

## **Reinvigorating Historical Scholarship, Historian's Position and the Quest for Visionary Nigeria.**

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**Abstract:** In any case, it is quite interesting to be borne at the back of the intellectual minds of both the researchers, students, scholars irrespective of the field of study and general reading public that this study titled *Reinvigorating Historical Scholarship, Historian's Position and the Quest For Visionary, Nigeria* has been initiated consequent upon the understanding of the failure of the Nigerian government, or the policy makers, educationists, traditional political authorities, students and their teachers on the whole, to wholeheartedly and unreservedly rise to the responsibility ahead of them, particularly with regards to the backwardness of Historical studies in our Tertiary Institutions of Learning, relegation of Historian's status, archival centers and custodians of records to the background. It is against this backdrop, the study set to investigate beyond the surface some of the major challenges confronting this studied academic discipline during the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; Nigeria with a view to proffering solution. In the course of conducting the study, several related literature both published and unpublished works were interacted with for appropriate historical reconstruction to be attained. The concept of "Reinvigorating" is a word which implies making somebody or something healthier, stronger and energetic. In another sense, means an ability to refresh, to make something looks more formal, efficient and successful. From this analysis, therefore, it could be understood that the study calls for full standardization of Historical studies, realization of Historian's academic dignity in any given academic world, as well as to equally understand the positive impact of the two interwoven subject matters on human's life. By and large, the study highlights the way out for the betterment, progress, ensurance of peace and actual nation building project of our beloved country Nigeria during the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond

**Keywords:** Reinvigorating, Historical, Scholarship, Historian's, Position, Quest, Visionary, Nigeria.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

For a better understanding of what the paper attempts to address, there is the need to examine what these words 'reinvigoration and 'visionary'" stand for. For this reason, it is not out of place to examine their meanings for the general understanding of the goal and objective of the paper. This study highlights the importance of historical studies ,the individual personality refers to as the historian, his role in the development of any given object ,mankind and his society at large. It is also the interest of the study to show how both history and historian offer their contributions in nation building projects. In the course of conducting the study problems confronting this discipline and the historian have been identified and drawn into light for solution.

- The concept of reinvigorating is a word that implies making somebody or something feel healthy and more energetic. In other words', it comprises an ability to refresh, to make a situation more formal, efficient and successful.<sup>1</sup>
- The word "visionary" could best be described as anything to do with ability to think about or plan the future with great imagination and intelligence. For example, a visionary leader is a person who has the ability to think about or plan the future in an intelligent or imaginative way.<sup>2</sup>

In view of the above, it could be argued that the over-riding concern of the paper is to draw the attention of the academic audience, general reading public and authorities concerned towards realizing the need to encourage the study of history. Furthermore, to financially and morally motivate the students of history for the satisfaction of their long term intellectual commitments and desire to be useful to their immediate societies and Nigeria at large.

In view of the above, it should be borne in mind that it is in the interest of our study to reveal that historical scholarship-Should be encouraged mainly for the attainment of these objectives, progress, resource control, economic reconstruction, sustainable democracy, and qualitative education, solution to ethnic-conflict,

peace and security of our beloved country. The paper has wholeheartedly and unreservedly argued that historical studies are in better positions to move Nigeria forward. For P. J. Opines that *"Every person has a history... the more and the better we understand all these histories the better we shall all be"*. He further observes that this could only be achieved through historical studies.<sup>3</sup>

### **The concept of History:**

Many definitions have been put forward aimed at explaining the term 'history'. To some people it is the study of the past, for others, history is a branch of knowledge that deals with the past. Furthermore, another group of people defined history as a transformation of society in time and space<sup>4</sup>. But the academic definition of history presented by eminent scholars including Y. B. Usman, K. O. Dike and P. J Shea enable us to understand history as a holistic academic course of study.

