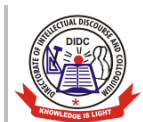


**THE ROLES OF AFRICAN HISTORIANS IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST
UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: A CASE OF NIGERIA****Yusuf Fatai, Oba Taiwo, Pandongari Sa`Eed, Musa Shehu****Department of History,
Federal University of Education Kontagora, Niger State
07069767886**DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14645119>**Abstract**

The role of African historians in national development has been greatly undermined in Africa, particularly Nigeria. It has almost been forgotten how African historians, played major roles in nationalist movement to fight underdevelopment in Africa. Today, however, in understanding the divergent devastating political, economy and socio-religious crises, leading to underdevelopment in Africa, particularly Nigeria, there is need for a fundamental necessity to understand the histories of the past. The discipline became operational ideology for African Nationalist as well as driving philosophy that molded the ideology of African leaders, indeed African historians continued to provide a veritable instrument for justifying nationalist government policies and programmes after political independence was won by most African countries in the 1960s, including Nigeria especially in the 1970s and 1980s, African historians provided the background for policies aim at removing the vestiges of colonialism and racism in the continent, especially in the area of acquiring technology that can help trigger development in Africa and get her out of this present state of underdevelopment. The paper adopts a historical research method to gather evidence from the past to establish facts or refute any hypothesis. Primary source and Secondary materials were assessed to make this work worthy. The study findings are that; history can help trigger development in Africa and get her out of the present state of underdevelopment and also conclude that, there is an urgent need for African historians to use history as a tool for the reconstruction of the present African society.

Keywords; African Historians, Nation Building, Underdevelopment, Racism.

INTRODUCTION

Every nation of the world is the product of history. It is history that gives a people, ethnic group, a nation its identity. For people and society to comprehend their situation in time and place, cope with present challenges and preside over the future, they need to have a sound idea of where they are coming from, where they are presently and where they hope to be in the future. For people and society seeking answers to questions germane to their present circumstances and future aspirations, the honest path is to befriend their past, which resides in history (Oyerammi, 2022). Unfortunately, European colonial historians and historical writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries believed that Africa was a dark continent and a historical tabula-rasa. One of such writer was Hegel, a German philosopher. When he was developing his philosophy of history in series of lecture in 1830-31, he gave only passing attention to Africa. He divided the people of the world into two □historical peoples who had contributed to the development of humanity, and non-historical people who had no hand in the development of mankind. It can then be understood that the nexus between history, underdevelopment and development remains inseparable seeing that man□s past activities are what led to the current state of the modern nation, either underdeveloped or developed (Oyerammi, 2019). For instance, in understanding the divergent devastating political and socio-religious crises including the Jos/Plateau crisis, the Ogoni and Niger Delta militant issues, Boko haram, Fulani/farmers clash, banditry among others, resulting to underdevelopment in Nigeria, there is need for a fundamental necessity to understand the histories of the past. This is the explanation given by historians on theory of causal (Oyerammi, 2022). For example, to buttress the importance of history in nation building and development in Nigeria, in 2016, the then President of Historical Society of Nigeria Professor Ogbogbo with his team made a case for history to be reintroduced as an independent subject into the basic and junior secondary schools in the country. This initiative was approved by the National Council on Education during its 61st ministerial session in

September 2016. In his remarks, the then Minister of State for Education, Prof. Anthony Anwukah, said a nation without history was a nation without future as it could not understand nor address the present situations. He said, in order to move the nation forward and make it play its catalyst role as instrument for human and national development; there was need for the reintroduction of history in schools. To accomplish this, his successor, Mallam Adamu Adamu, directed by Nigerian government, mandated schools all over Nigeria to teach history as a standalone subject as from 2019/2020 academic calendar because lesson learned from experience could aid in avoidance of mistakes, pitfall and catastrophes in future (NCE, 2016).

It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the unbreakable nexus between history and the process of development and the position of African historians, their tremendous contributions to nation building project and struggle against underdevelopment.

The Concept of African Historiography

African Historiography is a concept developed by African historians to correct the erroneous view and writing of Africa history by the Europeans who purposely distorted the image of Africa. It is a branch of historiography concerning the African continent, its people, economics, religion, social cultural life and variety of written and none written histories which has contributed to the development of the continent even before contact with Europeans (Usman, 2018).

