

A Critical Evaluation of the Importance of Historical Occurrences in Development of a Modern State

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ABSTRACT: This work presents a critical evaluation of the relevance of history to modern society. It examines the importance of understanding historical events and their impact on contemporary issues concerning development. The issue of menace of Boko Haram and other security challenges facing Nigeria are all historical. The literature review explores the relationship between historical research and its application in addressing current societal challenges. It discusses the significance of historical knowledge in informing decision-making processes and shaping public policies. The article also discusses the role of historical perspectives in forging a deeper understanding of cultural, social, and political dynamics. This research incorporates Hegelian understanding of the “end” of universal history and the role of historical agent. Overall, the paper emphasizes the enduring relevance of history in shaping the modern world and offers insights into the value of historical scholarship in addressing present-day concerns.

KEYWORDS: Hegelian, Historical Agent, Historical knowledge.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many historians conceive of history largely a social science and physical science, a study of culture and societies rather than the humanities. History studies all these and provides man the purpose of universal history mankind. Hegel, a philosopher of history, projects history as dialectical progression towards realization of freedom. He classifies history into three types: original history, which refers to first-hand accounts of events and actions; reflective history, which transcends the present culture and attempts to provide a summary of historical events; and pragmatic history, which connects events into a pattern in their universal and inner meaning. Hegel's approach emphasizes the importance of understanding a culture's customs, beliefs, and practices in order to penetrate into the essence of a specific period. [Hegel, 1837]. He also discusses the significance of speeches in historical accounts as integral components of history. Overall, Hegel's understanding of history involves a complex and multi-faceted approach that aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the development of human society. The highest value man can attain in the progress of history is realization freedom.

Critically implicit in the study of history is the belief that man shares a common humanity with all other human beings. To historians of the twentieth and twenty first century, some socio- cultural and philosophical examination can be deduced for the conflict or violent behavior of man several centuries ago contextual to their character and behavior today and at the same time that man is nevertheless so unique that in the final analysis no two men are the same: there are really no completely identical twins, and each people, each culture, has an integrity of its own to which standards derived from other cultures and the history of other peoples are really irrelevant. This study, however, cannot deny the common heritage of man, nor can it deny his uniqueness.

The tendency to discard past events and making the modern man illiterates of Historical events allow for dictatorial minded leaders that are anxious to impose on others, their own views and constructs evolved from their own national experience and for their convenience as universal values and standards (Ajayi, 1977). This is peculiar to colonized nations. The acceptance of concepts and ideologies not indigenous to them creates confusion of identity and also disrupt evolutionary trends on such concepts as democracy. Africa, majorly Nigeria must learn to assert its uniqueness in governance, traditions, and culture. Nigeria, for instance must

remain conscious in adapting these ideas. According to Duyile William Abiodun, the colonial impact on infrastructure must be seen to be exploitative (Infrastructure Development in Nigeria, 2020). He further buttressed his views through the prism of migration; 'since independence the colonial pattern of labor migration continue, with Ghana, Ivory Coast and Nigeria continuing to provide seasonal employment in their coffee, cocoa and groundnut plantations for migrants from Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso and Niger, and Senegal's groundnut farms receiving a large number of laborers from Mali' (Duyile, William Abiodun, 2021).

2. THE RELEVANCE OF HISTORY

It used to be assumed that if so many human beings derive satisfaction from studying literature or history, it must be that they find it relevant to their existence and that they must find other less obvious justification for such pre-occupations. Some scholars like Ade Ajayi and Nwachukwu justified the study of the Humanities by claiming that they improved the soul and enabled man to fulfill his religious and human desires better. Other scholars sought justification in claims that the Humanities improve men as men and therefore enable them to better fulfill their obligations to one another (Ade-Ajayi, 1977). Other scholars like Nwachukwu John conceived of the Humanities as "civilizing" or making man better citizens or "civil" human beings.

