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**THE PLACE OF HISTORY IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
THE CASE OF NIGERIA****Jonathan Oluropo Familugba (Ph.D)**Department of Arts Education,
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology,
Ikere Ekiti**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the place of history in National Development with particular reference to Nigeria as a country. The paper establishes the fact that every nation that desires to grow must be adequately informed about its history, and its origin, in order to be able to understand its present and chart a course for its future. The paper argues further that in spite of all the multi-dimensional problems confronting Nigeria such as, corruption, leadership problems. Infrastructural decay, ethnic diversity; sectarian killings that daily threaten our corporate existence as a nation, a lot could still be achieved in the area of nation – building if we are ready to learn from the past which is the subject matter of history. The paper also examines the significant roles played by Nigerian historians and their contributions to nation building. The paper concludes by recommending, among other things, that history as a discipline should be given a pride of place in our educational curriculum; and that there should be an adequate funding of historical research on the part of the Nigeria Government and Philanthropists.

Keywords: History, Nation building, Development, Government, Nigeria

Introduction

The importance of History to man, the society, the nation and the world at large cannot be over-emphasised. Every nation that desires to grow must be adequately informed about its history, its origin, in order to be able to understand its present and chart a course for its future. Thomas Jefferson in the wake of the new nation

warned the Americans that “if a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be” (Ajayi, 2006: 1618). This succinctly describes the importance of History in the development of any nation. To remain ignorant of one’s history and at the same time be struggling to develop would make such an effort an illusion if not a mirage.

Sources and Methodology

The data for this study were made up of secondary sources which comprises of textbooks, journals, newspapers, magazines, and other literatures relevant to the subject. The research methodology employed in the analysis of data obtained is historical method which is a simple descriptive collation and analysis of data.

Definition of Terms

Goodlad (1968), in the New Standard Encyclopaedia describes history as a record of past events, usually a written account of the development of human civilization arranged chronologically and including an explanation of how and why the events occurred. In the same vein, Collingwood (1973:9) considered history as a scientific research or enquiry which attempts to answer questions about the past human activities based on available evidence. He regarded history as self revelatory, meaning that ‘history exists in order to tell what man is by what man has done’

The philosophy of history is concerned neither with the past nor with the historian thought about the past but with the inquiry conducted by the historian and the series of past events into which he inquires, that the past which an historian investigated is not a dead past but a past which in some sense is still living in the present. Carr (1961) defines history as the continuous interaction between the present and an investigation of the past, it is not the past itself, for, history as a complete and fully accurate reconstruction of the past does not exist. He further argued that each historian in the process of reconstruction of the past is influenced by his cultural or ethnic background as well as his own values and prejudices. From the foregoing however, history could be regarded as the study of the past that helps us to have a better understanding of the present, with which to chart a course for the future.

Concept of National Development

Scholars have tried to define the concept of National Development in various ways. Thomas (2000) cited in Adu (2007) viewed development, first, as an all – encompassing change and not just an improvement in one aspect, but rather, a process where change and improvement is continuous, and that development is an historical process of social change in which societies are transformed over long period.

Hagen cited in Claude (1996:9) viewed the concept of development from another perspective. To him, development is synonymous to modernization. This School of thought posited an original state of backwardness or under-development, which to them was initially universal. They argued that all the countries that could be regarded as developed and industrialized today have at one time or the other gone through this stage of backwardness which they were able to overcome in the process of time.

Afigbo cited in Ikime (2006:144) identified five elements of Nation building as follows: (a) The territory, (b) The people, (c)The institutions and systems (e.g. family, economy, religion, law, socio-political system etc); (d) The technological baggage of the society (i.e. the tools and implements which assist in getting work done, (e) The ideas, ideologies. He posited that, the essence of nation building “is the search for collective identity which is co-extensive with the territorial boundaries of the nation – state; a collective identity, that can become the basis for consensus, solidarity and the shared acceptance of a patterned normative order” National development is a multi-faceted process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, responsibility, self-discipline and material well being, it involves all facets of human life both in terms of economic, social, cultural and technological.

National development has always been synonymous to progress. Nigeria just like other Nations has shown keen interest in her development and has devised various strategies for attaining it.

History and Nation Building

For a nation to experience growth and development, such a nation must be adequately informed and knowledgeable, about its history, its origin, and its source. This will enable her to better understand the present, and consequently be able to move forward. In other words, we must constantly remind ourselves of what has happened in the past, how these happening continue to influence present realities and what options are available for future planning.

Since development is the process of changing and becoming larger, stronger or advanced both history and National development could be regarded as a process which involves an analysis of the past, an understanding of the present and a conscious effort to shape the future.

