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TRENDS IN HISTORIOGRAPHY OF NIGERIA

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Introduction

Evidently, historiography has transcended the literal understanding of historiography being the art and process of writing history as well as the study of written histories alone. Contemporarily, the scope of historiography has been widened to cover the peculiarities of the societies that originally had no writing culture, like those of West Africa. Hence historiography can, additionally, be seen as the manner, technique, style and ways in which history is recorded, preserved and transmitted. This, particularly, has bearing with the non-literate societies of West Africa. Nigeria, as a country in West Africa, is the focus of this paper, viz. trends in historiography of Nigeria.

In Nigeria, especially, in non-literate societies, history is recorded, preserved and transmitted through all traditions, such as proverbs, incantations, praise songs, myths, legends, poems, 'oriiki', dancing, worship,

Abstract

In the distant past, historiography of Nigeria was seen as the exclusive preserve of the alien historians. But from the recent past to the present, historiography of Nigeria has had a different dimension. This paper examined the trends in historiography of Nigeria. Documentary research method was used for collecting data for the write-up. Thus, relevant textbooks, journals and periodicals were used. The paper is introduced by giving clarifications on the concept "historiography" and other associated things. The paper goes further by explaining other sub-topics such as African Islamic historiography of Nigeria, European/colonial historiography of Nigeria, socialist historiography of Nigeria, development of

Indigenous/modern African historiography of Nigeria and relevance of societal traditions to modern historiography. The paper is concluded based on its findings in a way of further deepening readers' understanding of the subject matter. The major finding is that historiography takes care of the events of the pre-literate societies via oral and archaeological evidences.

Keywords: Trends, historiography, African, Islamic, European, colonial, socialist, indigenous, modern, societal, traditions, pre-literate oral, and archaeological.

Religious ceremonies, rituals, royal ceremonies, traditional festivals, symbolic features etc. All these have a relevant place in historiography. Lamont (1998) has this to say:

Without doubt the most fascinating new type of study is the history of mentalities and ideologies. Neither of these words has the narrow political meaning attached to it. Instead, the meanings have been enlarged to suggest the ways in which cultures in a given period see and interpret their world. The history of mentalities is the study of the beliefs and the ways of seeing in a given culture. Ideology means something much broader than a political creed; it means the attitudes and values people hold.

In treating trends in historiography of Nigeria, attention is herein given to African Islamic historiography of Nigeria, European/ colonial historiography of Nigeria, socialist historiography of Nigeria, as well as the development of indigenous/modern African historiography of Nigeria, and the relevance of societal traditions to modern historiography.

African Islamic historiography of Nigeria

African Islamic historiography of Nigeria could not be divorced from the history of Islam in Nigeria, the former being a component part of the latter. Islam got to Nigeria from North Africa about the 11th century enroute Northern Nigeria. Consequent upon the wave of Islamization in Arabian land and the unfolding popularity of Islam in the world, the North African Arabs who were Muslims, and who acted as travellers, geographers, missionaries,

traders, scholars, etc. brought Islamic tradition alongside Islam to Nigeria, beginning with Kanem-Borno Empire. These strangers put down their own observations and the local traditional practices, using their own cultural and historical traditions as the basis of judgement. Alagoa (1983) says:

Only later did Nigerians acquire the skills (and feel the need) to record accounts of their own history using the tools and techniques of the outsiders.

It is worth-mentioning that, Ibn Battuta (1325-1354) and Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), both great North African historians wrote useful books on the kingdoms and empires of Western and Central Sudan, including Kanem-Borno and Hausa land, with the latter's work titled 'Kitab al- 'Ibar', having much influence on the general historiography of these places. However, it was Al-Hassan Ibn Mohammed Al-Wezaz Al-Fasi (1494-1552) called Leo African us in Rome, who first introduced the knowledge of these regions of Africa, gathered by North African Scholars to Europe (Brown, 1895) in (Alagoa, 1986).

Furthermore, the literary efforts of these North African Muslim scholars culminated in the emergence of local historians in Kanem-Borno and Hausa land, as well as in other places in Western and Central Sudan, who wrote different books about royal and general events. In Borno, Imam Ahmad Ibn Fartuwa wrote two books about the achievements and wars of the famous ruler of Kanem-Borno, Mai Idris Alooma (1569-1619). Another Borno historian, Muhammed Salih Ibn Isharku wrote account of the capital city of Ngazargamu in 1658. These scholars and others in these regions adopted the major Islamic historical literary form called chronicle, the famous of which was the Kano chronicle.

