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The unique lens of History: Reinventing the past for contemporary relevance

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Abstract

This paper seeks to increase understanding of History as a subject matter. In the light of the aforementioned fact, it is pertinent to note the fact that the relevance of History as a subject matter cannot be over emphasized as it undeniably helps in understanding the past. However, present happenstances unarguably reveals that many people, societies and organisations does ignore History, they don't know why it should be of special notice and apparently views history as not been very useful. Nonetheless, history possesses a deep rooted value which underscores the nexus between the present and future. Thus, this paper explores and exposes the meaning, nature of history with the aim of underscoring the relevance of history. The paper in this direction therefore is based on qualitative research methodologies and is deeply rooted on review of the meaning of History, it nature and historical pathway to underscore its uniqueness as a subject matter. To a large extent, the paper, with regards to its finding will contribute in increasing knowledge with regards to knowledge of history, its relevance and history pathway of leaning from experiences from the remembered past to the present as well as for the future.

Keyword: History, Sources, Archeology, Philosophy,

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Introduction

The origin of the word History is associated with the Greek word 'Historia' which means 'information' or 'an enquiry designed to elicit truth'[1]. Generally speaking, history engages on the study of the past. In this direction, History as a branch of study beams searchlight on life in society with emphasis on the past, in all its aspect, in relation to contemporary events not excluding the future expectations. Several definitions exist as to what history means, or is all about. Generally all historians and other scholars interested in the discipline agree that, "History is an account of the past which seeks to provide reasons why

[1] Pallavi Talekau, Dr. Jyotrimayee Nayak , Dr.S.Harichandan. *https://ddceutkal.ac.in/Syllabus/MA_Education/Education_Paper_5_history.pdf.* n.d. (accessed December 15, 2022). also see Esedebe Olisanwuche Peter, "Reflections on History, Nation-Building and the University of Nigeria." An Inaugural delivered at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 2003.

things (events, changes) happened the way they did". This means that anyone who is writing or interest in history should first become familiar with what happened in the past. Then she/he will be able to attempt to explain why those things happened, its implications on the present changes/events and in the future. The teaching and lessons of history unequivocally helps in to explain the present, to analyze it and to trace its course. But, regretfully, the past in Nigeria like in any other society is often considered as not useful and not worth dwelling on. Overall, of special concern to people is the present with consequential fear of the unknown future. Thus, this paper aims at unraveling History as a branch of study that beams search light on the past and further underscoring the aforementioned branch of study with as a branch of study which is worth giving attention to.

It is in the light of the foregoing, this paper will be dealing with meaning, nature and scope of historical pathway, with the intention to interrogate the justification of history and explicate why it is worth attention as a unique lens and subject matter through which a society can decipher pathways of leaning from experiences from the remembered past to the present as well as for the future.

The meaning of history

History as a subject matter engages in inquiry and unraveling of the past. Brian & Janda[2] notes that the word History originated from Greek word historia, meaning "inquiry, knowledge acquired by investigation" According to them, it is the study of the past, particularly how it relates to humans. It is an umbrella term that relates to past events as well as the memory, discovery, collection, organization, presentation, and interpretation of information about these events. In a broader sense, they maintain that "history is a systematic account of the origin and development of the humankind, a record of the unique events and movements in its life; it is an attempt to recapture however imperfectly, the past which is, in a sense, lost forever.

In examining the relationship, there is the need to recourse into the meaning of history. According to Carr[3], History is the: Reciprocal social process of interaction between the historian and his facts... it is a dialogue between the past and the present; it is a dialogue not between abstract and isolated individuals but between society of today and Society of yesterday.

From Carr's definition, it is discernable that History is not mere story telling. It is also not a mere fabrication. History is an account of what actually happened in the past which has a link to what is happening at present and can help in

[2] Brian Joseph and Janda, Richard (ed.). *The Handbook of Historical Linguistics.* Blackwell Publishing, 2008.
[3] Carr Edward Hallet,.What is History? University of Cambridge and Penguin Books, 1961. P.15

planning or projecting for the future. In other words, history is about yesterday, today and tomorrow. We study important development in human existence in the past for the development of today. Thus, historical records or accounts are presented in sequential, coherent, consistent and systematic order. Logical presentation is an important ingredient of history. Bias and prejudice are not allowed or encouraged.

