

## Globalization, Information and Communication Technology and its Impact on African Historiograph

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**Abstract:** *This paper essentially examines the impact of globalization, information and communication technology (ICT) on African historiography. The paper argues that the advent of globalization and the introduction of ICT has exposed the historian to a bonanza of sources which can be easily accessed. This development has no doubt reduced, to a large extent, the challenges associated with source materials for the reconstruction of various aspects of African history, which were hitherto very difficult to access. Examining the various sources available for the reconstruction of African history (that is their strengths and weaknesses), the paper stresses the need for historians to treat the avalanche of sources derived from ICT with suspicion until their authenticity and reliability is established. This would in the long run provide more reliable assumptions and conclusions in the reconstruction of African history.*

**Keywords:** *Globalization, ICT, History, Historiography, Sources*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization appears to be the latest catch phrase in virtually all discourse. It has unarguably attracted much discussion, debates and comments, because of the profound impact it has had, and is still having on the lives of people all over the world. Because of the centrality of globalization in all spheres, especially in the realm of academic discourse, many have come to acknowledge that we are living in a “New World Order” [NWO] – a *Global Village*, made possible by the spectacular inventions in the areas of Information and Communication Technology [ICT].<sup>1</sup>

What benefits, therefore, do historians derive from globalization, especially within the context of historical and historiographical studies? Historiography basically refers to the writing of history based on the critical examination of sources – the selection of particulars into a narrative that will stand the test of critical methods.<sup>2</sup> The philosophy of history of which historiography is the end product, is generally understood as covering two distinct types of enquiry: First, is speculative or substantive philosophy of history which is broadly taken to have as its subjects matter, the actual human past, viewed from a universal stand point and studied with the aim of disclosing the overall workings and significance of the historical process considered as a whole.<sup>3</sup> The second which interest us most is critical or analytical philosophy of history which is primarily directed towards investigating the manner in which practicing historians proceed in the course of eliciting and interpreting particular events and developments, which the human past is composed.<sup>4</sup>

From the foregoing, therefore, the craft of the historian, which is basically the reconstruction of man’s past activity, is predicated on the availability of sources which would aid in the discharge of his craft. However, various studies have shown that historical research in Africa during the colonial and post-colonial period was bedeviled by the challenges of source materials. For instance oral sources which were and are still invaluable in the reconstruction of early African history, especially at a point when written sources were scantily available have their limitations. These include problems of chronology, distortions, translation, the contamination or adulteration of oral tradition by early missionary accounts, etc. It is in the face of these enormous challenges in the reconstruction of African history that there is the need for Historians to cross-check their sources, by using various sources to authenticate the veracity, truthfulness and reliability of their analysis.

The advent of globalization and ICT appear to have provided additional source material to the Historian, especially in Africa where the neglect and preservation of archival materials has been a major problem. We agree with the submission of Edwin Bridge's et al that:

While other societies are complaining about the sheer mass documents being produced by history conscious and preserving individuals, institutions and organizations, saddling archivists with the task of sifting through the mass and determining what should and what should not be preserved, what we find happening in Nigeria is the total lack of and disrespect for records through willful destruction and the carting away and misuse of those preserved by the Colonial authority.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of this essay in historical studies can truly not be underscored. This is because there appears to be paucity of scholarly articles or works on the impact of globalization on African historiography, and a major objective of this work is to address this loophole in the literature on African/Nigerian historiography. Giving the above scenario, this essay attempts an exposition of the challenges [especially of sources], which the Historian faces in the process of trying to reconstruct history and the impact of globalization, especially ICT in historical reconstruction.

## 2. CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

### 2.1. Globalization

The idea of globalizations was first propounded by a literary critic, Marshall McLuhan when he stated that: "the new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a *global village*."<sup>6</sup> The invention and introduction into popular use of more sophisticated televisions, radio receivers, phone systems, satellite communications gadgets, powerful personal computers and the world-wide internet network services, etc since 1962 confirms McLuhan's prophecy. This "electronic interdependence turning the world into a truly global village seems to have been realized,"<sup>7</sup> with unfolding events in the world. What do we mean by globalization?

