-mail: alade.idowu@dlc.ui.edu.ng)**

¹⁰⁴ Pormann, Peter (2006-7) "The Arab 'Cultural Awakening (Naha)', 1870-1950, and the Classical Tradition", *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 13: 3-20.

- (2009) 'Classics and Islam: From Homer to Al-Qā'ida,' *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 16: 197-233.