Others called the Humanities a source of "enlightenment" (Nwachukwu, 2023). Scholars are concerned with relevance in terms of meaning and significance to the lives of the common man, - in terms of a direct relationship between the study of the Humanities and an improvement in the quality of life of the masses (Ogot, 1977). It may also serve as a useful purpose for this research, to examine succinctly the main objectives of historians over the last decades, and, in particular, how they have tried to justify their need in this modern era. The research would then consider the extent to which the experience of historians is relevant in the wider context of the philosophy. A particular reference is usually focused on history with direct emphasis on the past records and events while relevance points to the present events with likelihood that it would influence the future. It needs to be emphasized that history is not the past, but a study of the past. The role that Philosophy plays is to interrogate that past by addressing the salient facts according to the Historian choices. Historians are the first however to critic actions taking by past actors in context with characters of past humans. With all the technology at the historians, disposal for recording events and preserving records, historians know that there is no possibility of re-creating or re-inventing yesterday and they are not interested in recreating that yesterday.

Historians also realize that we can only select from the facts available from the past according to what records are collected and of the historian's interest. (Ajayi, 1977). This brings to focus the historian philosophy and orientation from his peculiar background. Past Historians who were Muslims had been quickly accept as fact the conversion of a Pagan King to a Moslem as a fact of History. History is not the past but a study of the past, an attempt to understand and interpret the past for the benefit of the present and also the future. The rich contribution made by pre-colonial Africans to the history of Humanity and the civilization of the Africans. The methodological renewal taking place in other courses like philosophy, linguistics and even political science by the use of historical materialism and structuralism; makes it very urgent to adapt a scientific cum genetics re-writing of African history and to insist on the contributions of the Africans to humanity. A retracing of Yoruba history, Igbo history and even Hausa history through genetics shall re-address old time controversies. It is not historians who live in the past but those who have an acquaintance with history, but too little understanding of what it is really about. Historians are much too aware of the dynamics of change to conceive of a situation in which one tries to re- invent or preserve the past. The historian seeks facts from the past. He interrogates those events in the past. He tries to live that event. He collects and collates and studies them. But he knows they are only data considered important by the researcher choice from the past.

It is the historian who is most antagonizing of his area of expertise, the historian also seeks to critic those seeking only to revive or preserve the past; those who structure culture into traditional and modern as if there was a sharp line between the two; those who go to the villages to bring cultural groups to town in the mistaken notion that they are thus helping to preserve the past. The historian philosophy and perspective sees culture as ever changing. Thus, the Masquerade dancers though based on traditional styles, is either a living creative, cultural group fulfilling a continuing function in the hometown or a natural imitator of ancient tradition dressed up for the benefit and entertainment of tourists. Similarly, the historian knows that languages die and others change beyond recognition. People learn and unlearn languages by the direct will and policies of societies and rulers. The historian collects data, written, oral, archaeological, linguistic, social or economic data from the past, and selects what he considers most significant for making the past meaningful for the present. He collects data to study and not as a substitute to replace or revive a dead past. When the historian studies what is significant, he is concerned with what is most meaningful and important among the data collected about the past, significant in the sense of relevance to the concerns of the present. For the historian, therefore, the search for relevance is a constant preoccupation because his understanding of what is significant or relevant keeps changing with the

dynamics of present technology and methods (Ade-Ajayi, 1977). This can be illustrated with a review of the main concerns of African historians since the end of the Second World War and justification for those particular concerns.

Three main periods may be identified in the development of African historiography since the end of the Second World War. The first was the period of struggle for political independence; the second the period just before and immediately after the achievement of political independence when the chief concern was decolonization of the main social and political institutions; and the third period when the politically independent governments begin to grapple seriously with the problems of nation building, social reform, economic liberation, neo-colonization, neo-cultures as the 21st centuries concerns as LGTBQ and the myriads of small wars (Dr Duyile, 2023) . It is clear that these periods merge into one another in each country and across the continent. While some countries are already seriously grappling with the problems of documenting neo-colonialism, others are still seeking political independence cum secession tendencies. While some countries seek political independence first, others try to combine the search for political liberation with a form of society and the basic social and economic institutions of the state at the same time.