According to Hoogvelt:

Globalization can be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events many miles away and vice versa.<sup>8</sup>

Heywood similarly defined globalization as:

A complex web of interconnectedness through which life is increasingly shaped by decisions or events taken at a distance; globalization reflects the increasing permeability of the nation-state.<sup>9</sup>

What is however more germane from the above definitions is the emphasis on the new high level of interconnectivity among people the world over, which depicts an entirely new element in human relations in contemporary world. Through globalization, the world has been radically transformed into an electronically interconnected, interdependent one made totally different from the previous essentially mechanized one.<sup>10</sup>

The astonishing ease of communication in the modern age is just part of the wondrous manifestations of the phenomenon commonly described as globalization. In academic parlance, the term is quite ubiquitous and popular such that it has acquired diverse meanings, whose implications extend to virtually all sphere of human endeavour viz: Economic, social, political, environmental as well as religious.<sup>11</sup> Such analysis and explanations of the various dimensions and perspectives - be it positive or negative has been clearly elucidated by various scholars and we, therefore, do not need to replicate them in this essay.<sup>12</sup> What is, however, more tangential to us in this discourse is that, whether we like it or not [i.e. globalization], we must learn to live with, and utilize its good aspects and correct its deficiencies to make the world a better place than we found it.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.2. History and Historiography

Historiography is defined as "the writing of history, especially that which is based on the critical examination of sources and the synthesis of chosen particulars from those sources into a narrative that will stand the test of critical methods."<sup>14</sup> Similarly,

"historiography refers to the study of the practice of history itself. That is, it is not the study of past events, or history proper, but rather the study of how historians themselves, over time, have

understood, recorded, approached and conceptualized history”<sup>15</sup> History as a discipline is defined as “the study of every thing and any thing related to man’s past in time and space.”<sup>16</sup> Historiography, which is derivative of history, can be described as the process and method of writing about history.<sup>17</sup> But in the most simplest form possible, historiography could mean the writing of history.<sup>18</sup> What this implies is that, whoever is engaged in the writing of history of a people, place or thing within the framework of time and space is in possession of an expertise acquired through training or vocation.<sup>19</sup> This comes to play in the process of selecting from numerous materials available to him.

It is important to note that hitherto, history was defined as the study of man’s “past” events and this definition appear to have enveloped most practicing historians. However, contemporary historical studies have gone beyond the mere study of man’s past activity to take a leap into the present and the future. In this connection, historians now study a staggering variety of contemporary issues using a historical framework or approaches. These include health, sickness, crime, justice, urbanization, terrorism, etc. this radical departure which we intend to clearly emphasize is to show that the discipline is no longer skewed to merely a study of the past. Invariably, the advent of ICT appears to have propelled this interest even more. It is because of the paradigm shift in historical studies from the wholesale concentration on man’s past activity to his present and future that the use of ICT has become a novel source for the historian.

If the task of a historian is essentially and basically that of reconstructing man’s past, present and future, it obviously means that the historian requires various materials/sources to carry out this task. Therefore, apart from the conventional sources which are quite common [i.e. primary, secondary and auxiliary sources] and are sometimes limited or inadequate, what are the other options available to the historians? This is where there is a nexus between globalization and historiography. The fundamental question, therefore, is how does globalization which is also associated with ICT facilitate or assist the historian in his craft of historical reconstruction? Put differently, how do we factor globalization, especially, Information and Communication Technology into the reconstruction of history? We shall attempt to explain and analyze this and other variegated issues in the proceeding sections.

### **3. CONVENTIONAL SOURCES FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF AFRICAN HISTORY**

Since historiography is synonymous with the art of writing history, is it justifiable to say that Africans in the pre-literate era had no history or any thing of any substantial value for historical documentation in a written form? One basis for this traditional conception of history was that it was based on documentation in the form of written texts. The argument thus followed that if there were no written documents, there could be no history.<sup>20</sup> In this connection, it was common and also logical to designate as pre-history any period before writing. However, recent studies seem to puncture the argument which attempt to tie history to documentary evidence alone. For instance, Daniel MacCall, like many other historians have provided new perspectives to this issue. Stressing the supremacy of evidence as the basis for history, he alluded to the fact that “if there is evidence, there can be history, if there is no evidence, there is nothing to write about.”<sup>21</sup> This formula or methodological approach adumbrated by MacCall was proposed in the teen of the twentieth century but was not utilized for a long time. This formula indicates that historiography could go beyond only written sources to the application of oral sources such as archaeology, historical linguistics, oral traditions, ethno botany, and some other fields of study in the reconstruction of history. As we shall concretely show later in this discourse, using this methodological approach, studies that were pertinent to Africa, gradually began to appear. Some of this works are referred to as “pre-documentary history.”<sup>22</sup>

