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UNDERSTANDING HISTORY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

History has been misunderstood to mean the past. However, past present and future are related. As we try to establish ourselves to feel at home, our past makes our present and so the future. Forces of history produces a given society and as human being we should not abuse history nor use it to interfere with other people freedom and nation building as it will bring suffering. History is thus about using our memory to building our institution so that the society can become productive and meaningful. If we don't memorize our past we could be in a real trouble to forget who we are. The significance of the past for us today involves selection and choice in which our contemporary concern can have a reasonable role. To understand how and why we live as we do, we cannot avoid appealing to the past to explain how and why we got to be this way. It is not the past alone that plays this crucial role in shaping our identities nor less important is the act of remembering the past. In this paper, therefore, the author will pay more attention on why history is a living memory and that by killing or forgetting our past we lose our way as we navigate our way into an unknown future. So how do we reconnect with the past? The author think we should tell stories about it. Method for this study involved data collection from secondary sources.

Keywords: *History, Memory, Past*

INTRODUCTION

The word history refers both to what actually happened in the past and to the representation of that past in the work of historians. As individual we draw on our experience in all sort of different ways as a means of affirming our identity, as a clue to our potential as the basis of our impression for others and as some indication of the possibilities that lies ahead. Our memories servers as both a data bank and a means of making sense of an unfolding life stories. But historical awareness is not the same thing as social memory. How the past is known and how it is applied to present need are open to widely varying approaches. But it would be a mistake to suppose that social memory is the preserve of small scale, pre-literate societies. In fact the term itself highlights a universal need: if the individual cannot exist without memory, neither can society, nor that goes for large-scale technologically advanced societies too. All societies look to their collective memories for consolation or inspiration, and literate societies are in principle no different. But written account (such as schools history books or popular evocation of the World Wars) films and television performs the same function. Social memory continues to be an essential means of sustaining a politically active identity. Its success is judged by how effectively it contributes to collective cohesion, and how widely it is shared by members of the group. Sometimes

social memory is based on consensus and inclusion and this is often the function of explicitly national narratives (John Tosh, 1984, pg 3).

Why the Past Matters

Most people take for granted and devote little time to studying or thinking about “how much the past does indeed matter to us” or thinking about it, in fact the past is responsible for everything we are. It is the core of our humanity. To understand how and why we live as we do, we can not avoid appealing to the past to explain how and why we got to be this way. It is not the past alone that plays this crucial role in shaping our identities. No less important is the act of remembering the past. If the past is the place from which we have come, then memory and history are the tools we use for recollecting the past, so that we can know who and where we are. Thus the memory and history is a wealth of human meanings thereby turns into the kind of place we choose to call home (William Cronon, 2000 pg 4). The past is non-existence and the physical and mental elements of past events can only be constructed in imagination by the operation of the historians mind upon what he takes to be evidence for the past therefore his picture of it “imaginary” in every detail. Moreover, the picture which is history cannot come as near to the past as the photograph likeness is drawn from unorganized and mostly incomplete features haphazardly surviving. Collingwood who demonstrated that the historians picture of the past is imaginary, also insisted that history is a form of knowledge autonomous self-justifying and at least as worth of respect as a means of truth as art, science or philosophy (Vivienne Little, 1983). The perception of objects in the present world depends upon a function which can be best described if only metaphorically as “image –making” which enables recognition of what we see, hear, taste as of a particular kind.

What makes a nation or a people is much of what they share in common to mark their collective identity, is an intricate set of remembrances that tie the present to the past. Much of growing up has to do with the expansion of our capacity to remember which evolves steadily as we age. All of our experience of growth and transformation flows from this most basic insight of memory: if we remembered nothing, we would never know change, for it is only by referring backward to the seemingly fixed signposts of the past that we can know how far we have journeyed in space and time in our migration from past to present. Our awareness of the past gives us our ability to analyze the two crucial states, we think of as “before and after”. The experience of change leads us to think of our past not as a random collection of people, place, objects and experience, but as a series of events that form meaningful sequences. The past is thus a vast collection of stories.