The historian tries to present issues, incidents or events concerning people and places in their unbiased form. He tries to dig into important areas of interest. The historian goes beyond 'they said' and seeks to find out why and how it happened. An historian is not usually in a hurry. He takes time to evaluate the necessary information received. He compares and analyses the information and its sources so as to come up with a balanced and acceptable account. History is an account because it aims at balanced information of true places, people and events of the past. It cannot be fabricated to suit the interest of the writer or historian but seeks to represent the true past into present. History gives account of real names of people, places, time and incidents that actually took place at the recorded time. History, therefore, is a recreation of the true picture of important persons, places, events of the past for the present and future generation.

Notwithstanding the forgoing enunciated history value in meaning, unraveling the past as a subject matter of History is often underrated. It is predicated on the above stated stance, that Alagoa[4], perhaps maintained his deep rooted stance that the past may be dead but cannot be buried. He posit thus:

> 'There are some people who are willing to act as undertakers and wish to see the past disposed of for good. There are others who have made it their business to see that the past does not completely disappear from our consciousness. I am pleased to count myself among this latter group. But for the majority of people everywhere, the past merely lives on in their present without any special effort or attention. For most people, the past is not a subject of special notice or interest because it is already such a normal fact of life in the present. The continued life of the past in the present is taken so much for granted that most people might even deny the fact of its relevance or significance for today. On the other hand, certain individuals or even entire communities could come to base claims to present status on the past achievements of their ancestors. Such persons would then form an exaggerated regard for the past must be condemned by those who wish to see the past buried, as well as by those who wish to see the best of the past live in the present'.

[4] Alagoa E.J. " The python's eye: The past in the living present." An inaugural lecture series, no. 1; ISSN: 1119-9849, University of Port Harcourt Press, 1979. pp.1-2

Thus, it is unarguable as it is observable that some people are actually opponents of history as could be gleaned from the foregoing consideration. Nonetheless, the reason behind why some persons oppose history and lessons of the past raises probing question with regard to why responsible thinking people should wish the past dead and buried. The major objections to history as stated by Alagoa have been stated very well by the seventeenth century French philosopher and scientist, Rene Descartes (1596-1650):

> 'To live with men of an earlier age is like traveling in foreign lands. It is useful to know something of the manners of other peoples in order to judge more impartially of our own, and not despise and ridicule whatever differs from them, like men who have never been outside their native country. But those who travel too long end by being strangers in their own homes, and those who study too curiously the actions of antiquity are ignorant of what is done among ourselves today. Moreover, these narratives tell us of things which cannot have happened as if they had really taken place, and thus invite us to attempt what is beyond our powers or to hope for what is beyond our powers or to hope for what is beyond our fate. And even histories, true though they be, and neither exaggerating nor altering the value of things, omit circumstances of a meaner and less dignified kind in order to become more worthy of a reader's attention – hence the things which they describe never happened exactly as they describe them, and men who try to madness of romantic paladins and meditate hyperbolical deeds'[5].

One cannot agree less with Alagoa as this statement till today still contains three main issues that continue to be raised by historians themselves and problems that they cannot yet say they have solved to the satisfaction of themselves and problems or of their critics.

First, is the criticism or accusation of historical escapism. That is, that historian's lose themselves in the past and become ignorant of the present. Second, is that of historical pyrrhonism. That is, the problem historians face of falling into a state of total doubt of skepticism concerning the validity of their accounts of the past. It is to this extent, considering the foregoing explanations that it is well said that Historians need to show that historical methodology is able to produce accounts of what really happened in the past.

It is in the light of the foregoing, that he maintained a plausible stance that the problem of historical knowledge requires some consideration. Is it possible for historians to know what happened in the past?