The most complete example of the assimilation of the Islamic tradition to the oral tradition would be works such as the 'song of Bagauda', where the Arabic script was used to compose in 'Ajami', a Hausa kinglist in verse (Hiskett, 1964-5) in Alagoa (1986). All the aforementioned African Islamic historiographers and others wrote historical accounts of the peoples, empires and kingdoms of those regions of Africa between the ninth and eighteenth centuries. When the Europeans came to Nigeria and other parts of West Africa, the writings of these African historians were found auspicious.

By the nineteenth century, the Islamic scholarship in Nigeria reached a great point with the emergence of the Sokoto caliphate. The caliph (Uthman dan Fodio), his brother Abdulahi, and son Muhammed Bello wrote a lot of books on the features of the Jihad, features of theocracy and the general teachings of Islam. Muhammed Al-Kanemi of Borno also contributed to Islamic scholarship in Nigeria during this period, especially through his Islamic writings.

European / Colonial historiography of Nigeria

The historical writings on Nigeria and Nigerians by aliens, specifically European historians exclusively typified the Western tradition and was grossly borne out of Eurocentric chauvinism and arrogance. This was the aggregate picture of the European and colonial historiography on Africa. Dr. C. O. O. Agboola has the following to say:

The writing of African history by non-Africans, specifically by Europeans, was pioneered by explorers, Christian missionaries, travellers, anthropologists, and ethnographers. The first European contact with Africa occurred probably during the mid-fourteenth century A. D. and it was started by explorers... It was from such contact that they wrote the earliest European accounts of Africa and the Africans, and those accounts by and large portrayed Africa as "the dark continent".

When these Europeans came to Nigeria in different categories, there were elements or features of writing culture in some parts of the country, especially, the Islamized North, and there was the 'Nsibidi writing' in some parts of South-eastern Nigeria particularly in the valley of the Cross River of Nigeria (Afigbo, 1973) in (Fadeiye, 1986).

But these Europeans lost track of the existence of these features of writing culture, and hence adopted the possession or non-possession of Western type of literacy as the basic distinguishing characteristic between civilized and uncivilized peoples of the world. Therefore, Nigeria as a whole was tagged uncivilized by these strangers, nay Africa. They went further to ascribe more derogatory and fallacious terms and features to Nigeria and the entire Africa, like "uncultured; barbarous; savage; no history, no past etc".

Moreover, it was on the impressions created by these pioneer explorers, Christian missionaries, travellers, anthropologists and ethnographers that the Eurocentric historiographers writing on Nigeria and Africa based their biased and unbalanced historical writings. Eurocentric and prejudiced writings and views about Nigeria and Africa, were harboured by Hegel (1830-1831), Arnold Toynbee (1947), Revor-Roper (1963) and Seligman (1930), an anthropologist and one of the proponents of the famous and controversial “Hamitic Hypothesis”. This hypothesis was borne out of Eurocentric monomania and absurdity. According to Alagoa (1986), Seligman postulated as follows:

Apart from the relatively late Semitic influence... the civilizations of Africa are the civilizations of the Hamites, its history the record of these peoples and of their interactions with the two other stocks, the Negro and the Bushman...

These Eurocentric historiographers gave, in their writings, a lot of misrepresentations, mis-information and unethical views about the peoples and states of Nigeria, May Africa during the pre-colonial and colonial periods.

Socialist historiography of Nigeria

In reality there is no socialist historiography of Nigeria. Because originally, the writings of Karl Marx, Lenin and their colleagues did not include Africa, believing that Africa was a dark continent, not in existence. Their ideological doctrines dealt with Europe and Asia. In actual fact, there are features of socialist ideology in Nigeria.

The ideas of people agitating for a total change of government so as to accommodate welfarist policies and programmes for the improvement of people and society can be classified under socialist historiography. Asking for a total replacement of capitalism is socialist ideology.

The ideas and writings of the likes of Mallam Aminu Kano, Bala Usman, Gani Fawehinmi, Wole Soyinka, etc. belong to the socialist historiography. Such people want a government with human face, a government that is highly people-centred. Bala Usman once opposed the teachings of the Ibadan School of History, saying that, they were not meant for a change to a welfarist government.

