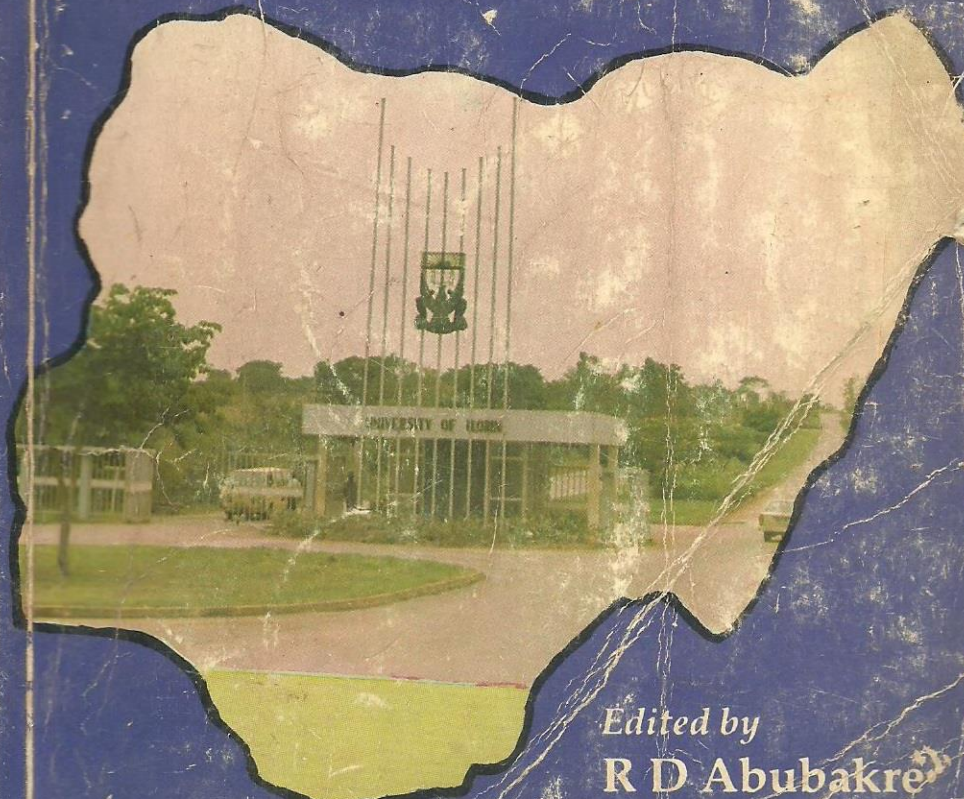


Reading in General Studies in Nigeria



Edited by
R D Abubakre

ALEGE Q.M.

Reading in General Studies in Nigeria

Edited by:

R. 'Deremi Abubakre

M.A. Akanji

R.A. Akanmidu

**University of Ilorin Library and
Publications' Committee
1994**

© University of Ilorin Library and Publications Committee

University of Ilorin Library and Publications Committee
June 1994

All right reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN 978-30679-1-5

Printed by Intec Printers Ltd
Km 8, Old Lagos Road, Ibadan

Chapter 18

History and the Social Sciences

P.F. Adebayo

*Department of History
University of Ilorin, Ilorin*

Introduction

In an era when the relevance of history to the Nigerian society is constantly questioned, it is by no means a useless enterprise to examine the relationship between history and the social sciences. It is a truism that there is this intellectual conflict between historians and scholars in the Social Sciences. But this need not be. Rather the interrelationship between the two disciplines should be stressed. This is because both history and social sciences share common objective in studying the activities of man in the society. History is holistic in nature in that it encompasses all sphere of human life.¹ While on the other hand, man the subject matter of the social science is susceptible to change and a detailed perspective.² Thus, there is a blurred distinction between history and social science as recognised by some social scientists and even Karl Marx.