This new vista which has long been incorporated into historiography also recognizes the need to co-opt the results of other disciplines into history in the manner that concepts of sociology, economics and psychology,<sup>23</sup> (which have been essentially synchronic) have become a part of historiography. It is equally interesting to note that for most of sub-Saharan Africa, until a few centuries ago, and for parts of Asia, Oceania, pre-Columbian America and Australia, history was essentially derived from unwritten sources or evidence. Such submissions by MacCall and other historians nullifies the old charge by Hugh Trevor Roper that Africans had no history.<sup>24</sup> This nullification is based on the number of studies published in the last three decades using this formula. Some scholars have even gone further to reveal that there is a link between non-literate and literate periods and this provides continuity in African history.

African scholars have adequately shown that Africans and their histories were and are still dynamic realities. Using various sources, African scholars have been able to create a link between non-literate times with literate periods. The number of languages, Africa and otherwise which historical writings exist is extensive and the number of scripts is larger than one might have ever imagined. Timothy Oshadare concretizes this position more lucidly thus:

In the pre-literate African society, history was been preserved in oral tradition, re-enacted during ceremonies like installation of new Kings, dances, totems, works of arts among other non-written sources. In these societies, history is a means of promoting the understanding of, and respect for the traditional institutions and practices of the community.<sup>25</sup>

The above statement is a clear indication that various sources are available to the historian during his work. Multi-disciplinary as well cross-disciplinary approach are strategies currently been pursued vigorously, thereby helping in breaking the boundaries of specialization. Of course, archaeology, linguistics, demographers, population geneticists as well as historians are all observers of human societies through time, but their specialties are organized in separate disciplines; increasingly an overlap occurs and multi-disciplinary studies are been pursued. It is however, important to note that all sources in history, apart from being limited most often in quantity are also sometimes limited in reliability and authenticity. It is in recognition of this challenge that all sources in history should always be treated with suspicion until proven otherwise. Historians are required to verify the information/data provided by each source to establish authenticity, veracity and reliability. Corroborating the several sources of history is quite fundamental to the achievement of the end of historical reconstruction.

### **3.1. Primary Sources: Oral Sources/Oral Tradition**

Primary source is a term used in a number of disciplines to describe source materials that is closest to the person, information, period or idea being studied.<sup>26</sup> In the study of history, a primary source [also called original source or evidence] is an artifact, a document, a recording or other source of information that was created at that time under study.<sup>27</sup> They are first-hand accounts of an event or time in history that is yet to be interpreted by another person. If created by a human source, then a source with direct personal knowledge of the events being described. It serves as an original source of information about the topic. Simply, oral tradition/or sources which are derivable from primary sources is history stored in the memory and transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation.<sup>28</sup> Oral traditions are usually preserved in some fixed form and may be spoken or sung. Its major characteristics are verbalism and oral transmission. Philip Stevens has classified forms of oral tradition into myth, legend, song and what he coins “popular history.”<sup>29</sup> Although many documents that are primary sources remain in private hands, the usual location for them is the archive. These can be public or private. Documents relating to one area are usually spread over a large number of different archives.

History as an academic discipline is based on primary sources, as evaluated by the community of scholars, who report their findings in books, articles and papers. According to Arthur Marwick, “primary sources are absolutely fundamental to history.”<sup>30</sup> Ideally, a Historian will use all available primary sources created by the people involved at the time being studied. In practice, some sources have been destroyed, while others are not available for research. Perhaps, the only eyewitness reports to an event may be memoirs, autobiographies, or oral interviews taken years later. Historians studying the modern period with the intention of publishing an academic article prefer to go back to available primary sources and to seek new ones. Primary sources, whether accurate or not, offer new input into historical questions and most modern history revolves around heavy use of archives for the purpose of finding useful primary sources. A work on history is not likely to be taken seriously as scholarship if it only cites primary sources, as this does not indicate that original research has been done.