The Concept of Underdevelopment

Taking underdevelopment from historical past, slavery played detrimental role in Africa's underdevelopment. It fostered ethnic fractionalisation; the large numbers of slaves were taken from areas that were the most underdeveloped. Research suggests that without the slave

trades, 72% of Africa income gap with the rest of the world would not exist today. African historians have documented the detrimental effects that the slave trade had on the institutions and structures of African societies. Historical evidence from case studies show how the slave trade caused political instability, weakened states, promoted political and social fragmentation, and resulted in a deterioration of domestic legal institutions (Nathaniel, 2008).

It is justifiable to say that, Underdevelopment is a manifestation of deplorable economic conditions. It is closely tied to dependency theory developed mostly by Neo-Marxist scholars to interpret lack of development in certain regions of the world. According to these scholars, underdevelopment is a natural outcome to interplay of the international capitalist economic system that rests basically on the notion that the development of one country in a system of dependency means the underdevelopment of others (Samir, 1985).

Underdevelopment rest on two principal foundations namely: the theory of monopoly capitalism and that of imperialism. The central thesis of these theories is that, the intercourse between the (rich) centre and the poor periphery countries always result in development of the centre at the expense of the periphery (Frank, 2000). However, in view of the current global occurrences and current historical record, it is unjust to continue to attribute underdevelopment in Africa to the effect of monopoly capitalism and imperialism. Currently, former colonies of European imperial expansion, apart from Africa have broken out of shackles of underdevelopment and have created strong structures in manufacturing, finance and technology. Indeed the Asian tigers, namely, South Korea, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Pakistan, Hong Kong, Taiwan on the other, and India, China, and Brazil are now dictating the pace of global economic growth. In Africa though the manifestation of underdevelopment can be traced to the period of imperialism, it is obvious

that a few challenges have made continuous acceptance of the structuralist definition of the concept questionable (Pavitt, 1995).

African Historiography and Struggle against Underdevelopment.

During the period of 1900-1940s African historiography was majorly Eurocentric i.e African history was written by interested European who nevertheless made contributions to the political realities, philosophical assumption and methodological approaches of the time. They only wanted to justify their presence in Africa. Most of their Africa historical knowledge was accounts of the colonial officials, explorers, missionaries, travellers and their missions was basically economic driven, which later resulted to underdevelopment of Africa. This type of historiography is characterized by the prejudice exhibited by these colonialists which is mostly based on their Eurocentric view about African history, (Bokunrawo, 2017). A few examples will expose Eurocentric approach to African history and underdevelopment during this period.

European colonial historians and historical writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries believed that Africa was a dark continent. One of such writer was G.W.F Hegel, a German philosopher. When he was developing his philosophy of history in series of lecture in 1830-31, he gave only passing attention to Africa. He divided the people of the world into two □historical peoples who had contributed to the development of humanity, and non-historical people who had no hand in the development of mankind. Africa was placed in the latter category. According to him, the history of the world travels from east to west, for Europe is absolutely the end of history, Asia the beginning□ (Adeoti, 2018). George Hegel, in his own view, Africa is no historical part of the world because it has no movement or development to exhibit. This condition is capable of no development or culture, and as we see them at this day such have always been. At this point we leave Africa, not even to be

mentioned again. For it is no historical part of the world, no movement or development to exhibit. Again, an oxford professor Hugh Trevor Roper says:

□Perhaps in the future, there will be some African history to teach.

But for present, there is none: there is only the history of Europeans

in Africa. The rest is darkness and darkness is not a subject matter of

history. We cannot therefore afford to amuse ourselves with the unrewarding

gyration of barbarous tribe in picturesque but irrelevant corners of

the globe □ (Daniel,2018).

The imperialist went further to established several baseless theories to support their mischievous reason for the colonisation of Africa continent. The pre-literate communities of Africa were considered as primitive and uncreative and could therefore not have made any significant contributions to the world civilization. In fact, any significant achievements in Africa before the European intervention like the great civilization of ancient Egypt and Ethiopia in North-East Africa, the Sudanic empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai, the great artistic break-through of ancient Ife, Nok Terracotta, Igbo Ukwu and the highly impressive stone structure of great Zimbabwe in the southern corner of Africa were ascribed to the mythical white men, the so called Hamites, who were supposed to have pioneered cultural development in Africa. This position was postulated as the Hamitic hypothesis or theory by Seligman in 1930. The theory maintains that Hamatic culture civilization were superior to those of black Africans, and that wherever there is evidence of cultural attainment in black Africa, be it in the state building, government, architecture and the crafts, the explanation is to be sought in the activities of the Hamites rather than the initiative of the Blackman

(Seligman,1966). This situation remained like this but not for long.