It is perhaps this relationship that has made it possible for historians to some extent borrow concepts and methodologies of the social sciences in order to enhance historical scholarship. Indeed this is an interesting aspect of modern African historiography. Historians have come to realise that an understanding of the analysis of the African past and contemporary problems (a-la E.H. Carr's understanding of

history) the application of concepts and methodologies of social sciences to historical studies have become inevitable. On the other hand, social scientists have equally come to realise the usefulness of history in providing background information for understanding their various subjects. It is against this background that this paper discusses the relationship between history and the social sciences. This would be done by analysing the probable areas in which history can obtain some form of knowledge from the social sciences and how the social science could borrow a leaf from the historian. A brief discussion is also made on scientific historiography which revolves around Marx conceptual tool of analysis. Finally, we look at the extent to which historians have used this inter-disciplinary approach to advance the relevance of African or more specifically Nigerian historiography to the society which with its inability to identify the roots of our socio-economic problems has become a failure in historical scholarship. Social science, for our purpose here, is defined in the words of Professor R.A. Seligman's as those mental or cultural sciences which deal with the activities of the individual as a member of a group.³ He went further by making a distinction between the social sciences which he defined as politics, economics, law, anthropology, sociology, penology, and social work. The semi social sciences (ethics, education, philosophy and psychology) and sciences with social implications (biology, geography, medicine, linguistics and art)⁴ social sciences can thus be seen from the above as those disciplines which deal with human societies and are different from history in the bodies of theories they present and also in their peculiar terminologies and techniques.

II

It would not be out of place to further examine the meaning of history here so as to know how history impinges on other disciplines or how other disciplines impinge on history. History can be defined as the 'science of human past' or following Collingwood opinion as the 'science of human action' (in time)⁵ - to supply a compliment borrowed from Marc Bloch's definition of history as 'the Science of

men in time'⁶ - the society, the context of human action, ought to be the focus of the historian's labours. It is obviously, this conception of the historian's task that informs Fustec de Coulanges' definition of the Philosophy underlying the historian disciplines when he says that: History is not the accumulation of events of all kinds which occurred in the past. It is the science of human societies.⁷ Professor K.O. Dike also referred to history as that part of social science concerned with Change in human societies.⁸ It is perhaps with this understanding in mind that Professor Claude Ake commented that if contemporary social science does not appear to be aware that in studying man in society, it is necessary to study history, that history is the Laboratory against which it must test and consolidate its knowledge about the social world.⁹ Thus from the above definitions there is a close relationship between history and the social sciences. As previously mentioned, it is this closeness that has made it extremely imperative for some social scientists and even Karl Marx to talk of erasing the distinctions between history and the other disciplines of the social sciences.

Be that as it may, it should be noted that the linkage of history within the realm of social sciences could be attributed to the eighteenth century philosophers who broadened the scope of history. The philosophers indeed pointed the way to social history. Their departure from the tradition of history conceived in terms of the deeds of Kings, Ministers and Generals' constituted a revolution in historiography. As such the new historiography shifted from 'trumpet and drum'¹⁰ to the terrain of the society, instead of the history of Kings and Courts, the history of men, because in the words of Herbert Spencer the biographies of Monarchs ... throw scarcely any light upon the sciences of society.¹¹

III

If the *philosophies* broadened the scope of history, Marx provided a conceptual tool of analysis. If history must be elevated to a science, it must penetrate, the reality belied by appearance - for the two rarely coincided. Indeed, 'All science would be superfluous if the outward

appearance and the essence of things directly coincided'. The 'vulgar economists' assumed such direct correspondence and so 'ignored the social foundations on which the market system was based'¹² 'economics is not concerned with things but with relations between persons, and in the final analysis between classes; these relations, however, are always *bound to things* and appear as things'¹³ To fail to see that it is the 'relations between persons' that 'appear as [the relations between] things' is to be victim of an illusion, which Marx termed the 'fetishism of commodities.' This illusion distorts reality; human relationship is expressed in the non-human or impersonal terms; man thus becomes estranged, an 'alien', in the world he has created. This is the basis of human 'alienation' in a market economy.

How may the investigator uncover the 'essence' behind the outward appearance. . . of things . . . Marx proposed a 'problematic' namely, a theoretical or conceptual tool with which we may approach the study of society; this he called the 'mode of production' which comprises of two components 'the forces of production and the relations of production taken as a whole.'¹⁴

Indeed, the notion of the 'relations of production' (inseparable from the forces of production is Marxism) is central to Marxist social analysis. In the words of Marx himself – the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy', political economy being 'the science of the social relations of production.'¹⁵ Political economy must however be seen as historical science because relations of production are a function of history. It is this realisation of the historical dimension to social reality that prompted the pronouncement by Engels: '... all branches of science which are not natural sciences are historical', and want of history in 'classical' political economy had provoked a critique by Marx.

The production process is a dual activity: it involves man's action on nature; it also involves man's interaction or cooperation with his fellow human beings, expressed in Marxist literature as the 'relations of production.'

