

ATTAINMENT OF OBJECTIVITY IN HISTORY: THE VEHICLE TO NATIONAL UNITY AND NATION BUILDING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Attainment of objectivity in history: The vehicle to national unity and nation building in Nigeria is an attempt to highlight the efficacy of writing history the way they are without prejudice or bias which enhances national unity and nation building. Considering the fact that, coherent continuity in any relationship is built upon the foundation of trust and trust is guaranteed by fact, is a clear indication that, attainment of objectivity in history will close the gap of suspicion among different tribes in Nigeria, hence truth is presented at the highest table of discourse. This paper emphasizes the need for objectivity in historiography for the attainment of a true national unity and nation building in Nigeria. It contends that, attainment of national unity and nation building has posed an intractable challenge to the country. This is notwithstanding her possession of abundant natural and human resources. The paper further argued that, successive governments in Nigeria have become victim of the challenge because of unprofessional/unskilled writers and some government correspondence accounting of historical work in an inaccurate way which facilitates disunity and unproductiveness among Nigerians. With the use of qualitative method of secondary and primary sources, the paper submitted that, in spite of the difficulties associated with objectivity in history, the study revealed that, objectivity could be achieved with the application of prescribed steps that would become a catalyst to national unity and nation building in Nigeria.

Keywords: History, Objectivity, Unity, Nation building.

Introduction

This paper examines the issue of objectivity in history and its impact to national unity and nation building in Nigeria. It recognizes the fact that objectivity is difficult to achieve in historical writing because of the nature of historical knowledge that include issues of religion, politics, etc., which are principally less scientific in nature. Also, the historian himself is simply human and as such finds it difficult to

divorce himself completely from the object of his study which is the activities of man like himself who lived in the past. Thus, the need to draw the attention of historians on the subject matter of historical objectivity is now necessary. This is because, a lot of historical write up are devoid of objectivity and in many instances, history is written without regards to professional ethics which in turn create chaos, disunity and an uneven development.

The paper is not only limited to professional historians and non-professional historians but also to students of history and the reading public of certain characteristics which would help them to differentiate between history and propaganda and which would also serve as a guide, especially to History students who are required to write an original project as an important requirement to enable them graduate, (Onwuzirike:2004). The study also has an additional importance to liberate historians and students of history from erroneous impression that whatever history that is written down is very authentic especially when it is written by a colonial officer. It will make historians look at any historical write up with critical attention and in the words of Ekechi F. (1982.5), “Any monograph written by an anthropologist (or ethno historian of external extraction especially in the colonial days), on a particular tribe and accessible to its illiterate members becomes the tribal Bible, the charter of its traditional history and culture”. This is so because the illiterate members of such tribes were not well informed on the issue of objectivity and bias hence, they accepted the write up adumbrated by most European writers of early colonial period. The point to make here is that, in spite of the difficulties associated with reconstruction of the past by historians yet, the study revealed that objectivity is attainable in history and goes on to prescribe the steps that a historian would take in order to achieve objectivity in the writing of history and hence objectivity is achieved, the distorted relationship that exist among individuals, groups, nations, states, etc., that create room for disunity and uneven development would be ameliorated.

The Concept of Objectivity in History

Historical objectivity stands for what is true and the real. It implies the state of being free from personal bias and sentimental approach and the state of not being one sided, personal and partial. According to Oyewale, P. O (2014) ..., facts are meaningless without interpretation or judgement. Therefore, objectivity in history means a state of having a comprehensive, systematic record of past events as they actually happened. Objectivity in history holds the belief that historical writing should be based on solid facts alone. In other words, it refers to the ability of historian to stand outside of himself and view things in a detached rational manner. It is also referred to as, “respect for the truth” (Fadeiye, 2004). Thus, in interpreting historical facts, respect for the truth therein is that, the historian must play down his sentiments and emotions. He must respect his evidences by not suppressing or deliberately twisting them to suit any selfish purpose (Joyce, 1982). What it implies is that, the historian should avoid looking at past events with the eyes of the present as well as

demonstrating high sense of intellectual integrity and honesty in his work.

Admittedly, there are several theories of objectivity in history such as, the Skeptical Theory, the Positivist Theory, the Perspectivist Theory, etc. all boil down to the measurement of attaining to solid objectivity in history and arguments therein which is tailored to academic discourse on attainment of objectivity in history. However, there are some opinions and writers who are of the view that objectivity in history is not attainable while scholars such as E. H. Carr, insisted that objectivity in history is attainable when historians presented their facts and interpreted it without sentiments and bias. He posited by saying that, “the function of the historian is neither to love the past nor to emancipate himself from the past, but to master and understand it as the key to the understanding of the present” (Carr, 1961). Therefore, in order not to lose focus from the philosophy of the work which centered in finding the relevance of objectivity in history to national unity and development and not basically to investigate deeply on various arguments on the nature of objectivity in history, the researcher wish thus, state briefly the nature of history by focusing on the meaning of history to enable for easy understanding of the work. Having gone so far in exposing the concept of objectivity in history which we summarily said to be a situation whereby a historian does not allow his emotion to affect his presentation or interpretation of the object of study.