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[5] Alagoa E.J. " The python's eye: The past in the living present." An inaugural lecture series, no. 1; ISSN: 1119-9849, University of Port Harcourt Press, 1979. pp.2-3

To answer this question, we may have to ask the further question, how do historians operate in their search for knowledge of the past? Like other scholars, historians become active when they develop curiosity about something. Such curiosity should lead to the formulation of questions to which answers have to be found. The enquiry or search for answers takes the form of a study of documents, which are the evidence of past human activity. Historical documents or evidence appear to the historian in a wide variety of forms. They may appear as written information on paper, papyrus, tablets of clay, on monuments, or even rock.

In Africa, the most significant documents may come to the historian in the form of oral literature or tradition, in intangible ethnographic practices and customs of communities, in the languages spoken by present populations, or in material objects such as artifacts from archaeological excavations or implements used in daily life or ritual. It is from his documents that the historian makes inferences, draws conclusions, and reconstructs or reconstitutes the past.

To the historian then, the product of his inferences from and interpretation of the documents from the past constitutes knowledge of the past. It constitutes knowledge in two senses. First, the evidence of the documents satisfies every reasonable person concerning the reality of the actions or events referred to. Accordingly, where the inferences made from the evidence are such as are compelling and convincing to the majority of historians presented with the same evidence, it is acceptable as knowledge of the past. Secondly, because the historian brings one piece of evidence into confrontation with another, and subjects each one to rigorous examination, he is able to obtain knowledge that is not immediately obvious as contained in any one of the pieces of evidence. It is in this sense that historical knowledge may claim to possess a certain amount of autonomy. In this second sense, the historian as Alagoa opined may be said to make history or create new knowledge, not merely record the past or recount it[6].

However anyone may think about the usefulness of history most people will, however, agree that history is the study of the past. In fact, historians are a bit like detectives - using evidence to find out what happened and why. This is not an easy job. You must be able to recognise evidence, decide how useful it is and come to conclusions based on what you have found out.

However, in simple but compound definition, 'History' as a subject matter can be best described as an account of what actually happened in the past which has a link to what is happening at present and can help in planning or projecting for the future. In other words, history is about yesterday, today and tomorrow. Thus, one could safely assert that we study important development in human existence in the past for the development of today.

[6] Alagoa E.J. " The python's eye: The past in the living present." An inaugural lecture series, no. 1; ISSN: 1119-9849, University of Port Harcourt Press, 1979. P.7

In a seeming corroborating stance, Professor Siyan Oyeweso[7] posited History as a biography of an issue, subject, peoples and events. According to him, there is the history of science, the history of money, the history of philosophy, the history of epistemology. There is even the history of religion (Oyeweso, 2006). Thus, a famous author wrote a book titled The Bible as a Story Book. All, whether Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Fulani, Bini or members of other ethnic groups, can trace our histories laced with myth. Yet we believe in the myth. A myth is not necessarily a lie. We, however, hold unto to the myth because it serves the purpose of giving meaning to our existence by conferring identity on us.

Oyeweso's idea of History is however built on the conviction that to understand a people, the historian must have a recourse to what happened in the past, why it happened and how it happened, not just through a systematic collation of beliefs and practices, but also through critical analysis of all other sources and branches of knowledge that are capable of serving historical ends and in this way, adopt a multidisciplinary approach and root explanation on the principle of causation.

It is in this direction, he had maintained that the tragedy of Nigeria is three-fold: a lack of knowledge of its history; a lack of understanding of that history and a lack of application of the examples and lessons of history. This he called the Unholy Trinity. A Trinity of ignorance packaged as knowledge, falsehood and rumour mongering that should attract intellectual contempt from the public in which the Nigerian elite are the guiltiest of the charge. They are educated, yet they have very little knowledge or understanding of Nigerian history and the lessons it handed down. Hence, rather than for history to serve an emancipative role for Nigerians it has become the original sin that is held liable for all of Nigeria's woes. Upon this sin lies the claim of "amalgamation of misfits", the "mistake of 1914" and so on. History is been blamed for a failed project and buffeted from all angles.

To this end, the Nigerian past is seen as a burden to all historians and students of society. A proper knowledge and understanding of that past is the only avenue of emancipating ourselves from it. Indeed, the past is the father of the present. They are forged organically and in an engaging and interlocking manner[8].