This gave rise to the development of modern African historiography.

African Historians Response to Racism an agent of underdevelopment

The above narration is a pointer to underdevelopment and this situation remained like this but not for long because it gave rise to the development of modern African historiographers, who make every effort to fight against the notion that Africa will never develop.

The above rhetoric□s were the propelling factors that necessitated the exigent needs for Africans to review and reinterpret the erroneous historical account of underdevelopment drafted by the Europeans and to accomplish this great task, African historians led by Nigerians, both nonprofessionals and professionals largely used African history to reshape and regain the lost glory of Africans. One cogent contribution of non-professional historians was the successful restoration of the balance in African history by rehabilitating African history and Nigerian history. However, the Nationalist School (1950-1960), who are professional historians, anchored by well-bred individuals in the field, emerged at a time when colonised peoples throughout the world were struggling for independence and national identity. Hence, Ibadan School of History emerged to fill vacuums in teaching, technology, approaches, and techniques in the study and writing of African history, particularly in Nigeria and creating some unique historiographical method, which were and is still making waves in the study of African past. (Ikime, 2018). As Caroline Neale (1986) notes, the success of these movements resulted in the writing of □independent history□. The most profile of these scholars came from the University of Ibadan, against the backdrop of myth and prejudice that concealed the true history of Africa and Nigeria from the World, Ibadan School of History emerged as the first and for many years the dominant School in the study of the history of Nigeria.

The works of these first generation historians in Nigeria Kenneth. Dike's, "Trade and Politics in Niger Delta", published in (1956), Jacob Egbarevhas "History of Benin" 1934, Reverene, Samuel Johnson, who wrote the History of the Yorubas published in 1921, Sai Akiga, "Story of Tiv life" published 1939, William Moores "History of Itsekiri, and other like Saburi Biobaku, Afigbo, Otunba Payne, Tamuno. J.C, Adeleye, R.A, Akinjogbin, Philip Igbafe among others □ can be readily acknowledged in their contributions to nationalism and patriotism. The decolonizing of colonial historiography and the affirmation of Nigeria □s rich culture and irrefutable history performed an important role in the preparations of the Nigerian people for independence. Their work drew general recognition to Nigerian heroes and geniuses such as King Jaja of Opobo, Nana of Itsekiri, Uthman Dan Fodio, Madam Efunroye Tinubu, Ajayi Crowder amongst others. These historians were great intellectuals and philosophers who provided the politicians and leaders the tool of legitimacy to attain independence. It is quite clear that the unity of any nation is invariably a product of history. Unity thus requires deliberate cultivating and delicately nurturing (Ikime, 2018).

African Historians Response to Economic Underdevelopment in Africa

Africa, particularly Nigeria economy is an underdeveloped and dependence one. At the time of political independence in 1960, the economy was almost an agrarian one because agriculture contributed about 63.4% to the G.D.P with more than 80% of Nigeria's Foreign Exchange earnings coming from export of agricultural produce which covered farm produce, wood and livestock products. By 1970, Nigerian economy had witnessed some structural changes. First, the population engaged in agriculture had fallen to about 60%, its contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 39.9%, by 1980 agricultural contribution to GDP Was 25% (Onwuka , 2001).

The contribution of agricultural to Gross Domestic Product was as a result of negligence, as more attention was paid to crude oil which assumed prominence in the post-civil war period. Indeed, minerals, especially petroleum rose from less than 1% of G.D.P in 1960 to around 14.6% in 1970 and jumped to about 27% by 1979. Nigeria is a mineral dependent economy since more than 75% of federal government revenues and more than 90% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings come from petrol, resulting to underdevelopment of even the states that produced crude oil (Onwuka, 2001).

The above analysed the poor state of Africa development as a result of moving away from agrarian product to dependence on European economic activities. Indeed, as emaciated in the theory of monopoly capitalism, the introduction of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDIs) and the Foreign Private Investment (FPIs) in Africa were seen as exploitative because they involved underpayment for African commodities. Moreover, African leaders felt their countries were short changed by European investors through the under declaration of profit and the reparation of some to their home countries without re-investing them to expand economic activities in Africa (Sunkel, 1990).

