

History, the Disease of Temporary Amnesia and National Development

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Abstract

This paper examines History, the Disease of Temporary Amnesia (Loss of Memory) and National Development. It analyses the concept "History, the disease of Temporary Amnesia and its impact on History as a course of study came to focus. It discusses the undue emphasis on science and technology to the detriment of History. The significance of History to National Development was demonstrated. The data for the research was obtained from primary sources like oral interview and secondary sources, such as newspapers, books (published and unpublished), thesis, dissertation, journals etc. The study found that the relevance of History to National development cannot be over-emphasized. It demonstrated that the disease of 'Temporary Amnesia' has negative impact on the study of History. Again the study found that the sarcastic comments that Africa have no history, that African history is nothing more than European activities in Africa is not correct. The earlier statements by European visitors that Africa did not produce advanced civilization have been disproved by the discovering of fine works of art at such places as Nok, Ife, Benin and Igbo Ukwu in Nigeria (Alagoa, 1978:12). In conclusion, it is noted that nation without the knowledge of the past cannot project successfully into the present and future.

Keywords

History, Temporary Amnesia;
 Disease, Significance, National
 Development.



I. Introduction

This paper examines History, the disease of Temporary Amnesia (Loss of Memory) and National Development. History as a word was derived from the French formulation of *histoire*, the Latin notion of *historia* and the Greek construction of *istoria*, each of which represented the basic sense of knowledge of the past (Nassion, 2017)

It may be necessary at this point to examine the concept 'History' in order to put the topic on true perspective. History is the study of important events which took place in the past. History connotes the systematic and analytical study of past events in order to understand the present, with the panorama of predicting the future (Yusuf and Zakariya, 2017).

History may be defined as the study of man through the evidence of his past (Alagoa, 1978:17). Robert Smith posits that history is the study of the past of human being (Smith, 1978:1). Put differently, History is the systematic and analytical study of past, present and future event, the past event is the major starting point of history. History is seen as the record of lives of the societies of man, all the changes, which the societies have gone through, all the materials which helped or hindered development and the conditions of the present as a guide, for the future (Makinde, 2012).

II. Review of Literature

The traditional conception of history epitomized by historians like Herodotus, who is popularly referred to as the Father of History, his great successor, Thucydides, Livy and Tacitus viewed history as any written narrative of events (Osokoya, 2011). This definition is now inadequate and unacceptable in view of contemporary realities. In the first place, the definition did not acknowledge the development of history overtime. Again it did not recognize the division of the discipline into such fields as political, social, economic, military, intellectual, constitutional and educational history. Osokoya noted that the conception of history as mere narration of events is now archaic because history has metamorphosed from mere description of events into critical and analytical interpretation of events (Ibid).

However, it must be noted that in contemporary times, history as a field of knowledge encompasses not only past events but also their consequences. In addition, not all events of the past capture the interest of the historian rather important historical events with consequences are usually preferred (Yusuf and Zakariya, 2017).

It is in the light that Walsh defines history as a “reconstruction of the past which is both intelligent and intelligible (Walsh, 1951). For Edward Carr, history is a continuous process of interaction between the present and the past affirming that interpretation is the life blood of history (Carr, 2014).

A historical fact that is not analyzed is not history, the historian must do proper descriptions and analysis of available facts. Evidence is the pillar of historical research, without evidence, there will be no historical interpretation. Evidence is the rubric upon which history stands. Historians use all forms of evidence to examine, interpret and reinterpret the past. These include books or written documents, oral evidence and objects like artifacts, buildings, photographs and paintings. History is critical in the selection interpretation and analysis of available data. According to Ajetunmobi it is these features of history that have made it look like science (Ajetunmobi, 2010: 369-374).

It is important to add that telling story is not history but, tell the story, analyze the story, why the story and how the story constitute the concept of history. Again the historian thought about the past event is done through interpretation, explanation analysis and questions raised and answered before conclusions are made.

On the whole, the historian’s quest not only requires the establishment of what were the events of the past (what happened) but also their explanation (How and why these events came to pass) and their assessment (how important were they).

Nigeria is today suffering from the disease of nation collapse because she lacks the sense of historical knowledge. Even among men considered cultured, it is easy to find some who know absolutely nothing about entire centuries of human history (Gabriel, 1984:321-323).

2.1 The Disease of Temporary Amnesia and its Negative Impacts on the Study of History as a course and Neglects

Amnesia refers to loss of memory. Memory and forgetfulness have been viewed since antiquity from perspective of physical, emotional, spiritual states of well-being and conceptualized philosophically (Langer, 2019: 64-74). Numerous discussions of memory loss or case reports exist in history. Originally, amnesia was recognized as a weakening or dissolution of memory (Ibid).