History is the study of the past, only to the extent that the past exists up to the last micro-second. The goal of historical scholarship is to make the present more comprehensible and the past not an unfathomable mirage. Thus, history is wedlock of the past, the present and the future.

[7] Oyeweso, Siyan, "'The undertakers, the python's eye and footsteps of the ant: The historian's burden." *22nd inauguration lecture.* Lagos State University, Ojo, Nigeria, 2006.
[8] Carr. Op.cit P.21

The nature of historical pathway?

It is pertinent to note that Historical records or accounts are presented in sequential, coherent, consistent and systematic order. Logical presentation is an important ingredient of history and bias and prejudice are not allowed or encouraged. The historian tries to present issues, incidents or events concerning people and places in their unbiased form. He tries to dig into important areas of interest. The historian goes beyond 'they said' and seeks to find out why and how it happened. A historian is not usually in a hurry. He takes time to evaluate the necessary information received. He compares and analyses the information and its sources so as to come up with a balanced and acceptable account.

History is an account because it aims at balanced information of true places, people and events of the past. It cannot be fabricated to suit the interest of the writer or historian but seeks to represent the true past into present. History gives account of real names of people, places, time and incidents that actually took place at the recorded time. History, therefore, is a recreation of the true picture of important persons, places, events of the past for the present and future generation.

As an academic discipline, History is the reconstruction, study and explanation of changes which humanity has undergone. It is an organised critical study of past activities of human beings that had produced significant effects on subsequent course of events. It is the study of past human activities at a particular place over a given period of time so as to record changes over time. It is the systematic study of the process, events or motion of events through the aid of records or sources.

Historians are chiefly interested in the past, whether remote or recent. The business of History is to find out what exactly happened, how it happened, when it happened and ultimately why it happened. On the whole, they are more interested in particular sequences of past events.

The subject matter of history is 'MAN', not as a biological unit but man in society (social man) who is susceptible to change. It is the changing activities of man over time that constitutes the transformation of societies. However, the central issue in History is CHANGE[9]. There would be no history, if there was no change. Thus history is about man and the society of the past the present and the future. It involves the study of all events that are related to humanity. It is a process of analyzing what man has done to the society and what the society has done to man in the past. It encompasses all aspects of life. It could be described as the package of the historian for the knowledge of the present. In traditional African

[9] Timothy J. LeCain, "The matter of History: How things create the past." Cambridge: University Press, 2017.
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pieties, history is an art that occurs as part of daily life which is re-enacted for the knowledge of younger generations. In other words, stories of peoples are rendered as part of history and they are narrated to the youth to give an idea of what the society and culture was in the past.

From the foregoing, it is unarguable that the central issue in History is CHANGE. The above statement is deeply rooted in the belief that the changing activities of man constitute the transformation of societies as is experienced in Nigeria. With regard to change, Isaac Newton (an early scientist) in his attempt at discussing the influence of unbalanced forces upon bodies, the motion of bodies and laws governing such motions stated that motion is caused by unbalanced forces. In this direction, Anyakoha[10], enunciated the Newtons laws of motion which states that every object continues in the state of rest or of uniform motion in a straight line unless acted upon by an external force.

From the foregoing, it is unarguable for instance that Nigeria history is replete with events, causes and effects of the activity of man which has significantly altered and transformed the country.

Sources of history

Sources of history simply put can be said to be sources of writing History. It then follows to point out that in order to have an accurate account of the past, the historian needs to consult various sources from which he can obtain facts and information regarding the past.

In his words Alagoa[11] posits that:

> "A historical source, or document is any material, in whatever shape, form or size, from the study, analysis or interpretation of which, knowledge of the past actions or events may be gained".

He further posits that historians are concerned with gaining knowledge of events and actions that occurred in the past. However, since such events and actions were no longer available for direct study, historians have to rely on information on any evidence from the past, concerning the past events or persons.