The historian sees history playing a relevant and changing role at each period documenting the facts. History has always been a popular weapon to achieve Independence in Africa if only because the colonial rulers had used it as a weapon of domination and frustration that came from denying basic humanity to peoples of African descent by denying that they had a history (Ofosu-Appiah, 1977). Independence activist and nationalist ideology were backed using historical standpoint, asserting much as an article of faith that Africans had not merely a history but in fact a glorious history. A well-known book of the 1950s was actually entitled African Glory (Ade-Ajayi, 1977). The economic liberation however remains a mirage.

Historians at the time of the independence movements had to go beyond asserting that Africans had a history. They had to demonstrate by the criteria of evidence acceptable to other historians not merely that African history exists, but also that it has as much time depth as the history of others, and that it contained evidence of the ability of Africans in the past to build and manage large political empires comparable to modern multi-ethnic territories seeking political independence. African historians first began by focusing attention on the periods of African antiquity when there were written references to African political achievements. They went further and demonstrated not only the indispensability of oral sources of history, but also its validity for historical writing. In the process, African historiography has changed the course of historical writing which now doubts the sufficiency of written sources alone for historical writing even when written sources appear abundant. African historiography continues to refine the methodology of using oral sources, combining them with linguistic, archaeological and other forms of evidence. The 21st century historian has an option to adopt genetic studies to support its fact in historical studies.

The rhetoric of history was necessary to develop the right mental attitude of the leaders of the independence movements and their followers as well as to persuade the colonial rulers. History led some kind doctrinal challenge against colonialism. Historians considered the precolonial period most relevant because it provided the necessary time-depth and evidence of the performance of independent African politics. In the period of decolonization, while the debate with former colonial rulers continued there was a fresh necessity to downgrade the Europeans supremacy through philosophical challenge and doctrine and persuade the rank and file of low cadre Africans, that indeed the African had the abilities to take over power from Europeans. The African liberators looked unto history for support and emancipation. History is needed now, backed by a philosophical understanding to challenging the escape of Africans to European, Asia and other continents. As the Governments outgrow the slogans of the period of decolonization and begin to grapple with economic imperialism, the need for the transfer of technology and the development of a self-reliant economy, the importance of the old assertion that a sense of history is vital to the liberation of the mind and the conditioning of the nationalist begins to be challenged. An awareness of history by itself does not seem to make any difference to the attitude of people to work, their sense of values or even their patriotism and basic commitment to the future of the nation. Few, if any, are awarded scholarships to study history. The emphasis shifts from the Humanities to Science and Technology. But this does not mean that history has ceased to be relevant or that historians have ceased to search for relevance.

It needs to be emphasized that history is relevant not only as an ideological or psychological weapon in a struggle for liberation against outsiders, but also as a force in the internal development of a new society. Not only in traditional African societies, but also in many other societies as well, history has this important role as a source of values that should monitor inter-personal relationships and the relationships of people with the rest of society and the state. History may appear not directly relevant to economic productivity and the development of

technology, but to the extent that people's mental attitude is an important factor in their creativity, history obviously is core to the precedence and initiative behind technological growth. In a multi-ethnic society, proper historical perspectives are also essential to promote better inter-ethnic understanding, political stability and the emergence of a new coherent society. But to make history such a social force, the study of history alone is not enough: it is important that it should be adopted to drive growth and development. It is failure to drive initiatives of development to its citizens through history that have brought concepts like 'japa' syndrome among Nigerians.