Oral traditions occupied a central place in the history of Africa before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It provided the most fruitful source of information about the remote past. Every African society has a tradition and pays serious attention to its preservation. Such traditions and preservation helped significantly in debunking the claims particularly by scholars of western extraction such as Hegel, Hugh Trevor Roper, A. P. Newton and Lord Raglan to the effect that non-literate societies have no history. The beginning of oral traditions in sub-Saharan Africa is closely tied to African independence movements

of the 1950's and 1960's. The first generation of African historians, in an attempt to debunk Eurocentric assertions and claims assumed that oral traditions were relatively uncomplicated accounts of what happened in the past.<sup>31</sup> Arising from such assumption, the job of the historian was to go into the field, interview knowledgeable, often elderly informants and thereby collect the traditions. These traditions were transcribed, translated and woven together into narrative accounts of origins, sometimes deemed to be creation myths. With all its perceived limitations, historians of African extraction used this process, albeit successfully, to set the stage for the reconstruction of the African past, which was erroneously assumed by Eurocentric scholars never to have existed. In Nigeria, pioneer historians fought tirelessly to establish oral tradition as a credible source for reconstructing Nigerian history.

For instance, the pioneering works based on oral traditional history collected by Samuel Johnson provides one version to the origin of the Yoruba. This version or perspective remains an invaluable source for the reconstruction of Yoruba History. In this work, Johnson was able to use oral tradition to trace the tradition of origin of the Yoruba's. According to him, the Yoruba originally came from the north-eastern Africa (variously supposed to be Egypt, Yemen, ancient Meroe and Arabia) and settled in Ile Ife after a journey that must have taken decades if not centuries. In the process of migration, they are said to have left colonies of themselves on their way, one of whom, the Gogobir (Gobir) of present Northern Nigeria, who are still remembered and often cited both by the Yoruba and Gogobir themselves. Johnson further revealed that the party that finally got to Ife, was led by Oduduwa who, the tradition continues, established a flourishing kingdom and later sent his sons and grandsons to establish various Yoruba kingdoms. The kingdoms are variously numbered as seven or sixteen, but when an actual count is taken of those who claim direct descent from Oduduwa, they are much more.<sup>32</sup> Similarly; Akiga Sai's work is a compendium on Tiv history. Using oral tradition extensively, Sai was able to trace the origin of the Tiv,<sup>33</sup> while J. U. Egherevba's work on Benin history has made invaluable contributions to the collection of oral tradition of the area.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the efficacy of primary sources, many criticisms have been leveled against the use of some especially oral tradition in African historiography. For example, it is alleged that oral tradition lacks definite chronology; that it is full of variants and vagueness and it is sometimes incomprehensible. David Henige in examining oral tradition and chronology exposed some of the chronological challenges which have occurred throughout the world, especially with specific reference to patterns which have occurred in well- documented societies, as well as in those whose history, like nearly all sub-Saharan Africa has been preserved primarily through oral tradition.<sup>35</sup> Taking a critical assessment of some king list in Igala Kingdom and Kano (that is, in central and northern Nigeria), Babylon, Japan etc, Henige contends that the discussion of the chronological aspects of oral tradition is best related to the weaknesses, distortions and limitations endemic to oral tradition, which is often expressed through king lists. Since this content is most often expressed through king lists, the first question to ask is: How accurate is it in terms of the number and genealogical filiations of the rulers contained therein? That is, has it been telescoped or officially lengthened? The reason for its occurrence may be several. Official king lists often, perhaps usually; omit the names of "usurpers."<sup>36</sup> For example, studies have shown that rulers imposed by a foreign suzerain have often been expunged from the record. It is likely that several rulers of Assyria, when the land was subject to Ur and later Babylon, were not included in the official king list.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, rulers whose reign were disastrous or unusually tyrannical may find their way out of the transmitted king list. In this way, oral tradition, in their function of preserving the semblance of stability and continuity, frequently resort to the technique of telescoping.