What we learn as we grow onto adulthood is that memory is our most important tool for telling stories and that stories in turn are our most important tool for telling ourselves what we want over our lives to mean stories about the past transform the inhuman universe into a human world of moral meaning. It is the setting down stories that transform it into history and translate it into a frame of reference that people in the future can understand and with it they can empathize, if we can learn how we ourselves are connected to a world that would otherwise be lost to us (through stories about our past). Scholarly and practitioners of peace-building as well as publics of war-torn societies increasingly agree that some kind of formal accounting of the past is essential to achieve lasting “self-enforcing” peace in war torn states. When victims and their families are allowed to tell their suffering and story it serves as a therapeutic purpose for an entire country and imparting to the citizenry a sense of dignity and an empowerment that could help them move beyond the pain of the past (David Mendeloff: 2004. In addition, it assures justices, promotes social and psychological healing, fosters reconciliation and deters future crimes all of which help consolidate peace in war torn societies.

History as a Living Memory

For the past to come fully alive we need to plant each of our family tree in the larger forest of history, the better to see, its true context. The past already lives a memory and history is a historic building or landscape, a museum full of past objects indeed a whole library’s worth of books and documents. They are all vivid reminders of the world out of which we came from. For those who do not already share this love, on the other hand, they are inert, dead objects. By killing or forgetting our past we lose ourselves as we navigate our way into an unknown future. So how do we reconnect with our past? The

answer the author think is that we need to tell stories about it. William Cronon has argued that' Every historical story can be divided into one or just two types:

- i) The first can be labeled a “presentist” story since it tells how we got to where we are today because its job is to explain how the past led up to the present
- ii) The second can be labeled with the phrase “the past is a foreign country” since its job is to remind us that the past and its people had their own reasons for being and only incidentally produced the world we now inhabit.

What serves the past is the stories we tell about it. It is our stories that take dead objects and boring documents and make them live again. That is why we need not just building but also books, not just archives but also historical structures, not just museum but also stories since history at the most basic level is the act of making the past live again in the present. History has unity and continuity the present need the past to explore it and the local history must be read as part of the local history. Historical study has for its end to let the community see itself in the light of the past, to give it new thoughts and feelings, new aspiration and energies. The past matters because private, public memory are crucial to all that make us human. In remembering the past we remember ourselves. We therefore need history to be taught in schools and the need to preserve and documenting our stories.

History and Narrative

Narration is thought to possess an inevitably fictional element. It is thought that the work of the narrative historian is said to be more like that of the imaginative writer. Thus the upshot assertion that historical narration is to be assessed in large measures in terms of the kind of criterion of truth that is appropriate to literary work (Noel Carrol, 1990, pg 135). According to Hayden White lives are lived and stories are told. Narratives are thus a form of representation, and it is true that historians do not go about finding their representations as one might find a lost picture, a lost photo, which is made (invented). Similarly, narratives are a form of representation and in that sense, they are invented, but, that does not preclude their capacity to provide accurate information. Narrative can provide accurate knowledge about the past in terms of the kinds of features they track, namely, the ingredients of courses of events which include; background conditions, causes and effects as well as social context, the logic of situations, practical deliberate and ensuing actions. Since the past is not storied, historical narratives are constructions, constructions that gives a sequence of events such as one might find noted in historical chronicle or annal meaning. Historical narratives, in this regard are thus said to constitute meaning (Noel Carrol, 1990, pg 137-138).

CONCLUSION

Telling the truth about history calls for an amiable approach to studying the past as laid out in a narratives and helps anchor our democratic version of history that includes minorities, the under classes and women (Bonnie G Smith, 1995) Do individual or masses have free will in history? According to many philosophers and historian masses are left alone thus can't be engaged to change because of their fatalism, belief thus the need of getting certain individual among the masses who have positive idea and coordinate the masses towards a better society. Because of ignorance masses are extremely poor. Masses are therefore representation of a countries spirit, culture. They also represent history from bellow which brings revolution. The silent majority, marginalized poor who have a voice when given a chance they can make change. Thus, the need for them to be given an opportunity to tell stories about it to understand why we live as we do.

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