Some historians have sought social relevance in emphasizing the social science aspects of history, the relevance of the past to an understanding of the processes of economic and social change. The undue emphasis on political achievement measured by the size of political states in the past is therefore giving way to a more balanced view of history, stressing social and economic factors, migrations, developments in the means of production, technology, the system of land tenure, etc. In the struggle against neo-colonialism and the further liberation of the rest of Africa, the old crude assertions of "you have no history, we have a history", is giving way to more sophisticated interpretations and re-interpretations of history.

The UNESCO General History of Africa project is a good example of the process of synthesizing and re-interpreting African history to make it more socially relevant. The project has emphasized the continental view of African history which focuses attention on the internal perspective and the pan-continental lines of historical movements. At the same time the project attempts to analyze and synthesize the contributions of Africans to the totality of human endeavor. In particular, it stresses the role of Africans in areas where, in spite of the facts, the African presence tends to be denied and ignored, such as in ancient Egypt, Middle East, the Americas, Europe and the Diaspora such a project gives new dimensions to the definition of the boundaries of African history, and the historical contribution of the Africans to the human society as well as encourages a more balanced and socially relevant interpretation of the African past.

The academic historians are discovering that it is not their synthesis and sophistication that effects the average person's appreciation of history as a cultural phenomenon and source of social and moral values so much as the popular view of history derived from school text books, the social media, the mass media, Ministries of Information handbooks and similar works that tend to reflect the historiography of several generations ago. It is this communication gap that tends to defeat the historians' search for social relevance. Historians that are concerned about the social functions of history have to concern themselves also with education, the proper teaching of history at all levels and the projection of history in the mass media and also the social media.

One can parallel in the other Humanities the same changing justifications. In literature, one is aware of the changing emphasis from social anthropological novels intended to persuade the foreign readers that Africans had a culture. From the clash of cultures as the most important theme of drama and novels, there is the growing concern with literature as a critique of society and source of social and moral values. In Linguistics, there is also a shift from mapping all languages and analyzing their historical development to a growing emphasis on socio-linguistics. Increasingly, linguists are asking about the role of language and education at different levels, how people use languages and what language policies ought to be pursued to take care of our diverse and sometimes contradictory needs for education, rapid technological development, contact with the outside world, the integrity and uniqueness of each language as a vehicle of culture and yet the necessity for national unity and stability. Similarly, Art, Music, and Dance are moving away from merely recording traditional forms to a more creative role of developing new cultural styles, deriving validity from serious studies of traditional forms, but seeking to adapt and evolve new forms for today's 'Gen Zs' and communities, as vehicles of entertainment, advertisement, mass communication as well as education.

Philosophy as an academic discipline is yet finding its feet, fighting against the popular prejudice that abstruse and intellectual thinking is a luxury in a developing society. Yet the rapid pace of change seems to demand the existence of a group specializing in clear logical thought in an attempt to clarify for us the meaning and direction of change in Africa.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion African history has been asserting both the uniqueness and the common humanity of the African in Diaspora. Universal history cannot be said to be universal outside African history since universal are assemblage of particulars. African has made several unique contributions to universal history including the development of early human civilization, the preservation and advancement of traditional knowledge and practices, and divers cultural artistic impressions that have enriched global heritage. Additionally, Africans have played significant role in shaping global trade, particularly through its rich natural resources and the exchange of goods and ideas. African American and black European and even blacks in Asia are now far apart from the

African continent as thus the Pan African period. African historiography has had to chart its own course and make original contributions to the science of historical study peculiar to the African situation where there is lack of adequate documentation. It has drawn heavily on traditional historiography both in terms of the content of oral literature and other historical forms as well as the role of history in society. But African history has remained part of the development of human history responding to a changing present with new techniques and fresh pro-occupations.

History is needed to resuscitate the African mentality of migrating. The Yorubas who were at the forefront of the liberation struggle in Nigeria had now coined a new word called 'Japa' that shows their frustration on liberation (Duyile & Nwachukwu, 2023). The colonial border legacy also need to be upturned to make Africans understand better their territorial sovereignty.

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