Development of Indigenous/Modern African historiography of Nigeria

Indigenous Nigerian historiography began with the historical accounts of non-professional Nigerian historians whose works in certain cases had the background of European tradition, and their beginning could date to the eighteenth century (Alagoa, 1983). The earliest surviving work of these non-professional writings is the 'Diary' of the Efik trader, Antera Duke; composed in Pidgin English in 1787. However, the famous early Nigerian work is the autobiography of the Igbo ex-slave, Olaudah Equiano published in England in 1789.

Furthermore, consequent upon the establishment of Christian mission schools from the mid-nineteenth century, a large number of the products of these schools became historians with literacy skills to record oral traditions and eye-witness happenings. Notable among these works were Samuel Johnson's 'the History of the Yorubas' published in 1921, Jacob Egbarevba's 'A Short History of Benin' published in 1934, William Moore's work on the Itsekiri published in 1936 and Akiga Sai's story of TIV Life published in 1939. Another group of educated Nigerians wrote works, to negate colonial propaganda, or as a confrontation to colonialism. For instance, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe wrote a book in 1937 to weaken the basis of colonialism, and Rev. Olumide Lucas wrote in 1948 to establish that the Yoruba descended directly from the ancient Egyptians, which had bearing with the traditions of origin that, the ancestors, Bayajiida of the Hausa, Kisra of the Borgu, Sayf ibn dhi Yazan of the Borno and Oduduwa of the Yoruba came from the holy places of Islam in the Middle East.

It should be noted, however that, all the aforementioned writers and authors, represented a class of non-professional historians in the indigenous contributions towards African historiography of Nigeria. After this period came the period of professional modern historiographers in their efforts to 'decolonize' Nigerian history in particular and African history in general. Mostly indigenous, members of this group were later joined by expatriates who have taught in Nigeria and who identified with their cause. This academic design and cause began at the university of Ibadan, with the duo of professors K. O. Dike and S. O. Biobaku laying the foundation of this academic revolution, thereby beginning the famous Ibadan school of History. This revolution later got diffused to many other Nigerian and African universities. Other protagonists of this historiographical revolution or the Ibadan School of

History, especially as pioneers, were professors J. F. Ade-Ajayi, E. J. Alagoa, E. A. Ayandele, A. E. Afigbo, O. Ikime and T. N. Tamuno (Lovejoy, 1983).

Those expatriate academics that were associated in one way or the other with this radical approach were M. Crowder, Abdullahi Smith, J. B. Webster, R. J. Gravin, Robert Smith and J. S. Omer-cooper. The first major revolutionary strides towards this Afrocentric cause were K. O. Dike's doctoral thesis for king's college, London titled "Trade and politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885" (1950) and S. O. Biobaku's doctoral thesis titled "The Egba and their Neighbours" (1951). Both works were unique and revolutionary in the sense that they employed Afrocentric approach to the study of their respective societies and delved greatly into the systematic and analytical use of oral sources to supplement archival documents to produce the works.

Furthermore, the appointment of the then Dr. (Later Professor) K. O. Dike as the first African Head of the Department of History at the then University College, Ibadan provided an auspicious atmosphere for the decisive take-off of the historiographical revolution, as he, through his new appointment, together with a group of professionally trained Nigerian historians in the department became highly committed to the survival of the academic revolution.

It should be noted however, that the ideological bedrock of this unique revolution was 'decolonization' of Nigerian history and African history through the extensive use of oral tradition and the application of interdisciplinary methods (Alagoa, 1983). K. O. Dike, S. O. Biobaku and others in the vanguard of the revolution, as well as a new generation of scholars trained under them were instrumental to the establishment of history departments at the then University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University (1962), the University of Lagos (1962), and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (1962), each produced her own variants of the Ibadan tradition, resulting in a nationalist school of historiography for the four centers. Obviously, the Ibadan school recognized, first, the need for additional source materials and second, the importance of an inter disciplinary approach.

More importantly, the professor K. O. Dike, first Nigerian Head of History Department and first president of the Historical society of Nigeria (founded in 1955), became the leading source of inspiration of this school of history. Dike and Biobaku, both of Ibadan played leadership role through their pioneering publications in 1956 and 1957 respectively. Dike was also

responsible for the establishment of the National Archives of Nigeria in 1954 to be harbouring all public records in Nigeria.