Thus, sources of History simply refer to all the materials or sources which directly reflect and explain Historical process and provide opportunity for us to

[10] Anyakoha, M.W. *Physics for Senior Secondary Schools (Based on the New NERDC Curriculum For Senior Secondary Schools).* Africana First Publishers PLC, Onisha, Nigeria., 2016.
[11] Alagoa, E.J. ." *Oral Tradition and History in Africa* (Kiabara) 1, no. 1 (1978).

study the past. They are the basis of any historical investigation. Overall, Historians depends on sources in order to understand historical events. Thus, we will direct our attention on two classifications of types of sources; which are – primary and secondary sources.

Primary source:

This simply points at sources created by a witness to or participant in an event. In order words, it x-rays sources that have to do with an eye witness account or account of a direct witness. They can be firsthand testimony or evidence created during the time period that you are studying. Also, Primary sources can be said to contain materials or information which is the direct experience or original thought of the writer or the person giving the writer the information he is recording.

In the light of the foregoing explanation, one can safely surmise that primary sources revolve around Oral tradition and testimonies. Hence, may include diaries, letters, government documents, photographs, poems, plays, drama and music. It however, depends on the content and form of these sources. That is to say, if they provide first-hand information of a participant in an event.

Oral Tradition: as a primary source

Oral traditions are testimonies of past events transmitted from one generation to another through the words of mouth. It can be said to be eye witness account. This source has hugely provided lots of materials in History[12]. It may take the form of Myths and legends, songs, folklores, proverbs and poems and so on as heighted above. Professor E.J. Alagoa one of the frontline indigeneous promoters of the use of oral tradition in historiography, sees oral tradition as information about the past which is transmitted orally through a chain, from person to person, in which a transmitter cannot claim to be the originator or the sole/only custodian of the information, neither can claim to be, an eyewitness. Though not an eyewitness, he is a vehicle of an information or evidence which itself is history[13]. In a seeming collaborative stance Enemugwem[14] asserts that Oral sources transmit information about the distant past from one person to another, in where festivals, language, ceremonies, poetry, folktales, proverbs, drumbeats, and music are recognized as the means of preserving the wisdom of the ancestors.

[12] Vansina, Jan. *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology.* (Translated from the French by H.M. Wright). Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1965.
[13] Alagoa, E.J. ." Oral Tradition and History in Africa (Kiabara) 1, no. 1 (1978).
[14] Enemugwem. J.H., "The Rhetoric of Oral Historiography ." (University of Port Harcourt, Kiabara) 9, no. 1 (2003).

The foregoing definitions and thoughts provoke the need of looking towards the direction of inquiring objectively into the philosophical and theoretical grounds on which the acceptance and use of oral traditions are based. The efforts of the great scholars cited above strengthens the understanding and faith in the validity of oral tradition, as well as, its contribution to the general body of historical thought and practice. There is little doubt that oral tradition provides one route through which African historians can make an original contribution to international scholarship in the field of history. The hope also is that oral tradition is placed in a proper perspective in relations to other traditions of historiography.

Limitations of Oral tradition:

1. It is prone to loss of details:

One could infer that oral tradition is transmitted from generation to generation and thus a lot of details could be loss. This is because, it relies on the memory and that could be seen as an imperfect and unreliable store house of information.

2. It may be distorted:

Oral account in this direction is prone to been distorted. To this end, a historical narrative of a tradition or what happened may even represent the narrator's own view about an episode. Simply put, the chances of exaggeration and oppression are great.

3. Lacks a system of precise chronological dating:

As non- literate societies in Africa then largely lacked an effective system of chronology of dating because of late arrival of writing skills. It provided for a system of dating which was defective. Thus, there was no precise date. That explains why, one could always witness the use of such words such as 'once upon a time', and 'a long time ago' in periodising events.

4. There are elements of contradiction:

There are elements of contradiction in oral traditions. For instance, there is a myth of Oduduwa been the founder of Ile-Ife and the Youruba Culture. One tradition argues that Oduduwa descended from the sky during the time of creation, when Oludumare (the High God of the Yoruba) sent him and other emissaries to come and settle on earth. A second Tradition holds that Oduduwa led other children of his ancestor in a migration from the East. It was said that the killing of Lamurudu led to the migration to Ife.