Many scholars have attempted to define the term "History" for instance Y. B. Usman in his scholarly works argues that history is all about the totality of human existence overtime<sup>5</sup>. P. J. Shea claims that History is all about causality, effect, change, facts and evidence<sup>6</sup> To M. D. Suleiman, History is all about activities of man in time perspective, i. e. what was done, being done and would be done. In other words, the past, present and the future<sup>7</sup>. According to C. C. Ifemaje, History as a body of knowledge about the past, especially the past of the act of man in society, consists of facts ascertained through honest inquiry as well as influences, interpretations and generalizations arrived at by the historian and are available in the form of true record on paper or in the memory of man<sup>8</sup>. However, to an Arab Historian in the person of Ziauddin Sardar, opines that:

"To justify the study of history is to understand history as the sum of happenings, the totality of human experiences as a way in which facts are selected, verified, described and analyzed. It also involves the selection of facts, the words, the styles, the accents, the imposed, Logic, the footnotes, all steer impress the individual historian and his Milieu and are combined to promote a particular image of the past<sup>9</sup>

### **The Term "Historiography"**

E. O. Erim in his analysis of the two concepts History and Historiography asserts that Historiography itself is a discipline dealing with the methods of writing history and the techniques of historical research and documentation. The essence is to make it clear for the understanding of history as an organized and critical study of such past happenings as had produced sufficient effects on subsequent course of events or -other human beings in the course of events<sup>10</sup>

E .A Afigbo views historiography *"As the science of writing history"*. Other scholars including K. O. Dike and J. F.A. Ajayi view Historiography as:

*"The discovery and critical assessments of historical sources, next is the reconstruction and description of the past on the basis of facts available and to a large extent involved to allocate, conscience the society, or even assist in influencing aspects of contemporary public opinion, action or policy, and the reflection on trends and the patterns of historical writings"*<sup>11</sup>

However, it should be understood that historiography is very holistic in nature, and only a balanced historian can conveniently encompass the above mentioned components of historiography.

### **Justification for the Study of History:**

A title of such nature normally appears in form of an intellectual response to the question of why do we study history? In other words, it requires- a total presentation of principal reasons in defense of historical studies. Furthermore, the word justification; implies having a good reason -why something exists or is done, in other words, it means an explanation of why a particular thing should be done. But reasons must as well be presented for defense

Many scholars have claimed that history is a process which involves interaction between man and man, man and his environment, man and the cosmic world, ever since the emergence of human societies which is still unfolding and has a time dimension<sup>12</sup>. In addition, history as a process is defined as the conscious attempt to systematically study the process of events through the aid of sources. However, this portrays that the major goal of history is to justify human curiosity and provide the society with the opportunity to know itself better in respect of the past events, societies and cultures. History should be understood as a record of the activities of man on earth, his religion, politics, economy and sociology. To a larger extent, it is concerned with the study of how and why societies change in the past, for the conscious transformation of the present in order to secure a meaningful future. Moreover, conceptualized as the study of change for change<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, eminent scholars including D. W. Robertson and J. Higharm had both called for the reinvigoration of historical studies. For they both emphasized that the study of history enriches human experiences, develops power of thinking, it enlightens .researches intellectually, it contributes in nation-building, encourages inter-tribal and communal relationships under the pretext of historical investigation, reconstruction and interpretation<sup>14</sup>. An indication to this is the Greenberg's classification of African Languages.

For it shows the early existing tribal relationship between certain African languages, most especially the category of Kwa-Sub-group, Congo Kordo-fanian and Nilo Saharan.

The major roles of historical sources in investigating, analyzing, interpreting, reconstructing and understanding of an event in historical sense cannot be ignored. Prior to the examination of sources, there is the need to present scholars' opinion as regards the position of history; Ibn Khaldun opines the inevitability of change in the society involving the rise and fall of great empires, after attaining their full life-circle<sup>15</sup>.and highlights that only change is permanent in History. From the foregoing, it can be observed that the only thing that is permanent in history is change and such change can be gradual, rapid or revolutionary. But: Baradough views history as reconstruction based on fragmentary evidence, the significant things, about the past. This demonstrates that it is not everything or every even of the past, that is being studied, but those that have significant effects on subsequent course of events. On the other hand, E. H. asserted that history is the continues process of interaction between" the historian and his facts and an unending dialogue between the past and present<sup>16</sup>.