There is no way of accurately gauging the effects of usurpers "usurpers," interregna, periods of chaos or foreign rule and changes of dynasty on the perceived time-depth of a particular polity, and independent evidence is not often available for analytical purpose.<sup>38</sup> Writing on the manipulation of dynasties, Henige remarked:

.....Changes in dynasty, which can have chronological implications, may well be masked as stories of "lost," "hidden" or "exiled" heirs who reappear when necessary to carry on the dynasty. In this regards, it is noteworthy that there are few recorded changes of dynasty in pre-colonial Africa, although this is scarcely uncommon elsewhere.<sup>39</sup>

Another less conscious and, therefore, less obvious form of telescoping is to compress an entire epoch into a generation or reign of a single ruler. Often this can be detected, as in pre-dynastic China, where

the earliest rulers were given reigns of prodigious length. Similarly, John Boston perceives the first Igala rulers as “symbols of the nation” and argues that Igala traditions “covers only a fraction of the total time span of Igala history”<sup>40</sup> He believes this occurred because of the function oral tradition played in Igala politics. It is also important to emphasize that telescoping will occur through the faulty collective memories of the transmitters of the list. This is especially true and common in societies where such transmission is not an official function and where sanctions are not likely to be imposed for errors committed in the process of transmission.

A final incongruity of orally transmitted king lists is the excessively long reigns often attributed to founders of dynasties. Thus, the first emperor of Japan is said to have reigned seventy-five years, the first ruler of Kano sixty-four years, the first ruler of Arakan sixty-two years, the first Aztec ruler fifty-four years, etc. State building or dynasty founding is not normally a pursuit of infancy or childhood, and logically the founders of state, especially conquest states, should have reigns of average length at best.

Perhaps, the weakest aspect of oral tradition is its inability to establish and maintain an accurate assessment of the length of the past it purports to relate. As time passes, societies without calendrical systems tend to become either very vague about this time-depth or to relate to its present, changing circumstances. The most common method of measuring the past in many societies is in terms of king lists or genealogies. A comparison of orally transmitted king lists and genealogies in various places and times, for example, the early Mediterranean world, the Ancient Near East, the Native States of India, Africa and Oceania indicates that certain patterns of chronological distortions seem to emerge, sometimes telescoping but more often lengthening the past.<sup>41</sup> In addition, some believe that oral traditions are based on memory and there is the tendency to lose their value over a long period of time while they are kept, and that oral tradition has a problem of feedback.<sup>42</sup>

In trying to reconstruct the History of Igala, J.S Boston relied on oral tradition as his main source, in which he identified some crucial problems in reconstructing Igala history. Apart from the problem of divergence on the question of origin, he also identifies the problem of chronology and the challenge of oral tradition performing a political as well as historical function. Boston specifically states:

First there is the problem of variants in the traditions, and particularly the problem of divergence on the question of origin. The second problem is the problem of chronology, which can be summarized briefly here by saying that oral traditions seem to cover only a fraction of the total time-span of Igala history. The third problem is the problem of separating the political facets of the traditions from their historical functions. The third problem is the one that holds the key to the other two. The shortcomings of oral tradition in terms of diversity and in terms of chronological inadequacy can probably be explained by the fact that oral tradition performs a political as well as historical function.<sup>43</sup>

The divergence and existence of different theories about the origins of kinship are an essential feature of Igala oral tradition, and to emphasize only one of these views or even to try to select between the traditions, carries the risk of misrepresenting the nature of historical corpus and of missing its essential point.<sup>44</sup> In this connection, the task before the historian is to provide a framework within which the divergent views can be reconciled and synthesized. Granted that oral tradition is underpinned by some identified inadequacies highlighted above, however, the broad view of sources constituted in Africa is due in large part to the relative paucity of written documentary materials for the continent. It would be a mistake to overstate the absence of documentary sources for the construction of African history. It would be an even bigger and costlier mistake to assume or imagine that African historians, by and large, rely on only one kind of evidence to the exclusion of others.<sup>45</sup> The Long debate over the nature and suitability of oral tradition for the reconstruction of African past, has obscured the reality that few historians rely exclusively on oral evidence in their work.