Notwithstanding the foregoing limitations, it is important to emphasis that the collection and analysis of primary sources is central to historical studies.

Merits:

1. Indeed, Oral tradition has merits. It remains the oldest source of History and was useful in the reconstructing of Pre- Scientific History of societies.
2. With Oral tradition, historical truth could be established. For instance, despite the contradictions in the myth of Oduduwa, both tradition mentioned him as the leader of the Yoruba

Archaeology:

Succinctly put, Archaeology is the science through which we obtain information about that ancient past through the Artifacts they left behind[15]. This is an important source of History. In this book, it is hugely considered as a primary source for historian. The most important source for an archaeologist is an excavation site. Excavated Artifacts are taken to a laboratory where they are assigned absolute dates using a technique of calibrated Radio Carbon Dating.

Limitations of Archaeology:

1. One unique feature of Archaeology is that, it presents information on man's activities in the past and is typically concerned with the ways of life of an extinct population. Extinct in the sense that those about whom it supplies information are no longer living.
2. The fact should be stressed that a major weakness of this source is that it informs principally about the makers of objects but not from the makers themselves. Thus, its greatest shortcoming is that it produces limited account of the makers of tools and objects. It does not supply adequate information about the language spoken by the makers of such objects, their race- that is whether they are white or black and their socio-political organisation.
3. Also, there is a problem of interpreting what objects discovered were used for. For instance, if archaeological findings reveal the ruins of a magnificent building in the centre of a settlement, it is as the house of a chief or a gathering place or a market. In the light of the fore going, one interpretation may be as good as another. Thus, since statements, about the uses of tools and objects are not from the makers of such objects, we cannot be absolutely sure that those interpretations by archaeologist are perfectly correct.

[15] Thursthan, Shaw. *Archaelogy & Nigeria.* Ibadan: University Press, 1967.

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Merits of Archaeology as a source:

1. Archaeological discoveries have significantly helped in highlighting the fact that Africa does not lag behind in cultural attainment. It is from Archaeological works that will learn of great cultures of Nok, Benin, Ife, Igbo- Ukwu and so on in Nigeria. (These will be discussed in a subsequent chapter).
2. Archaeology has been a very useful ally of History in the area of dating. One method of dating as earlier mentioned is Carbon dating. Through this method, it is possible to determine when certain great culture existed. The dates, one must mention are not precise.
3. Also, it has helped to take care of what other sources have not been able to do. It has enriched our knowledge of Pre-History people and society.

Secondary sources:

Secondary sources are those sources of History that offers interpretation or commentary on primary sources. They include second hand accounts or analysis. When a historian consults books written by somebody or persons who was or were not eye-witness (es) to the incident he is referring to secondary sources of information. Secondary sources also refer to oral information given out by somebody or persons who was or were not privileged to have first-hand information on the event. Hence, like primary sources, secondary sources could be in oral or written form. Secondary sources are materials or works based on primary sources. Examples are written sources like books, journals, diary, newspapers, etc.

Limitations of Secondary Sources:

1. They are not evenly distributed in time and space. They are usually not relevant to Nigerian history before the coming of the Europeans. Some of the secondary accounts of Nigerian history by Europeans are sometimes biased. Some are written to suit political or racial interest and this error may be taken up by later generations as authentic truth.
2. Written sources can sometimes be corrupted in the process of preservation if proper care is not taken.
3. It can also be easily lost through destruction by fire, rain or insects if not properly preserved. Some people, like government officials, sometimes deliberately destroy documents.

Nonetheless, no single sources can adequately supply information on history. The sources work hand in hand.

Relevance of history

It is often said that history has taught us nothing, "people and governments have never learned anything from history or acted on principles deduced from it". G. F.W. Hegel[16], in particular, doubted its utility but many historians have categorically disputed that view.