The natural response was a call for Nationalisation of FDIs and FPIs in Africa, there was no thorough analysis of the implications of nationalizing the business of foreign investors. The decision by African leaders to nationalize FIDs derived from the research findings of Latin America scholars whose economics were anchored on mining and plantation Agriculture. Indeed, the latter was well developed and its structures were capable of sustaining the economy after the divestment of Western capital (Offiong, 2006). Moreover, the reaction of African leaders at this time was not meant to solve a strictly economic problem for instance the action was a product mostly parochial military nationalistic patriotism that was not

founded on concrete economic realities, the military leaders played to the gallery and sought to impress with populist but faulty policies and programmes.

The immediate impact of the nationalization and indigenisation was the collapse of economic structures in African countries□ due to lack of both capitals, technical and managerial expertise. Approaches to economic issues changed as political considerations were allowed to decide issues that involved strictly economic technicalities. The same leaders that drove away foreign capital are now crying for the return of western investors. It is currently considered more or less a crime for any country that wants to develop not calling for the injection of foreign capital into its economy. (Udoka, 1996).

Way forward

Historians appeared to have agreed FDI is engine of growth in developing economies. This is because FDI provides necessary factors of production in third world countries. (Johnson 2005) asserts that FDI provides economic package comprising cheap capital, advanced technologies, superior managerial capability, intermediate inputs, and raw materials for developing countries.

African historians must be assertive in the 21st century if it is to help address the problem of underdevelopment in Africa. Dos Santos (2004), asserts that; the discipline as provided a justifiable ideology for Nigeria□s foreign policy in the 1960s through the early 1980s when it addressed the twin problems of colonialism and racism. It should be alert in providing the foundation for the tackling of problems of leadership for example debt burden, corruption, conflicts and crises, kidnapping and banditry, terrorism, poverty, backwardness, mismanagement of national economies, suspicious in collaborative ventures and inequality.

African History could provide the philosophy for African interactions with other continents especially in the face of globalisation which instrument and institution such as the World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank seem to have conspired against its progress. African history must provide the ideology for south-south cooperation as a panacea for western conspiracy against the development of Africa and other continents. In fact, history should provide the foundation for understanding and testing the success or otherwise of the new partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). This instrument is presented as a strictly African initiative for Africa and its implementation is designed to be undertaken strictly by Africans. However, it does not state why Africa's are going cap in hand to beg for billions from the G8 countries. This is a nexus of African history should provide.

Having said this, African history should revisit its themes and contents in differences to global realities to assist the continents to confront its numerous problems. Rather than continue to rehearse the dependency theories of monopoly, capitalism, and imperialism as being the source of Africa's underdevelopment. African historian must strive to establish a correlation between good governance and economic prosperity, between conflict, political instability, lack of accountability and transparency expose in resource utilization and underdevelopment, between internal imperialism and ethnic conflicts and between misappropriation of external loans and heavy debt burden. African historian must expose the pretention of the leadership class in devising the NEPAD as a development instrument.

Anthony (2005), in his 13 main features of Nigerian economy confirms the economy as underdeveloped and dependent on which have continue to destroy the economy, leading to underdevelopment. The main features include the following but not limited to: Dependence on foreign technology mono- cultural dependence on crude oil underdeveloped agricultural

sector, high rate of unemployment, in-egalitarian distribution of income and wealth, excessive government involvement in economy and Systematic Corruption.

Conclusion

The paper Conclude that, Africans should shift attention away on the mentality of how Europeans underdeveloped African through colonialism and racism, the focus of African historians should rest on how to tackle underdevelopment in Africa and this can be achieved by writings on how to bring about the lost glory of Africa and to also educate those in the position of policy making in Africa and Nigerians on how important history can help bring about development. African Historians should establish the fact that mis-governance, conflicts, political instability, corruption, mismanagement of national resource, none transparency and accountability in resource allocation and utilization, conflicts, misappropriation of foreign loans and heavy debt burden should be the quest and research of historian and the syllabus should be channel and organised toward achieving such objectives so as to safe Africa and Africans from underdevelopment. If lauded by the current generation of Africans leaders, history can help create the right ideological and cultural climate that will be very contributive to the nation growing process and national development.

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