For instance, other primary sources are equally available to the historian to enable him/her corroborate and authenticate his source that we need to mention- Historical linguistics and archaeology are also very viable primary source materials that are available to the historian in his craft. For example, historical linguists supplement their thinking with archaeological evidence; archaeological historians draw inspiration from oral tradition, champions of oral evidence complement their work with documentary sources, and soon on. Our confidence in the reconstruction of the past derives in part from the ways in which the various sources and methods, when used together can refine, challenge,

inspire, reinforce, or confirm, one another. One major area of historical inquiry with its own epistemological and methodological debates is comparative linguistics.<sup>46</sup> The histories of words and their attached meaning (semantics) have proved a particularly fertile area for historians. For example Jan Vansina's monumental history of equatorial Africa is founded upon the study of "words and things," a combination of linguistics and ethnographic data emphasizing semantics.<sup>47</sup> Linguistics historians have forged relatively close links with archaeologists, even publishing their works in archaeological journals. Historians have remained fairly steadfast in their belief that archaeology provides a set of methods whereby the validity of history reconstructed from oral traditions can be tested with independent data. Hitherto, archaeology's contribution to African history was thought to be primarily the provision of dating evidence and the elucidation of past migration routes. However, historians have come to realize that archeology can throw light on certain aspects of the past, especially migrations and on material culture.<sup>48</sup>

Primary sources, particularly those before the 20<sup>th</sup> may have hidden challenges. "Primary sources, in fact, are usually fragmentary, ambiguous and very difficult to analyze and interpret"<sup>49</sup> Obsolete meanings of familiar words and social context are among the traps that await the newcomer to historical studies. For this obvious reason, the interpretation of primary texts is typically taught as part of an Advanced College or Postgraduate history course. However, advanced self-study or informal training is also possible.

#### 4. SECONDARY SOURCES

Secondary sources on the other hand are scholarly books or articles that are based on primary source data and analyze, critique, report, summarize, interpret, or restructure that data. They can also be based on the reading of other secondary sources or a combination of primary source data and secondary sources.<sup>50</sup> Examples of secondary sources include: reference books such as encyclopedia, handbooks, reviews, textbooks most scholarly books, most magazines and journals, etc. Primary sources are distinguished from secondary sources, which cite, comment on, or build upon primary sources; though the distinction is not a sharp one.<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that both "primary" and "secondary" sources are relative terms, with sources judged as primary or secondary according to specific historical contexts and what is being studied.

The delineation of sources as primary or secondary first arose in the field of historiography, as historians attempted to identify and classify the sources of historical writing. In scholarly writing, an important objective of classifying sources is to determine the independence and reliability of sources.<sup>52</sup> Historians are, however, advised to be very cautious when putting secondary sources into use. The exposition of Carlo Cipola on this subject is apt and captured *inter alia*:

In contexts such as historical writing, it is almost always advisable to use primary sources if possible, and that if none are available, it is only with great caution that the author may proceed to make use of secondary sources.<sup>53</sup>

Many Historians believe that primary sources have the most objective connection to the past, and that they "speak for themselves" in ways that cannot be captured through the filter of secondary sources.<sup>54</sup>

Various scholars have expressed the difficulty involved in producing secondary source narratives from the "raw data" which makes up the past. As a general rule, modern historians prefer to go back to primary sources, if available, as well as seeking new ones, because primary sources, whether accurate or not, offer new input into historical questions, and most modern history revolves around heavy use of archives for the purpose of finding useful primary sources.

What is, however, central to this discourse is that historical reconstruction requires sources – be it primary or secondary. All these sources have their strengths and limitations just like we have clearly shown. Giving these limitations, the best option available to the historian is to access as much sources as possible but threat same with suspicion, until he is able to corroborate one source against the other to arrive at an authentic conclusion. It is also relevant to note that if the study of and reconstruction of history requires enough data, it then means that the historian must go beyond the conventional sources that we earlier mentioned.

This therefore brings us to the next issue – what role has globalization, especially the ICT played and is still playing in enhancing or facilitating historical research? If historical research requires bundle of

facts, to what extent has ICT contributed or facilitated this process? What are the opportunities and challenges presented by ICT? These and other variegated issues shall be addressed in the next section.

## **5. GLOBALIZATION [ICT] AND ITS IMPACT ON HISTORICAL RESEARCH**

A Historian, just like members of any other discipline, live at a particular time and should, therefore, not detach him/her self from the changes that are taking place within the society. In this connection, Historians cannot afford to miss the opportunity provided by globalization, but most especially ICT. Historians who neglect the current state of interconnectivity, the new modes of recording, processing and publishing will miss out very much. Historians depend on highly credible sources in historical reconstruction and like John Tosh has elucidated, “except for the special circumstances in which historians record events they themselves have witnessed, historical facts can only be known through intermediary sources”<sup>55</sup> These intermediary sources have grown in number and quality since the 1980s, and it has been made more accessible by the activities of international computer networks. Through their efforts, it is possible to access, discuss, interview and present one’s ideas as they are being muted or cultivated.