The Concept of History

The essence of working on the meaning of history is to show case the relevance of history to national unity and development and use it to buttress that attainment of objectivity in history is truly the vehicle to national unity and development. History which is the subject matter of historiography has not yet got any universally and eternally accepted definition. E. H. Carr defined history as a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, and unending dialogue between the present and the past. Little wonder Oluwaseun, P. O, (2014), stated that ..., history may also be tentative in the sense that discovery of fresh evidence may affect historical reconstruction and therefore the result is a re-evaluation of a previous objective account. Considering this, it is crystal clear why each generation re-writes and re-interprets its history. Huizinga, J. (1936) defined history as the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past. Marwick, A. (1970) defined history as follows: firstly, it connotes the entire human past as it actually happened; secondly, it connotes man's attempt to describe and interpret that past and thirdly, that history is a systematic study of the past. Thus, having laid down briefly the definition of history, it is important at this juncture to state categorically that history connotes in its entirety every aspect of man and his environment and as such, requires a true account of such event in order to use the study as a parameter for national development as well as fostering unity among different peoples and Nigeria in particular.

Consequently, no group, nation, state or even individual would like to see their

historical account distorted in such a manner as it is not properly contained. To the person or group, it is a slap on their integrity and a total misrepresentation of their foundation which the aftermath is total disunity and lack of development. This is true because, you won't talk of any meaningful development in a situation where people's identity is falsely presented and in that case no unity. Therefore, writing history without bias, sentiments, attachment of emotion, prejudice etc., which is captured as objectivity in history would not only bring Nigeria on the part of unity but attract development because people have seen the truth about their existence. For instance, in a situation of distorted colonial history of Nigeria where the production of cocoa was attributed to the Northern Nigeria, the production of groundnut attributed to Eastern part of Nigeria and the production of palm oil attributed to the Western part of Nigeria will not only be seen as a threat to the national unity but also affects level of development as each party would demand for a re-write or absolute correction of the write-up.

Historical Objectivity: Road to National Unity and Development in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi-faceted and heterogeneous society that requires authenticity in their national account. Indeed, authenticity requires accuracy in any form of official dealings particularly in areas of socio-economic and political matters especially in a country such as Nigeria that is surrounded with many ethnic groups. Thus, one of the major reasons for disunity and lack of nation building in Nigeria is as a result of historical account that was based on false foundation. Admittedly, Nigeria is blessed with abundant human and natural resources, yet there is evidence of disunity and backwardness as captured by Ifeanchio and Nwagwu (2009) who stated that, Nigeria's effort at achieving national unity...has remained largely unrealized. In fact, there is every reason to prove that Nigeria is experiencing baffling multiplicity of crises since achievement of political independence in 1960. The election and census crises of 1960-1966, the coup and counter coup of 1966, Nigeria-Biafra civil war of 1967-1970, ethnic agitations, problems of resource control in Nigeria, terrorist act from different quarters in Nigeria, mass killing of innocent people, constant post-election petitions, etc., were in one way or the other connected with lack of historical objectivity of Nigeria history. Emeghara E. (2014), rightly opined that, "what principally accounts for this unsavoury state of affairs is the inability of government, past and present, to employ the resources of history as a strong unifying factor in ensuring a true national unity and integration". The resources of history as stated by Emeghara is purely and squarely objectivity in Nigeria's historical account.

For instance, the 1966 revolutionary coup was wrongly captioned, "Igbo Coup" simply because, most Eastern Nigeria politicians as at then was not killed in the coup such as Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dr. Micheal Okpara, etc., while the coup took the life of Sir Tafawa Belewa, Ahmadu Bello, etc. These sectional killings as tagged by some writers were as a result of circumstantial action which was beyond the organizational structure of the revolutionist. Thus, considering the controversy surrounding the 1966 revolution, it becomes necessary to identify its commanders and leaders which

according to nairaland.com were (1). Adewale Ademoyega-Yoruba (2). Kaduna Nzeogwu-Delta Igbo (3). Adeleke G-Yoruba (4). Fola Oyewole-Yoruba (5). Emmanuel Ifeajuna-Delta Igbo (6). Tijani Kastina-Hausa (7). Gibson jalo-Niger Delta and (8). Olafemiyan O.-Yoruba. The truth is that, it is not Igbo coup, the problem is that, the Igbos who should have been killed were not killed even though some of them were killed. Indeed, there were other minor participants who contributed in one way or the other to the revolution but were not the commanders of the coup. Therefore, the weight of any group is measured by the strength of its leaders and by extension ascertains the way and manner as well as when and who started the group. According to (Adewale, 1981, 55) one of the major participants of 1966 revolutionary coup in his work, *Why We Struck*:

Stated that, today, if one were to ask “When did the preparation for the revolution really begin?”, the most accurate answer would be, “from 1961”, because the three of us who formed the nucleus of the revolutionary group had met in that year. Although we had not there and then planned a revolution, we had seen eye to eye and we knew that we had a common cause. It was as if the seed was sown at that time and only needed time to germinate, grow and bear fruit. But these meetings were between Ifeajuna and me on the one hand, and between Nzeogwu and me on the other. This pattern remained almost the same throughout.

To this point, following by what Adewale captured in his work as stated above, it ordinarily implies that, he was the arrow head behind the formation of 1966 coup having been at the middle of Ifeajuna and Nzeogwu. Secondly, if you go by the numbers of the leaders in the coup, you observe that it was only two (2) Igbos, four (4) Yorubas, one (1) Hausa and one (1) Niger Delta that were leaders in the coup. The question is that, when did two (2) became greater than four (4)? Honestly, this is a case of when a lie is told repeatedly people will start to accept it as the truth. The point to make here is that, the distorted history of 1966 coup led to the counter coup of 1966 thereby sowing the seed of continued discord among different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. To put things straight, most writers of 1966 coup did not employ objectivity in the construction of what transpired during the time under review, hence, disunity and uneven nation building became the order of the day.

Again, as rightly captured by Agbodike C. C. (2004) about some European writers whose contention was that Africa had no history worthy of studying or writing about before the advent of Europeans in the area largely because documentary history was almost non-existent among preliterate Africans and that amount to distorted history on the part of Africa and Nigeria in particular. The proponent of such view is

Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper, Professor A.P. Newton, Sir Reginald Coupland, etc., to them history only begins when men take to writing. However, research has proven the above contention to be wrong, [Nigeria] has not only a past but a rich socio-cultural heritage and that the study of the people's past is not only possible but is also useful and indispensable. To this point, the assertion that, Africa and Nigeria in particular had no history before the coming of Europeans is a misrepresentation of history and should be seen as baseless and historical fallacy.

Conclusion

The work concluded by saying that, national disunity and lack of nation building on the part of Nigeria has its root to the lack of objectivity in most Nigeria history and should be shun in its entirety in order to make a head-way. As rightly said by (Adewale, 1981, 21). that, "the safety valves of the nation [Nigeria] were reposed in such institutions as the courts, the Census Commission, the Electoral Commission, the Police and finally the Armed Forces. But the sanctity of those institutions was being politically assailed, assaulted and dragged in the mud, so that...the ship of the nation was heading for the rocks". This is true because, Nigeria as at then would have seized to exist or become a divided nation if not the intervention of the 1966 revolutionary group, yet, few historical fallacies saw the action as sectional/regional excise whereas it was a national excise meant for the unity and development of Nigeria. Therefore, it is not proper that distorted and biased account of 1966 revolutionary coup be referenced or tagged Igbo coup as captured in nairaland .com whereas the coup was a national act with clear intention to ameliorate corruption in Nigeria's socio-economic and political face without consideration to tribal sentiment. Historical scholarship accounted by (Falola, et al, 1989,2) opined that, "a long historical view not only helps us to keep calm in time of trouble but also reminds us that there is an end to the longest tunnel. Even if we can see no hope ahead, a historical interest as to what will happen is a help in carrying on".

Admittedly, the attainment of objectivity in history is not a tea-cup-party but the combination of respect for basic documented facts, sufficient scrutiny of sources, and restrained creativity that does not distort the real story is what distinguishes good renderings of history from works of fiction, fabrication, falsehood and most importantly from mere write-up that is meant for propaganda and cheap popularity. Consequently, professional Body such as Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN) should as a matter of urgency stipulate procedures to checkmate the excesses of lack of historical objectivity and if possible, sponsor it as a bill at the National Assembly indicating grounds for professionalism in historical writing. Moreso, the construction/writing of socio-economic and political history of any group or Nigeria as a country by non-professionals should involve at least one or two professional Historians, hence they are acquainted with the culture of objectivity in historical writing.

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