The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which arises a legal and

political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.¹⁶

The above passage demonstrates the integrated or 'holistic nature of Marxist Science, all spheres of society – economic, political, intellectual, and ideological – are seen in interdependent or 'dialectical' relationship. The usual 'compartmentalisation or distinction between academic disciplines is *entirely* foreign to Marxist science. Marxism is a comprehensive or 'total science' a science of the 'social totality'. It is also comprehensive from the point of view of its horizon; its field of investigation is global namely human societies in general.

It is 'Vulgar' Marxism, therefore to reduce historical materialism (namely the approach to history through a society's productive base) to crude 'economic determinism'. It is entirely wrong to think of historical materialism as an economic (or for that matter a sociological) interpretation of history.¹⁷ 'For it is an essential characteristic of Marx's historical thought that it is neither 'sociological 'nor' economical' but both simultaneously. The social relations of production and reproduction (i.e. Social Relations in its broadest sense) and the material forces of production, cannot be divorced.'¹⁸

Marx thus provides a useful insight into our understanding of a society. His conceptual tool of analysis has proved a veritable tool for Marxist historians engaged in analysing other societies. As a result of the insight shown by this Marxian conceptual tool of analysis, Marxist historiography is now regarded as part of social science. In fact-Scientific historiography revolves around this Marxian tool of analysis.

However, the desire to analyse the dynamic of the changes undergone by the African societies as a result of the impact of colonialism necessitated the urge to borrow concepts and methodology of the social sciences, especially sociology. Thus sociological concepts of social change and variables such as technology, population growth,

social control and mobility, conflict and culture have become indispensable for the historian writing on African society. The understanding of these sociological concepts could for instance help the historian in answering the question as to whether the Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio was a social movement. In social movement there must be group consciousness. A social movement must aim at the creation of an entirely new social and economic order in relation to the distribution of wealth and political order. There must be more or less consistent set of ideas which members must accept critically. All these have proved useful to the historian in analysing African societies. In addition, there is the need for students of African history to be exposed or sensitized to the tools and techniques of other social science disciplines in order to be able to understand more fully the societies and institutions he is researching on. History is meaningful only when viewed as processes in social development. "The masters in the literature of historiography Professor Bierstedt once wrote, 'are not mere catalogues of facts, mere calendars and chronologies... Every historian worth his salt, in short, is also to some degree a sociologist, he wants to know not only how it was but also how it became. In order to answer his final questions the historian cannot escape an ultimate recourse to sociological concepts and sociological categories.'¹⁹

Social science has also influenced the historian in the sphere of laws and theories of economics which have added value to his interpretation and reconstruction of the past. Indeed the historian, whatever his period of study, must have some rudimentary knowledge of economics since so much of man's activities in societies is concerned with economic matters. The historian is particularly interested in economic history which according to Professor W.A.B. Coura is that part of history which requires the knowledge of economics for its full understanding. By using the tools and concepts of economic analysis the historian or economic historian can be more precise in his study. An outstanding application of economic principle to historical data was used extensively by A.G. Hopkins in his *Economic History of West Africa*. There is also the "Quantitative History" which is

perhaps the most important type of economic history. Other stimulating branches of economic history that has attracted the attention of the historian is the 'new economic history' or cliometrics or econometric history.

Still on precision, statistics has been found useful to the historian. Historical statistics is nothing else than general statistical method applied to the study of facts which occurred in the distant past on a mass scale and left traces of themselves in sources which are still extant.²⁰ Statistics add precision to history because in contrast to qualitative and impressionistic history is that its system and method of classification, the assumption it uses and the pattern it imposes are stated and clear.²¹

In a like manner, ethnographical data has continued to serve as a veritable raw material for the historian. The data of cultural anthropology derived from observation, of the custom behaviour and life pattern of a particular society are important in historical reconstruction of the society in question. Reporting and evaluating these observations rest on the ethnographer. The raw material of the ethnographer which attempt to describe the 'culturally significant behaviour of a particular society would help to throw light on what would have otherwise been hidden treasures of the past.²² It is equally important to point out that anthropology has proved to be a useful tool for historical reconstruction because of its meticulous studies of African culture. In fact Africanist historians had to rely on anthropology coupled with biology and linguistics to reconstruct African past.

Geography has also been found useful to the historian in that it is customary to describe the geography of an area under study, how it has affected the people and how the people respond to it. More importantly, the physical features such as relief and climatic conditions have for instance affected historical development in not only East and Southern African regions but elsewhere as well. Indeed the effect of environment (ecology) on human activities is an indispensable factor in an historical understanding of any area under study.