The following examples may suffice: with the advent of ICT, the Historian no longer needs to confine himself to a library full of books, journal or archival documents. He can now reach individual authors and discuss with them— a process that is commonly referred to as E-learning. The opportunities provided by ICT has helped in the extraction of both primary and secondary source materials; as the time, resources and energy that would have been spent on travels to conduct interviews has been made easier since the advent of ICT.

For example, audio-visual materials such as Utube are easily available through modern ICT facilities to the historian. Utube historical documentaries provide free viewing of historical documentaries for scholars. With this development, historians can easily access historical documentaries that would have been otherwise difficult to obtain. With ICT, all the historian needs to do is to login to Utube and type in their subject or topic of need and an avalanche of documentaries are handy. Historians can access all types of documentaries they require through Utube. Utube provides access to free videos and such information are used for research purposes.

The availability of social networks on the internet such as Twitter and Facebook, etc has also made research much easier for the historian. ICT has the impactful ability to get answers to questions very quickly; speed up the interactive process at the heart of the historical process. It is also democratizes historical process as well. The impact of ICT has been variable registering in scale, accessibility, search ability and relevance of historical raw materials to solving one or more kind of questions. Also, the Historian through the instrumentality of computers can download relevant audio-visual footage on historically important events into his computer or store them in diskettes, Cdroms, DVDs, Zip discs, flash drives, etc, which can be saved and used over a long period of time. Such documentaries can, therefore, not be easily destroyed as it is the case with archival sources/materials that are yet to be digitalized.

Other academic and scholarly networks such as H-Net are also available to the historian in the conduct of his craft. Scholarly works are frequently, efficiently and competently reviewed at H-Net and this increases the body of knowledge available, especially to the historian. Some scholarly works that are not easily accessible on the shelves of various libraries can be found on H-Net. H-Net encourages discussion of African history, culture and African studies generally. Africans of all disciplines are therefore encouraged to subscribe. H-Net also provides various academic announcements such as seminars, conferences, fellowships, call for papers, call for publications, programmes, workshops, etc. to the historian and other researchers. The call for publications provides publishing opportunities for scholars and the globalization of ideas. What this means is that international cooperation has increased due to availability of internet. It also brings scholars working on similar ideas together. This has also created a lot of opportunities for interaction and linkages with academics from various parts of the world. H-Net’s email lists functions as electronic networks, linking professors, teachers, students in an egalitarian exchange of ideas and materials. Every aspect of academic life, research, teaching, controversies - new and old is open for discussion.

ICT has also made the availability of various search engines possible. For example, the Google search engine provides uncountable research materials to the historian. The stress and rigour of sourcing for materials, is to say the least, solved by the availability of these search engines. In

addition, the availability of search engines like JSTOR and African Journal online also helps researchers identify relevant materials. Emails also help scholars share articles, essays and other information. All these are the product of ICT. Information that would have taken a longer time to access or receive is now transmitted within minutes. Research can now be completed within a short time frame.

Further still, through the internet, the Historian can easily access most libraries the world over by simply clicking onto his computer and visiting the appropriate website. Hitherto, the Historian would have needed to personally visit these libraries. In the same vein, the internet also provides the Historian with the privilege of accessing or purchasing the most recent literature on-line. This helps in preventing the situation whereby the Historian would have been required to wait for the distribution of the material, which takes a lot of time. M. Greengrass has identified five areas where ICT has proved, or is proving significant in historical research. These include:

- Information search, retrieval and validation.
- Availability of historical raw materials in facsimile forms.
- Publication and accessibility of textual and non-textual historical outputs.
- Processing/collation of large volume of data.
- Maintaining formal, institutional and semi-institutional contacts in the word of learning.
- Fostering informal research contacts around particular research themes and objectives.<sup>56</sup>