History has been defined as a reconstruction of the past human experience and action. It however does not end there. It goes further to let us know why such events happened, so as to enable us learn from it. For instance, in the area of politics, history could investigate the reasons for the fall of a particular regime. The reason behind this activity is for the present or incumbent government to study the reasons why such regimes collapsed with the aim of avoiding such mistakes of the past and emulate exemplary virtues. This is exactly what national development is all about. Although history deals with a record of past achievements of societies, it provides the inspiration for human existence (Osokoya: 1996:11).

For any nation to develop, it has to know itself and understand its relationship not only with the past but equally with other societies and cultures. This assertion is in line with the words of “Cicero” who once said “Not to know what took place before you were born is to remain forever a child”. In the light of this, therefore, every nation that would grow needs to understand the present in the light of the past events and developments, for there is nothing in the present that cannot be better understood in the light of its historical context and antecedents. Nigeria, just like any other nation had shown keen interest in building a virile and politically stable nation. In an attempt to realize this objective, there are quite a lot of problems that has been identified as constituting a clog in the wheel of progressively achieving these objectives, and except those issues are clearly understood and sorted out, all efforts geared toward nation building would be a mirage.

Ake (1996:1) identified some factors that had impeded nation building efforts in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. These factors, among others include: Colonial legacy, ethnic pluralism, corruption on the part of leaders, poor planning and incompetent management. This assertion was corroborated by Ikime (2006:145) who identified two major factors as the reasons for our under-development both as a people and as a country, and these factors, to him could be traced to our history. The evil of slave trade was followed by that of colonialism. These two factors, combined to draw us behind in terms of development while other continents in the world such as Europe and Asia were busy with the task of building their nations industrially and technologically.

Another factor that has been identified as contributory to under-development of Nigeria as a nation is corruption in the leadership. The History of nation –states and civilization have clearly revealed that well-focused transparent, honest and visionary leaders have played strategic roles in the socio-economic, political and ideological transformation of their countries, thereby uplifting not only the living conditions of the citizenry through coherent policies, but transforming the destiny of their countries in the international system. Examples of such leaders were: Mahatma Gandhi of India, Winston Churchill in Britain, De Gaulle in France, and Abraham Lincoln in the United States of America (Abukakar, 2004; 152).

In spite of the adverse consequences of colonialism and neo-colonialist repression and deprivation of African people, history revealed that the continent equally had its own crop of leaders who were committed to

democratic values, human right and justice. Leaders like Kwame Nkruma of Ghana, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Gamel Abdul Nasser of Egypt and late Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. These were leaders who through diverse policies initiated the process of national rebirth in their countries that led to the fundamental transformation of their nation state. However, this is not to say that these statesmen were entirely flawless in the conduct of state affairs, or that their policies were perfect. The point to note is that visionary, honest and transparent leaders, though, might not be the exclusive makers of historical processes; are essential personalities in the historical development of their respective states. If our leaders would be humble enough to study the history of such renowned statements and learn from their success, and failure, the task of nation – building would be achieved to a meaningful level.

The issue of Ethnicity

Rakov (1992) sees ethnicity as “a group of people having a common language and cultural value” Odinukaeze (2014), Bello (2013) and Ngele (n.d) all agreed that ethnicity served as the bane of development in Nigeria. There are three major ethnic groups in Nigeria – The Hausa/Fulani, The Yoruba and Igbo – apart from these major ethnic groups, there are more than four hundred and fifty smaller ethnic groups and 529 languages in Nigeria out of which seven has gone into extinction. Out of the existing languages, 21 are institutional, 76 are developing, 357 are vigorous, 26 are in trouble while 42 are dying. Ethnologue, (2014), Nnoli considers language as the major parameter of identifying an ethnic group.

It should be pointed out however that ethnicity as we have it in Nigeria context today is a fact as well as a factor of history. Prior to colonialism, we hardly refer to a linguistic grouping on account of the language they speak, neither does it make political sense to speak of the Igbo, the Esan, the Isoko, the Yoruba, the Efik, the Hausa. The reason for this was that these people do not act politically as such. For instance, the Yoruba of South Western Nigeria is made up of seven sub-groups – The Egba, Ekiti, Ife, Ijebu, Kabaa, Ondo, Oyo. From our knowledge of history, we are able to discover that the Yoruba never regarded themselves as one entity prior to colonialism as we have it today. In fact, there were wars and political rivalries among these sub groups. This is to show clearly that these people were not politically homogeneous, Ikime (2006:149). It was the colonialists that started making reference to our people on account of the language they speak such as the Igbo, the Hausa, and the Yoruba. It was after the creation of the Nigerian state that these various linguistic groups began to see themselves as one, on account of their common language, culture and belief. There is the call now, to all, irrespective of their ethnic background, to be loyal and see themselves first and foremost as a Nigerian, before any ethnic consideration.