To add to the above, the major urge for the systematic study of oral tradition came from the projects for interdisciplinary study directed by Dike and Biobaku from 1956 (Alagoa, 1983). Although, both scholars recognized oral tradition as the major historical source it was deemed necessary to seek evidences from other sources and analytic skills from disciplines outside history for support. Indeed, research in oral tradition was conducted mainly by anthropologists rather than by professional historians in both Dike's "Benin scheme" and Biobaku's "Yoruba Scheme".

By and large, other pioneer members of this Ibadan school and those trained under them, have written several books and articles on Nigeria, West Africa and Africa, following the ideals of the historiographical revolution and the Afrocentric tradition. Such were Obaro Ikime's "the Groundwork of Nigerian History" (1980), "A Thousand years of West African History" edited by J. F. Ade-Ajayi and I. Espie (1965), "Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" edited by J. C. Anene and G. N. Brown (1966), and others were the works of Alagoa, Afigbo, Ayandele, Tamumo, Atanda, Akinjogbin, Oloruntimehin, etc.

Moreover, in the 1960's, research projects using oral traditions received necessary government support. It was believed that, historians were involved in the activities in line with the interests of the politicians in promoting the slogans of negritude and the African personality. Dike's concern with documenting the largest political system on the Guinea coast easily commanded support. In the same vein, Biobaku's implied object of tracing Yoruba ancestry to the ancient centers of civilization in the Nile valley and the middle East appealed to the first Nigerian government of Western Nigeria under Chief Obafemi Awolowo. As well, by 1966, a Northern Nigerian Research Scheme directed by Abdullahi Smith and Thurstan Shaw, and an Eastern Nigerian History Project directed by Dike and Anene, had also been initiated. The only new project carried out on internal funds in this period was the Rivers State Research Scheme begun by Alagoa in Ibadan in 1971. In the North, an Arewa House was founded in Kaduna at the instance of Abdullahi Smith for the collection of documents in Arabic and Hausa, and history bureaus were established in some new Northern states, the most prominent being the Sokoto State History Bureau. During this time, many other history-

oriented projects were undertaken by the historians across the country including works on Nigeria and states of the Nile valley, Zimbabwe, the West African Sudan, Guinea Coast, Congo Basin and East African Lake Region.

Moreso, the Historical society began in 1956 the publication of the 'Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria' aimed at a professional academic audience. In 1966, 'Tarikh' was added as a medium for communication with undergraduate students, school teachers, and the general lay public.

Evidently, the efforts of these modern African Historiographers could be said to have paid off in the commencement of the study of African History at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels at different universities and institutions in Asia, Latin America, Canada, the United States and Europe. For instance, African History is being taught at the school of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in Britain and at the center of West African Studies (CWAS) of the University of Birmingham (Adebayo-Oset, 1984).

However, the academic efforts and activities of the Ibadan History school later came under the axe of the critics. It has been argued that, the works of Dike and Biobaku of the mid-1950's did not study trade as economic history but as an important component of political history in the context of European commercial expansion. John Flint's study of the Royal Niger company reflects a similar development in scholarship; while Flint concentrated on the European factor rather than the African, his approach was as balanced as Dike's and Biobaku's (Lovejoy, 1983). Like the European and Western writers, in probing into the extension of Christianity to Nigeria, Ajayi and Ayandele placed their studies in the context of political and diplomatic history. Afigbo and others who gave an analysis of the colonial period followed this tradition.

Furthermore, Abdullahi Smith in (Lovejoy, 1983) is quoted as having written that:

The nationalism of the Ibadan school was bankrupt because it drew on the terrible corruption of Western society.

In the same vein, Yusuf Bala Usman, Smith's articulate student is quoted as having contended that:

African scholars must get down to creating a proper conceptual framework and not waste time trying to resurrect and revise

these dying systems of value and thought that derive from western studies of African societies.