Now the major concern is an examination of the sources that greatly contribute in making historical episode a reality. It should be understood that sources including geography, .linguistics, oral traditions, primary, secondary and archaeological sources are very significant in tracing an event, understanding and writing of history.,

- Geography and history are interwoven, the word: Geo (from the Greek means "earth" and "graphics"-to write). Geography enables a historian to relate man with his physical environment at past stages of evolution. For it provides information' regarding the patterns of settlement, economic development, rain, vegetation, wind and topography fer historical analysis and documentation.

- Linguistics is all about precise ways in which ideas, emotions and desires are communicated. This makes the *understanding* or societies possible most especially, if a study could be carried under the pretext of comparative linguistics, dialectology or lexicon statistics<sup>17</sup>

"It is a testimony transmitted verbally from one generation to another. This portrays that the message must be oral statements spoken, song, or called out on musical instrument". However, prior to the invention of writing, oral sources served as means of preserving and transmitting history<sup>18</sup>.

- Primary and Secondary sources are both referred to as written documents, known as inscriptions. The inscriptions include paper, wood, stone, leather, and leaf. But written documents include; diaries, letters, memos, newspapers, gazettes, journals, periodicals, annual reports, biographies, travelers accounts, correspondences, official and private minutes of various dealings, statistics and agreements they all provide information for "historical documents.

- Archaeology: is another segment of historical sources. It involves excavation, discovery and interpretation of the material remains. The discovered remains are artifacts, which include utensils, farm implements, industrial equipment, abandoned palaces, houses and animal skeletons.

However, I. A. Abba in his analysis of archaeological studies opines that the interpretation of history of the material remains depends on the reports of various experts such as anatomists, pathologists, zoologists, botanists; metallurgists and architects/ The method used in the explanation of the artifacts found is inter disciplinary and based on multi-faceted approaches and a wide variety of sources<sup>19</sup>.

### **In Defense of Historical Studies**

P. J. Shea, claims that in the academic history of the United States of America, no matter the type of discipline one needs to study he/she must include history as a subsidiary course for the understanding of its national history (American Civic History)<sup>20</sup>. For Dahiru, "History is parasitical" as it depends on other disciplines for consumption, which eventually brings about proper construction, interpretation and analysis of events<sup>21</sup>

The question of the major contributions of historical scholarship to the growth and development of other disciplines has made Naniya to argue that by the early part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Centaury, there were only three academic disciplines found in operation, namely, Geometry, History and Natural Sciences (Pure Sciences): Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that it is history that traces the origin, growth, development and founding fathers of other disciplines. For example, the history of science, technology and society clearly shows that Abu Musa Alkwarizmi was a recognized scholar of mathematics, famous Muslim scientists were Abu Musa, Jabir Ibn-Hiayab (Chemistry), Ibn-Yunws (Astronomy) Al-Razi and Ibn Sina, (Avicenna) Medicine, Ibn Al-hadith (Physics and Omar Khayyum (Mathematics). However, the essence is to portray the relationships and academic role of history to the development of arts, social sciences and scientific courses respectively<sup>22</sup>

### **Who is a Historian?**

For a better understanding of an individual refers to as a historian, it would be more appropriate after dealing with such a description to equally examine the nature of the task falls upon him as well as his functions

in historiography. A Historian is a specialist trained on the techniques to handle sources and ask critical questions such as why? How? And what from academic justification? In a historian's attempt to reconstruct the past, he does this because history is distinct from fiction, story telling, or literature. Furthermore, historians evaluate sources to establish authenticity and reliability of the information they obtain. For all sources are suspects until proved otherwise<sup>23</sup>.

#### **The Task and Functions of a Historian in Historiography:**

The identification of the following by a historian are some of the duties expected of him. They include: the identification of the informant's position in the society, his qualification, sincerity and credibility.

The identification of how knowledgeable the informant is<sup>9</sup> Particularly in the area of an inquiry.