The Russian historian, Klyuchevsky, for instance, writes:

> "History, say those who do not study it but only philosophise about it and therefore scorn it-Hegel-has never taught anyone anything".Even if that were true, it does not in the least apply to history as a science; flowers are not to blame that the blind do not see them. But it is not true; history teaches even those who do not study it; it teaches them a lesson for ignoring and disdaining it. Those who act without it, or in spite of it, always ultimately regret their attitude to it. As yet it teaches not how to live by it, but how to learn from it...." History is power; when it is good to people, they forget about it and ascribe their prosperity to themselves; when it becomes bad for them, they begin to feel its necessity and value it boons[17].

Should any one persist in saying that "the only lesson of history is that nobody learns from history"? The appropriate answer will be the one given by Emeritus Professor Isaac Adeagbo Akinjogbin: such a person is not just an ego (a stupid person) but an Omugo (a thoroughly stupid person who makes foolishness his constant delight[18]. Among the Yoruba, for instance, the lessons of history have somehow been preserved in writings, proverbs and aphorisms. Just as Oyeweso offered two examples, In Oyo history, Bashorun Gaha was a powerful, tyrannical and blood-sucking prime – minister who had the unenviable record of raising five Alafins to the throne, murdered four and was himself killed by the fifth. His corpse was later dismembered. In the aftermath of his death, the following saying became popular: Ronu iku Gaha ko se rere "Reflect upon Gaha's death and mend your ways". This is a specific and clear warning to all aspiring tyrants, usurpers, malevolent characters and dictators. History is indeed the graveyard of dictators. The thrust of the saying above is to underscore and emphasize the importance of good governance by rulers.

As earlier noted Alagoa examined History as the past in the living present. He argued thus:

> *The past may be dead, but we cannot bury it. There are some people who are willing to act as undertakers and wish to see*

[16] Hegel Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. (eds), *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History; Introduction: Reason in History.* Cambridge : University Press, 1975.
[17] Rakitov, Anatoly. *Historical knowledge.* Progress Publishers, 1982.
[18] Akinjogbin I. A, *History and Nation building* . Ile-Ife, Nigeria: University of Ife Press, 1977.

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> *the past disposed of for good. There are others who have made it their business to see that the past does not completely disappear from our consciousness*[19].

The above assertion by Professor E.J.Alagoa though of probing effect, goodly unravels why the past is important and further underscores why people may want the past buried. It irrevocably situates the relevance of History. As he opined, it is regrettable that for most people, the past is not a subject of special notice. In a seeming collaborative stance, Esedebe attempt to explain this puzzle is situated in the local perception, nature, methods and use of history. He posits thus:

> The generality of our compatriots believe that the study of history is a trivial pursuit, an expensive pastime which nations in embryo like Nigeria cannot afford to indulge in. So strong is the prejudice against the subject that many parents dissuade their children from reading it on the additional ground that it possesses few employment prospects. Even many an academic colleague who should know better is amazed that some of us are studying history. When we are not told in the words of Tolstoy "what an excellent thing history would be if only it were true", we are reminded that history is something that never happened, written by a man who was not there. When we are not rebuked for not letting by gones be by gones, we are persuaded to leave the dead past to bury its dead and face instead the present and the future over which we can exercise some influence however modest. What is fictitious, say some critics, may well be worthless. Even if a reconstruction of past happenings is possible, they further argue, there is no connection between such events on the one hand and the present and future possibilities on the other[20].

It is however clear that the past neither repeats itself nor creates a present exactly in its own image. Nonetheless, a knowledge or consciousness of the past produces in the individual and the community, a sense of perspective and certain wisdom in action. A proper level of historical consciousness provides an anchor for the community so that it does not get blown away by every wind of change. The past provides a standard for the present as well as a starting point for forward movement.