The known causes to this disorder include; neurological disorders of stroke, hemorrhage, alcohol and substance abuse and other acute or chronic brain disorders.

Unfortunately for the historians and history as a course of study, the disease of temporary amnesia is a serious challenge in this country as most Nigerians are suffering from the disease. As a result, most of our people have no knowledge of the past. A people with no knowledge of the past would suffer from collective amnesia grouping blindly into the future without the guide post of precedence to shape their course (Babatunde Fafunwa, the Punch, 30-10-1990).

It is only through the knowledge of its history that a society can have knowledge of itself. As a man without memory and self- knowledge is a man adrift, so a society without memory and self-knowledge would be a society adrift (Marwick, 1970:15).

III. Results and Discussion

3.1 The Neglect of History as a Course of Study by Government

History for decades has no strong ground in the Nigerian curriculum because the governments of Nigeria thought the panacea in solving Nigeria's problem is through science and technology (Yusuf and Zakariya, 2017). The importance of history in national development is relegated to the bottom of the academic hierarchy. Our second National Development Plan, 1970-1974 declared the building of a "a united, strong and self-reliant nation as one of the five main objectives of the Federal Government of Nigeria, the authorities did not consider history important enough to be taught as a compulsory subject at either the primary or secondary schools or both (Esedebe, 2017).

Again, the Federal Government of Nigeria had directed that in conventional Universities, Sixty percent of undergraduate admission must be to courses in the Sciences and Humanistic disciplines and the social sciences are to share the remaining forty percent of the place (Ibid).

So, history as a discipline is under constant attack, it is also true that it regularly recovers, but not without wounds and imbalances, always difficult and sometimes impossible to repair (Yusuf and Zakariya, 2017). The major reason, why Nigeria is still lagging behind in terms of national development is because where she came from and does not know where she is going. This is anchored on the fact history had been relegated down to the bottom of the Nigerian educational curriculum as Professor Alice Jekayinfa observed:

History as a discipline has been relegated in Nigeria, whereas the discipline is the bedrock of any nation (Omelewa, 2015)

Odey observes also that the near extinction or the poor show and parity of 60/40 in favour of the sciences against the Arts in the admission of Nigerian undergraduates is a deep-seated problem of "crisis of consciousness" of those who should know (Odey, 2005:41). For so long, science and technology have received an unusual applause in the Nigerian Universities. Many seem to forget the destructive capacity of science/technology and the foundations which Arts/Humanities have laid ahead of time for the sciences and in the Nigerian Universities education (Ibid; 41-42).

So the disregard for History in the nation's education system at all levels is by now well-known and almost over flogged. History today is in crisis of relevance because of much emphasis on science and technology. This is particularly the case of third world countries where the government devotes much attention to science and technology acting on the premise that if the country must develop, there is the need to promote science and technology. In this circumstance, history is completely neglected allegedly the discipline as mere story telling. It is painfully observed that the number of students enrolling for history as a subject in the West African School Certificate Examination has fallen drastically and

even the number of Assistant Examiners and team leaders invited yearly for marking scripts in history has seriously reduced.

For some years now, in the Universities, history as a course of study is begging for relevance. To avoid the scrapping of history as a course of study in most Universities in Nigeria, the course is now combined with international studies, strategic studies and diplomatic studies to keep the lecturers still at work. Nobody is ready to read history in the University because of poor negative attitude of the society, particularly government to the discipline. Even students are ashamed to say publicly that they are reading or studying history as a course of study.

Despite the crisis of relevance which history is currently facing today, history will continue to occupy its unique place in the society because no society can do without history.

The relegation of history as a course of study is not only in the area of admission but also in terms of employment. The negative attitude influences the number of historians who get recruited into public services. It is however doubtful if an almost total neglect of history can actually give us durable palliatives to the epidemic problem of development.

3.2 Negative Attitude of Parents to History

Parents are parts of the society and cannot be different in their poor attitude to the study of history. Parents try to do everything humanly possible to discourage their children from studying history. They see history as not prestigious enough for their children to offer in the Universities.

3.3 The Relevance of History to National Development

First, recently, the federal government re-introduce the study of history as a compulsory subject in the curriculum of the primary and post-primary institutions in Nigeria. This attests to the fact that no nation can do without its history. Ayodele notes that the callous, intemperate and retrograde policy willfully taken to wipe out history as a branch of learning that, fosters spirit of enquires in contemporary society, was to suffer a nation, denigrate and stultify her growth, progress and completely in perpetuity subservient under the rule of the thumb fashioned by military autocracy (Hope Newspaper, July 2019). The teaching of history and other equally important and ancillary subjects like religious studies development should be give the fillip in the scheme of things (Ibid).