In opposition to some salient features of the Ibadan History school, R. J. Gavin and E. J. Inikori, both were the most important scholars of Ibadan background who carried out research that was neither political nor diplomatic. There were writings of some other scholars which were not in consonance with the background tradition of the Ibadan school. Notwithstanding, the fact remains that, the Ibadan school contributed in no small measure to the development of modern and Afrocentric historiography. Evidently, some of their works revealed information such as unrest among the slave population, attacks on indigenous customs by the freed slaves & missionaries, & their participation in economic and political reforms (Oroge, 1971) in (Lovejoy, 1983).

Relevance of societal traditions to modern historiography

The cornerstone of this modern African historiography in the realm of professional historiography is the use of non-written sources as a recourse. The revolutionary African historiographers have carried out a lot of historical researches, using oral tradition and interdisciplinary approach. Dike and Biobaku's books became the models for the use of oral tradition and for the new African historiography. Others after them followed suit by making use of oral tradition in their researches and works. Such modern historiographers were Alagoa, Atanda, Ade-Ajayi, Akinjogbin, Afigbo, Smith, Oloruntimihein, Ayandele, Ikime, etc in their different works.

To establish the relevance of oral evidence and oral tradition to modern historiography, Atanda (1973) has this to say:

In so far as the illiterate majority kept any records of the events of the period, they did so in their memory... Oral evidence becomes a major source of finding out the views of these chiefs and their people... thus the majority of them were able to give eye witness accounts of the events narrated.

Contrary to the general belief being held that Mallam Alimi was one of the flag bearers of the Jihad of 1804, Ade-Ajayi (1956), through the use of oral tradition, gives another impression as follows:

In any case, Alimi had no official connection with the Fulbe Jihad. He did not arrive until the early 1820s and the Jihad had begun long since 1804. He also lacked an official appointment to act as a flag bearer...

Giving his comment on oral tradition as a source of historical writing, Vansina (1961) has this to say:

With all practitioners in the field, we can re-affirm that oral traditions are legitimate and valuable sources for the historical sources which admittedly are usually difficult to handle, but which can yield information about past events and past trends. They are indispensable if we hope to arrive at a genuine understanding of what happened in Africa.

On the whole, contemporary historical challenges have necessitated the use of all societal traditions as complementary to written and other sources if we are to have a balanced history of both literate and non-literate societies of the world and if history is to be taken by its dynamic. To this end, Handlin (1915) has this to say:

Everything made or recalled is evidence. Surviving objects and imprints on memory spread before the curious survey of the material for reconstructing the past whence they came... Questions of form or outward characteristics have received the greatest attention in the manuals of traditional historiography.

More importantly, modern historiographers have begun to realize the importance in history of the use of such societal traditions as those associated with proverbs, praise songs, legends, myths, incantations, 'oriiki', praise songs, poetry, dances and beats, palace features and royal ceremonies, traditional festivals, symbolic objects, tourist centers, worship, religious ceremonies and rituals, etc. Though some historians have reservations for the use of traditions, not all traditions can be manipulated or tampered with. Each source of information for the reconstruction of the historical past has its own short comings, its own advantages and disadvantages (Fadeiye, 1986).

Thus there are closed and open traditions. Closed traditions are those ones that are fixed in nature and cannot be manipulated or tampered with. Closed

traditions include 'Ifa' divination, rituals, worship, certain aspects of cognomens (oriiki), myths, incantations, etc. Open traditions are the traditions that are vulnerable to manipulations, distortions and deliberate falsifications. They include stories of creation, legends, songs and dances, proverbs, beats, etc. are liable to manipulations. Butterfield (1981) has this to say:

... But the minstrels and reciters would assemble such units into groups, producing for example a cycle of narratives clustered around the name of a single hero. When it occurs to somebody to string together a no of inventories of this kind, the result is a curious and anomalous beginning for what was to develop into historical writing.

Conclusion

The trends in historiography of Nigeria have indicated that the human society is highly dynamic, not static. Today, historiography has gone beyond merely the art and process of writing history and the study of written histories, as it involves the manner, styles and techniques of recording, preserving and transmitting history. Historiography of Nigeria has passed through different phases as shown above. However, the European/colonial historiographers were biased against Nigeria and Africa in their various writings on the history of Nigeria in particular and of Africa in general. Thanks to the revolutionary modern African historiographers whose writings have corrected and debunked the wrong impressions and fallacies about Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Also, unfolding archaeological evidences have helped to correct and debunk these wrong impressions and fallacies of the Europeans about Nigeria and Africa.

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