Also, a man walking along a path needs to keep his eyes to the ground; to watch his step. History in this direction provides the type of knowledge that guides

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[19] Alagoa Op.cit 1979

[20] Esedebe Olisanwuche Peter. ""REFLECTIONS ON HISTORY, NATION-BUILDING AND THE UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA." *An Inaugural delivered at the University of Nigeria.* Nsukka, 2003.

our step, it gives us the patience and the alertness derived from experience to deal with the problems of today. Thus, relevance of history as captured by Udochu et al[21] includes but not limited to introducing children to their heritage, implanting moral values, quickening the imagination of any individual, laying the foundation of a tolerant outlook, imparting a sense of human solidarity, gives pleasure and provides identity. The study of History as they further discussed is essential for good citizenship, equips the students with basic communication skills and promotes nation building and integration

Nonetheless, it is believed that the traditional conception for the justification of history is deeply rooted in the fact that History makes the unlearned and leaders in particular wise. It is believed that any country whose leaders are conversant with both their local and world history makes good leadership. Knowledge of historical facts has been used as a screening device in many societies. In Nigeria for instance, during senate screening for ministerial nominees, most questions thrown to the candidates are always historical questions such as recitation of the national anthem, the names of some of our past leaders, the number of local governments in the country etc. If Nigerian students/youths are to become great leaders of tomorrow, they should adhere to the teachings and admonitions of the 16th century political strategist, Niccolo Machiavelli who in a traditional sense of understanding of History advised that:

> The Prince (Nigerian leaders) should read history, studying the actions of eminent men to see how they conducted themselves during war and to discover their reasons for initiating war and to discover the reason for their victories or their defeats, so that they can avoid (defeat) and initiate (victories). Above all, they should read history so that they do what eminent leaders have done before them: taking as their model some historical figures who have been praised and honoured; and always keep their deeds and actions before them….Wise Prince (leaders) should observe these rules; they should never take things easy in times of peace, but should rather use peace time assiduously in order to be able to reap the fruits in time of adversity.[22]

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is unarguable that though History is seen by many as a boring subject matter, it is giving attention to. It is a study that is notoriously and incurably relevant to man and society and possesses more to study the meets the eye. A Spanish philosopher George Santayana is credited with the

[21] Udochu Eke, Atuonwu Chiedozie Ifeanyichukwu and Unya Ukpabi Ikenna. *Introduction to Nigeria History.* University of Port Harcourt Press., 2016 .
[22] Machiavell, N., & Bondanella, P. *The prince. .* Oxford : University Press, 2005.

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aphorism, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it". Thus, lessons from the past may not always wad off doom, but will definitely provide insights into the present and even the future.

One major trust of History that appreciates its value as deduced from foregoing discussion is that History by its nature as a subject matter pursues its own techniques to establish and interpret facts through sources. It deploys various sources such as primary and secondary sources methods of inquiry to interpret and reconstruct the past. Through this means, History offers an account of the past in such a delightful and insightful way that it presents a collective memory of a people to such an extent that it has a link with contemporary experiences of the people with implications for the future. Thus, providing answers to where people or man comes from with potential to unravel and explicate where they are heading to.

History is the basis of all subjects of study which fall under the category of Humanities and Social Sciences. It is often said to be the "queen" or "mother" of the social sciences. History is considered an indispensible subject in the complete education of man and it has been defined differently by different scholars. According to modern concept, history does not only contain the history of kings and queens, battles and generals, but also the communities and the societies are the subject of study of history as well. History is a unique subject possessing the potentialities of both science and art. As an enquiry after truth, history is a science and as a narrative account of the past, it is an art or a piece of literature.

History is a study of man. It is concerned with man in time and space. It explains the present in the light of the past. Continuity and coherence are the necessary requisites of history. The scope of history is vast; it is the story of man in relation to totality of his behavior. It starts with the past; makes present its sheet-anchor and points to the future.

The aims and objectives of teaching history have undergone changes with the shift in the philosophical thinking of the time and changes in the social and political practices. Determination of aims and objectives is necessary. Instructional objectives need to be clearly defined. The pupils should acquire knowledge, should develop specific understandings, attitudes, interests and appreciations, relevant to history.

History is valuable as a study in more ways than one. The values of teaching history disciplinary are to such extent that History as a subject matter of study is informative, educational, ethical, cultural, intellectual, political, nationalistic, internationalistic and vocational. Overall, as a subject matter that engages on an intellectual voyage of yesterday, today and tomorrow with meticulous technique of interpretation of evidence, ignoring the subject matter is at the peril of any individual, society or organization as the case may be.

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