Given these avalanche of assistance provided by ICT, a 21<sup>st</sup> century historian would not require to rely exclusively on books, journals or newspapers for all his information when the footage of events are transmitted live on television. Overwhelming impact of ICT on historical research has expanded the scope of the historians beyond the frontiers of his own immediate country or nation. His nation and his continent are no longer unchallenged limits of his publication, the whole world is. We agree with the submission of Greengrass that:

Historians, like other scientific disciplines, are faced by an explosion of information. E – Science is proposed as a means of managing that data “bonanza.” The prospect, the overwhelming rationale ..., is that science methodologies help to raise our level of abstraction ... If this is so, we should be looking seriously to take advantage of what the e – science agenda has to offer us.<sup>57</sup>

Writing on the impact of globalization, Goucher, etal contends that:

Late 20<sup>th</sup> century global awareness – shaped by the information superhighway; satellite communications, and common environmental issues such as global warming and nuclear energy has created an imperative for reordering our collective knowledge of the past within a global frame work in order to comprehend the present plan for the future.<sup>58</sup>

What is quite clear from the above quotations is that in the age of globalization, the Historian should not disregard the opportunities provided by ICT in carrying out his craft. The advent of ICT has made research much easier, as access to both primary and secondary sources are within the reach of the Historian.

### 6. CHALLENGES OF ICT TO HISTORIOGRAPHY

We have already shown that the historian should always treat all his sources with suspicion until he is able to prove otherwise. This is achievable through the critical evaluation and corroboration of source to get authenticity. We seriously need to stress this point because from our analysis of sources, we have shown that all sources have their strengths and limitations. In the same vein, the use of ICT, which has had impactful consequences on historiography, has variegated challenges that we need to highlight. This is equally very important because if these sources are not critically evaluated; they are likely to lead the Historian into making wrong assumptions, analysis and conclusions.

For instance, some materials sourced on the net may be highly distorted (deliberately or consciously) to enhance their own image, prestige or importance. Such people may even create a narrative that may not be accurate. A researcher who excitedly downloads such documents without critically evaluating the amount and direction of bias is bound to make wrong conclusions. As an example, a Government report may be an accurate and unbiased description of events, but it can be distorted, censored or

altered for propaganda or cover-up purposes by some unscrupulous persons. If such a report is posted on the net, any Historian who chooses to access and use such information without critically cross-checking same is bound to make false assumptions and judgments.

Historians need to take the issue of bonanza of materials more carefully. The truth of the matter is that, the intent and purpose of some of these materials posted on the net are not easily discernable. It is difficult to say what the sponsor is trying to achieve by posting such a document on the net.<sup>59</sup> Some materials may be distorted, deceitful or fake and used uncritically, it may lead to wrong conclusions.

It is also important to mention that the poor funding of the National Archives in Nigeria and various parts of Africa is impeding the digitalization of materials. It is rather unfortunate that most archives in Nigeria are yet to be digitalized. Primary source materials available in these archives are still in hard copies, most of which have been mutilated or destroyed, due to poor preservation methods. Because of its inability to digitalize its operations, researchers still need to be physically present in the archives in order to use materials. Other challenges bedeviling the archives in Nigeria include: (i) Inadequacy of modern conservation facilities; (ii) limited training opportunities for the staff of the National Archive; (iii) absence of comprehensive and integrated records management programme (iv) inadequate publicity on the importance of the National Archive to National development.<sup>60</sup>

Given these cumulous of challenges, Historians need to come to terms with their methodological approach to the reconstruction of history. While it is important for them to take advantage of this new opportunity provided by ICT, they should not hesitate to be very critical of materials they access from various electronic sources. In this connection, the historian is called upon to treat electronic materials with utmost suspicion. They should be highly critical of same, and should endeavor to corroborate such materials with other sources to get valid conclusions.

## 7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

All we have attempted to do in this essay is to show the impact of globalization on the study and reconstruction of African history. We have shown that the advent of globalization and with the introduction into popular use of ICT, the historian has been exposed to a bonanza of sources which can be easily accessed. This development has no doubt reduced, to a large extent, the challenges associated with source materials for the reconstruction of various aspects of African history, which were hitherto very difficult to access. Examining the various sources available for the reconstruction of African history (that is their strengths and weaknesses), the essay stresses the need for historians to treat this avalanche of sources with suspicion until their authenticity and reliability is established. This would in the long run provide more reliable assumptions and conclusions in the reconstruction of African history.

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