Commenting on the significance of the re-introduction of history as a compulsory subject, Dr. Mike Ene, one time, Secretary-General of Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), said “The Law of Morality says: if you don’t know where you are coming from, it will be difficult to know where exactly you are going and that is the situation about history in any society (Ibid).

The Negroes have been presented by many European writers as a race “without past”, people who never evolved a civilization of their own and contributed nothing to human progress (Otoide, 2005). The world was made to believe that the history of the Negroes began with the coming of Europeans to Africa in the fifteenth century, if the Negroes had any history before that date, these writers argued such history could be summoned up in these words “barbarism, chaos and stagnation” (Ibid).

Fortunately, there is now a new breed of ardent and interested scholars willing toiling in the vineyard of Africa history and as result history is now being correctly and objectively interpreted in the light of recent researches by balanced historians (Ibid). For instance the Hamitic theory is now generally discredited. E.g. Hegel the leading German Philosopher, blazed the negative trail by his in famous assertion that African were capable

either development nor education (Hegel, 1953). It is now generally agreed that the ancient civilization of the Sudan and the artistic achievement of Benin, Ife, Nok and Asante were completely of Negro origin (Ibid).

Buttressing this further, Alagoa noted that it is not possible to argue against the artifacts and the earlier statements of European visitors that Africa did not produce advanced civilizations have been disapproved by the discovering of the fine works of art as seen in places as Nok, Ife, Benin and Igbo Ukwu in Nigeria, large architectural structures in Zimbakwe and of course, the abundant remains of the civilization of the Nile Valley (Alagoa, 1978:17).

In terms of time dimension, archaeologists in East Africa have recovered the fossils of Skeletons which suggest that man might have developed in this part of Africa over a million years ago (Ibid). These discovering give support to speculations that Africa (Nigeria inclusive) was the cradle of man. Africa is now known to be one of the places in the world where man first took shape and developed the first stone tools, the basis of technology (Ibid).

Again, a society that is ignorant of its historical past is an endangered society (Akoda, 2005:1) That is the reason institutions like museums, libraries and archives are established to locate, collect and preserve the country's historical records (National Archives Exhibition, 1980:1). It is important to put on record that the Nigerian government recognizes the significance of these store houses of history and is a harbinger of several archives.

The historians if given the opportunity coupled with their right University training are strategically placed to keep in perspective unresolved issues of national concern (Odey, 2005:44). This always fall under the phrase of the National Questions which cannot be resolved without the logic of history (Ibid). This has been compounded with the wrong education policy which continue to widen the gap between the poor majority and affluent minority, employment nexus, system of exclusion or inequality and limited labour absorbing capacity (Ibid). Only the historian can reconstruct these anomalies and begin a new song and dance to stop the ravages of neo-liberalism and globalization in Nigeria.

Nigeria needs history in order to have a direction toward the road to development. History is the key to nation building. Society that wants to experience growth and development must embrace history. History is very significant to national development because it houses the totality of human activities in the past for evaluation. Just as the memory is to the mind, history is to the society (Yusuf and Zakariya, 2017). Therefore for a meaningful development in Nigeria, history as a discipline and knowledge system is sine qua non in the road to national development (Ibid). Thus in terms of policy formation, decision making among other topical issues on national development, it is important to resort to history for a road map.

As Nigerians, our destiny lies in our history, no civilization current or past has achieved any significance development based on rejection of its indigenous culture and history (Ochefu and Ogbogbo, 2006: 78)

History is important in solving national problems and issues. The major reason why so much violence (physical and psychological) aggression, hatred, poverty, etc dominate the day to day existence of the people in Nigeria is that, collectively, they lack historical consciousness (Yusuf and Zakariya, 2017).

They tend to act or react based on the present situation and care little about the past. In the same vein, Babatunde Fafunwa noted that;

A people with no knowledge of the past would suffer from collective amnesia grouping blindly into the future without the guide post of precedence to shape their course (Oyeranmi, 2011:7).

Finally, history is very fundamental to the sustenance of every society for it digs the past in the light of the present. For Nigeria to really understand her present predicament, the study of history is important.

V. Conclusion

For Nigeria to solve the present multifaceted developmental problem bedeviling the country, the past must always be visited. This is essential if men of the future are ever to break the chains of the present, they will have to understand the forces that forge them. To achieve this, Nigeria must be well endowed with historical knowledge which is based on recollecting, retrieval and reconstruction of the past (Ibid). Again it is necessary for history to return to its pride of place as prime motivator of national consciousness. There must a historical re-awakening which would be championed by Nigerian historians.

While the government should be commended for the re-introduction of history in our schools, the necessary textbooks and other teaching aids should be provided to encourage the students to study and to make the teaching of history interesting.

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