Assisting the historian in the sphere of analysis is Ego Psychology or Psychoanalysis which has recently emerged as a useful tool of

analysis. The Science of Psychoanalysis can offer useful information to the historian especially in the use of such concepts as projections, displacements, compensations, repression and ambivalence. By employing these analytical concepts psychoanalysis yields useful insight into group behaviour. Also psychiatry and social psychology are other varieties of science that deal with human behaviour. In modern African history the historic movements of Southern and Central African in the 19th Century can equally be understood by using the concepts of psycho-analysis.

Ego Psychology is particularly strong in biographical studies and deal with the character of the mind. The understanding of an individual may however be the cause of understanding of an historical event. A little reflection will indicate that this may be the case in respect of the rise of modern nation states in Africa. It is difficult to dissociate a person like Shaka the Zulu from the history of Southern Africa. It is also difficult to differentiate the personal life of Kwame Nkrumah from the rise of Ghana. Psycho analysis can highlight the genesis of the action taken by the subject under study. For example is it true that Saka the Zulu was building a Zulu nation because of his earlier sense of shame? What was the most important force that moulded Kwame Nkrumah? Indeed the historian can handle his work better by studying and employing psycho-analytic concepts. These are indeed the various ways by which social science has sharpened the analysis of the historian.

This reliance on social science has however not been one way directional. The historian's stress on concrete situations, his insistence that the present only follow from the past and that it cannot be divorced from it have influenced the work of the social scientist. This reality is what the scientists are learning from history. History has proved to be an inexhaustible reservoir of information for all social sciences. Its motherhood role cannot be denied since history as an enquiry connotes man's attempt to describe and interpreter that past which makes the oldest of all inquiries. It is in this vein that one would point out that it is perhaps beneficial to the historian and social scientist to lean on each other for survival rather than exporting

energy on imaginary line of demarcation. A convergence of interest would thus be of paramount interest to the historian and the social scientist in that the methodology and sources of the two field of knowledge should serve to complement each other.

However, it should be noted that despite the fact that Africanist historians have borrowed the concepts and methodologies of social sciences towards advancing historical Scholarship, the method used has not been too encouraging. This method as championed by the Ibadan School of History has been too narrative. As a result of this flaw, radical scholars with Marxist ideology such as A. Temu, B. Swai, Bala Usman and of late, Gloria Thomas-Emeagwal and others have consistently been calling for a new critical approach towards the study of African historiography. The call for this new critical approach has already gained wide acceptance among African scholars. It has in fact been acknowledged by Professor Ade Ajayi the chief spokesman of Ibadan School of History in his 1989 valedictory lecture.²³ The adoption of this critical approach is necessary because it helps the historians to comprehend the society in its entirety or totality. A society is one whole and no part of it can be studied in isolation. What is therefore needed is the production of a versatile, sophisticated historian that is well grounded in various social science subjects. This will enable the historians to analyse the African society critically. It is by so doing that we can bring historical studies into the main stream of history, make it part of the living present and into powerful tool for comprehending and transforming social reality.²⁴

But to what extent have Nigeria historians succeeded in this direction? Nigerian historiography has been suffering from lack of an indepth study and analysis of the Nigerian Society. Emphasis in the teaching of history has not been placed on the economy. Rather it has been placed on the knowledge of the past to the neglect of contemporary history as well. It is therefore not surprising that Nigerian historians have according to A.E. Ayandele 'not made any impact on the Nigerian Society, in the sense of making the masses aware of the values of Nigerian historical studies'.²⁵ We have failed to pay serious attention to the economic bases of our society in analysing our

problems. Rather superficial explanations associated with corruption, tribalism, nepotism etc. are given as the reasons for political instability in Nigeria. We share the view, of E. Oyedele that we should be adventurous and must attempt to trace historical developments to the modern socio-political and economic crisis that has polluted the world.²⁶ This will help us to 'identify the roots of our socio-economic problems.'²⁷

Conclusion

This paper examined History and the Social Sciences. We started by identifying what History is, and what the Social Sciences are. The widening of the scope of history and the provision by Karl Marx of a conceptual tool of analysis on which revolves scientific historiography was equally discussed. Again, we went further to demonstrate how history and the Social Science impinge on each other. More succinctly, we examined in clear terms the fact that there could be a symbiotic relationship between History and the Social Sciences. This we did by highlighting probable areas. History could borrow some forms of knowledge from the social sciences and know the social sciences could also borrow the methodologies and sources of the historian. It would be beneficial for the two disciplines to engage in interdisciplinary approach to the study of History and the social sciences because both disciplines are at studying man in society.