However, it is pertinent to note that, for Nigeria to overcome the problem of ethnicity and achieve results in respect of national integration, Nigeria must design deliberate strategies that would be acceptable to both majority and minority ethnic groupings. For an individual to relinquish his ethnic identity for that of Nigerian nation, the Nigerian government must be faithful to the implementation of all the strategies geared towards achieving national integration. Those strategies such as the establishment of Federal Character Commission should be strictly adhered to and be transparently and faithfully executed.

It should further be pointed out that in spite of the ethnic diversity of Nigerian state; a lot can still be achieved in the area of nation building, if we would learn from history. The so called developed countries today were not all politically homogeneous. Countries such as China, Russia, and United States of America were all composed of multi-ethnic groups. They were able to overcome these problems as a result of their sincerity of purpose and faithfulness on the part of their leaders to develop their nation. Our government should engage the effort of historians, who should study the history of these developed countries and how they were able to overcome the problems of ethnicity. Lessons learnt should be used to formulate policies and design better strategies towards the attainment of nation building.

In furtherance of the task of nation building, the role of historians can also not be over-emphasised. The likes of K.O. Dike, S.O. Biobaku, J.F. Ade Ajayi, who in their astuteness, challenged the Euro-centric view of the European scholars who want to make us believe that Africa have no history prior to colonialism. They vehemently wrote to counter the negative views about African history by focusing on aspects of our past which our white detractors had deliberately ignored. Through this medium, they were able to re-discover our identity as a people, gave us a new pride in ourselves, gave us a new personality and provided the intellectual backing that served as an impetus to the nationalist movement (Kime 2006:143).

Coupled with the problem of ethnicity pointed out earlier is the evil of corruption which had done incalculable damage to the task of Nation-building. The problem had given Nigeria a very bad image not only within but also outside the country. Every average Nigerian is seen as a fraudster or corrupt individual who could not be trusted. This was however one of the factors that informed the “rebranding” effort of the Federal Government. A lot could be achieved in this regard if we could go back to our history to unravel those ideals, values of honesty, transparency and good morals which were the hall mark of our forefathers, which had meaning for our people, and build our re-branding efforts on such ideals.

As a discipline, History to a very large extent could also be used as an effective tool for human resource development which in turn translates to all round development of the nation. First, history tries to enable students to understand the world we live in. Secondly, it attempts to widen pupils experience through the study of people at different times and places. Thirdly, history develops the ability in students to think critically and make judgements (Osokoya 2002:96).

In the same vein, Adaralegbe (1976) classifies the objectives of historical education into three, namely:

1. It assists students in comprehending their experiences thereby making life more meaningful.
2. It enables students to participate effectively in and contribute actively to the dynamic life of their societies.
3. It enables students to acquire the analytical ideas for solving their personal and interpersonal problems.

From the various benefits of historical education highlighted above, it could be said that the teaching of history as a subject in Nigerian schools is indispensable. It serves as a veritable tool in preparing the future leaders for the greater task of nation building, this is due to the fact that history enables bewildered men to think about their relationship with the past and which enables them bear the uncertain future with greater ease.

Furthermore, the language we utter almost on daily basis reflects the unique pre-occupation of various categories of people with history at all times. Politicians during electioneering campaigns, political leaders, writers, and people in everyday life commonly use such expressions like “history teaches us” “history proves” “history will show” “history is on our side”. This common reference to history is a pointer to the relevance and the importance of history in human life and the development of any nation.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

History both as a process and as a discipline has been identified as a powerful tool for national development. It has been pointed out that national development encompasses social and political development, and that history as a discipline has a lot to offer more than any other subject; for it is when there is political stability that the environment will be made conducive for economic growth and investment. Through history, Nigerian could evolve a political culture that would enhance stable polity. We need to constantly remind ourselves of what has happened in the past, how these happenings continue to influence present realities and what options are available for future planning. The student of history should be made more dynamic, and the study of the subject should be accorded more dignity, honour and respect. The government should make the study of history compulsory at the secondary school level. This will make it possible for every Nigerian citizen who

ever passes through the secondary school to be acquainted with the basic knowledge of Nigerian history, and which would eventually make them better leaders in future. There should be an adequate funding of historical research on the part of Nigerian Government and Non-governmental organizations. Historians should be adequately involved in the task of policy making in order to enhance the usage of their wealth of experience towards achieving the goal of National – Building.

The Government and the entire citizenry should endeavour to make use of lessons learnt from history, for it is only when we are prepared to learn from the past, that we could overcome the multi-dimensional problems that daily threaten our corporate existence as a Nation.

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