- The identification and ability to wipe out biases and prejudices prior to documentation.
- What is the source of the document?
- The identification, adoption and application of multi-disciplinary approach for successful documentation is also necessary.
- What is the world outlook of the recorder of events?
- Is the informant a participant to the event being discussed? Moreover, it is also a duty for a historian to equally criticize, crosscheck, and review every document prior to writing. The historian should as well ensure to put these components into consideration appropriateness of theme, title, organization of material, academic language, quality, originality of argument, depth of research and how contributory a particular event is to the knowledge of the field?<sup>24</sup>

E. H. Carr firmly argued that objectivity in history cannot be objectivity of facts, as postulated by those who favour objectivism but only of the relations between facts and interpretations, between the past, present and the future. E. H. Carr further opined that historian's background should be studied prior to studying his book. For Smiths, insists on having a biographical information about the author. In fact, there are critical appraisals of the fact that the historian's cultural and educational background, world outlook, nationality, class and religion, may have the tendency to influence his interpretation of the historical process and his reconstruction of history.

This is a portrayal of the fact that every writing has a purpose, goal, and interest behind it. F. Eitel, opines that "Know/edge *is not striven...but rather serves as a difficult world, for the implementation of one's own interest*". Indeed even Fukuyama's "**End of History**" has an interest behind it. <sup>25</sup> In view of the functions of a historian, and role expected to significantly be played: made an eminent scholar in the person of J. Higham to comment in his article titled "**The Historian as Moral Critic**" *The historian in order to be really creative should live a double life. He is expected as far as his work is concerned, to be a full knowledgeable member of the present and at the same time. Be faithful... to the integrity of age gone by... To feeble an involvement in the life of the present makes for a slack and routine grasp of the past*<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, D. W. Robertson puts it this way: "*If we relate the contents of the sources we are using to the values of time instead of those of the age of the documents, we are universalizing an attitude peculiar to our own age as if that attitude is a platonic reality... an by so doing we fail to learn what is in that age, which we cannot from our own age*"<sup>27</sup>

The aforementioned scholars attempt to emphasize the importance of time, document and how historian should interact with the available sources in interpreting and event. In addition, all the techniques of historical writing should be put into consideration for accurate documentation of event.

In view of the functions of a historian, E. H. Carr, had this to comment: "The function of the historian is neither to love the past nor to emancipate himself from it, but to master and understand it, as key to the understanding of the present"<sup>28</sup>

#### **Scholars 'Conception of History:**

This serves as a clue for the understanding of historical scholarship. In other words, scholars have differently argued and presented their opinions with regards to the understanding of their immediate academic world, societies, beliefs, culture and others.

R. B. Collingwood (1889-1943), was an idealist historian and philosopher of British nationality. He argues that what gives the historian his criterion for historical truth<sup>29</sup>. is the constructive imaginary picture of the past event as self dependent, self determining and self justifying form of thought based on his experience. He further asserts that it is ideas, views, beliefs, that direct action and not action directing events. Furthermore, thoughts, mind, re-enactment, rethinking, recollection and constructive 11. Imaginations are critical terms in Collingwood's philosophy of History. For G. B. Clough in justifying the study of history opines that:

*"every thinking man and woman today who seek an answer to the modern world, turn inevitably to the past hoping to discover in history a clue to modern trends and tendencies"*<sup>30</sup>

Y. B. Usman a well known patriotic Nigerian, human activist, epitome of academic excellence, erudite and radical scholar, master of sharp words and a historian by virtue of discipline in his analysis of historical scholarship claims that: "In this country, people are not so much against theory, knowledge and learning in themselves, but against the truth that these reveal"<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, this scholar is well known for his thoroughness, depth and high standard of acceptance in his researches and writings on the state of Nigerian society and History. In fact, his conception portrays that knowledge, its foundation, theory and learning came into light through History.

### **Problems of Historical Studies.**

Generally, the Historians and the students lack moral and financial motivations from the authority concerned to enable them satisfy their long term intellectual commitments. Furthermore, important Historical sites, particularly National Archives, History and Culture Bureaus and their serving staff have been completely ignored without any incentives as a result of nonchalant attitude of the aforementioned sectors.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the paper attempts to justify the significance of Historical studies and the position of a historian for visionary Nigeria. In the same vein, it calls- for the promotion of Historical scholarship and Historian's status. Finally, the paper has explored the intellectual contributions of some eminent historians and their conceptions of History, and contends that no meaningful development can take place in a society without good reflection on the past.

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30. K. M. Gundawa "History and Historiography for National

31. Development.....PP 3-5
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