Thus, we would conclude by agreeing with Fernand Braudel that "social sciences, at least provisionally border dispute over what is or is not a social science... rather let them try to make those lines across our research which if they exist would serve to orient some kind of collective research",²⁸ and make possible the first stage of some sort of coming together.

Notes and References

I am grateful to Dr. B.A. Mojetan of the Department of History, University of Ibadan, Ibadan for making available to me his paper 'Maxist historiography as Social Science', which helped in the preparation of this article. I am also grateful to Dr. R.O. Lasisi, H.O. Damole and Mr. Samuel Aghauno of the Department of History for their constructive criticism and contribution to the article.

1. E. O. Oyedele, "History, The Historian and the Third Republic". Paper presented at the 34th Annual congress of the Historical Society of Nigerian, University of Benin, 15th-19th May, 1989. p.6.
2. Claude Ake, "History as the Future of Social Science", Keynote Address, 27th Annual Conference, Political Science Association of Nigeria.
3. David I. Sills (Ed.) *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Macmillan Company and the Free Press, New York, 1968 Vol. 1 and 2. pp. xix - xxx.
4. Ibid p. xix - xxx.
5. Collinwood, A. *The idea of History* (Oxford, 1956), p.20
6. The Historian's craft, cited in Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History* (Macmillan, 1970), p.26.
7. Cited in E.J. Hobsbawm, 'From Social History to the History of Society'. *Daedalus* (Winter, 1971). The quotation from Voltaire (later in the article is taken from a contribution in this volume.
8. K.O. Dike, "African history twenty-five years Ago and Today" in *JHSN* Vol. 7C No.3. December, 1980 p.17.
9. Claude Ake, *Op. cit* p.3
10. 'Drum and Trumpet history' is political history concerned with the exploits and achievements of kings, princes. The expression is that of John Richard Green (1837-83) and it occurs in his book *A Short History of the English People* (1874).
11. Ibid.
12. George Linchheim, *Marxism: An Historical and Critical Study*, (New York, 1982), p. 163 Marx described certain economists as 'Vulgar' because of their superficial Science, superficial in the sense that they were pre-occupied with 'market appearances' to the neglect of the human factor, namely, the social relations of production underlying the market economy.

13. Engels in 'Appendix to Karl Marx, *A contribution to the Critique...* p.226.
14. Umberto Melotti, *Mame and the Third world* [Macmillan, 1977] pp. 2 and 3.
15. Andre Baionet, *Qu'est-ce que, l'Economic Politique?* (Paris, 1962) p. 15.
16. K. Marx, 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique...* p.20.
17. Eric Hobsbawm in his 'Introduction' to Karl Marx, *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations*, (London, 1964), p.17.
18. E. Hobsbawm, 'Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography' *Diogenes* No. 64 (Winter, 1968) p.52.
19. Robert Bierstedt 'Tonybee and Sociology', *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. x No.2. June 1959, p.103.
20. Jerzy Topolicki, *Methodology of History Poland* – Polish Scientific Publisher 1976 p.488.
21. *Ibid.*
22. For details see Yu V Brimlys, *Theoretical Ethnography*, Moscow Nauka, Publisher, 1984.
23. "Valedictory Lecture", delivered at the University of Ibadan 5th November, 1989. For details see *Nigerian Tribune* 12th November 1989, pp
24. Claude Ake, *Op. cit* p.9.
25. E.A. Ayandele, *op. cit.* p.9.
26. E. Oyedele *op. cit.* p.9.
27. E.A. Ayandele, *op. cit* p.5.

Reading in General Studies in Nigeria will, no doubt, be of value to the undergraduate students as it is faithful to the General Studies principle of cross-fertilization of ideas among disciplines. It will also be useful to a wider readership of administrators and individuals who may wish to improve themselves in the knowledge about themselves, their society, and their culture. The educated public will also find valuable the scientific findings in this book which concern an individual, his family and his society.

The contributors are reputable authorities in their various chosen fields. They have benefited generations of undergraduate students with their specialities through handling of topics in the General Studies programme. They are fully aware of the degree of need of students and wider readership.

The University of Ilorin Library and Publications Committee is poised to leave no stone unturned in its modest efforts to contribute its quote to the promotion of scholarship.

R.D.A.

ISBN 978-30679-1-5