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History's Role in Policy Making: Proffering Solutions and Questions for Humanity and the Ghanaian Context

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Abstract: Concerning history, several people across the globe perceive or think that it is mostly about past events and also about dead people. Some trained historians, whether in ancient histories or contemporary histories, have sometimes vehemently concluded that the historian or the writer of history cannot draw conclusions but he can only make inferences or better still ask questions. Such carefulness of the historian does not only add to his tactfulness but also makes the ordinary reader aiming at policy to rush for quick-fix information, 'non-history'. To a large extent when the works of historians have been used by policy makers, they are not cited. They are used in a way that the ordinary reader or beneficiary might not have a clue that history had a part to play in the birthing of such policy. This history and policy essay gleans information from essential academic sources to push forward an argument for history's role in policy making. It does look at some relevant questions for Ghana where the authors lecture in history and political studies.

Keywords: History, Policy Making, Intellectual History, Health Policy Making, Wealth of Nations, Alternative Energy Sources, Internal Disintegration.

Introduction

There are several issues that have been raised concerning the role of the historian in policy making. To many, a historical study is only about the human past, which has no bearing with the occurrences and developments of present times. To a larger extent the central theme of historical studies, continuity and change, has been overlooked or has not been appreciated by several people within the present society. The problem is that several non-historical publications which policy makers sometimes consult have used the work of historians or historical writings without crediting them. Again, policy makers who have used the work of historians to come to the kind of conclusion they have arrived will most often not mention it in their public discourse or speeches. Again, the work of most traditional historians who have published in traditional history journals or books are read mostly by historians or those being trained to be one.

For instance, historical evidence provides depth and context to issues nurses face today. As a result, the American Association for the History of Nursing (AAHN) supports the inclusion of nursing history in the curriculum. Also, Keeling writes in 2001 in an AAHN position paper that nursing history content accomplishes several goals. She argued that history does not only offer contextual perspectives but also enlightenment.¹ She re-echoes the voices of Lavinia Dock and Isabel M. Stewart that no occupation can be intelligently followed or correctly understood unless it is illuminated by the light of history. Nursing history in itself, she argued, serves to expand students' thinking and provides them with a sense of professional heritage and identity.² So Olga church asserted that graduates of nursing programmes who have not been exposed to their heritage have not been properly oriented to the profession.³ According to Lewenson (2004) the 21st century practitioners will need more than sheer information but rather the need for greater sensitivity and understanding about contextual variables and

¹ Arlene Keeling. Nursing History in the Curriculum: Preparing Nurses in the 21st Century, *American Association for the History of Nursing (AAHN) Position Paper* (2007). Accessed May 18, 2016. <https://www.aahn.org/position.html>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

ambiguity if they are to critically evaluate the information they receive.⁴ The argument is that studying history will help nurses in particular to understand their history and to ultimately use history in their decision-making process. Historical understanding allows for thoughtful decisions that facilitate innovation and change.

The above notwithstanding, the historian and his production of history have focused on major social, economic and political issues which are of grave concern to the human being and the society in general. Several efforts have been made by writers of history and historians for that matter to project how policy makers have directly or indirectly used the work of history to guide them in forming the basis for the ultimate decisions they take concerning key issues affecting society, an organization or a corporate entity. To a large extent, this point of view essay primarily focuses on how historical writings or productions could impact or influence the decisions of leaders or policy makers in the bigger society or in a country in general and sometimes on institutions in particular.

Specifically, the study examined the role of history in serving as a conduit through which societal and organizational problems could be solved. To this end, information from several secondary sources including books, articles in journals and magazines have been pieced together to highlight how history and historical writings impact policy making and the solving of societal problems. The pieces of evidence could support the fact that history contributes to the making of policy and also serves as conduit through which societal and organizational problems could be solved. The discussions that follow are primarily based on secondary sources that have been carefully scrutinized and analyzed in thematic forms. The discussions have been grouped under the following six thematic areas to raise issues for both academic and intellectual discourse:

- 1.The process of policy making,
- 2.How intellectual history makes history fit for policy making,
- 3.History's role in health policy making,
- 4.History and the wealth of nations,

⁴ Sandra B. Lewenson. 2004, p. 18.

5. Internal disintegration and lessons from history to policy-makers, and
6. History of alternative energy sources.

The Process of Policy Making

Rose (2005) identifies lesson drawing as a process whereby countries and jurisdictions adopt policies or programmes in other countries or jurisdictions so as to implement them in their countries or jurisdictions. It is simply a form of knowledge or policy transfer in which successful policies and programmes are borrowed from one jurisdiction to another. Implicitly, adequate knowledge and facts of policies and programmes adopted in one jurisdiction or a country is consequential to the successful transfer from one country to another and this is where history and historical writings play a key role in providing the knowledge and needed information for proper policy transfer.

Scholars of public policy have modified the initial classification of the policy process by Laswell (1971) as intelligence, promotion, prescription, invocation, application, termination and appraisal.⁵ Generally, the policy process has been identified as involving issue emergence, agenda setting, policy formulations, and specification of alternatives, policy adoption, implementation, evaluation and termination or re-emergence of issue. It is also agreed that there are several ways through which issues gain agenda entrance or are adopted for the consideration of policymakers. For instance, Cobb and Ross identify inside initiation, outside initiation, or mobilization as the process through which issues get attention of policy makers for their consideration and possible adoption as public policies.⁶

The process through which policy players such as government officials try to bring issues for the adoption of policy makers is referred to as inside initiation whereas in outside initiation interest group and the public move issues under discussion by the public for serious consideration and adoption by the policy makers. Alternatively, when

⁵ Harold Laswell. 1971. *A Preview of Policy Sciences*. New York: American Elsevier Publishing.

⁶ Cobb and Ross. 1976, pp.126-13.

policy makers and the government try to move issues they are seriously considering for adoption as public policy onto the public domain so as to seek support for the policy during implementation it is referred to as mobilization (Adolina and Blake 2007). In other words, issues get attention of policy makers either through the public or the government officials themselves. In that regard, Rose (2005) identified lesson drawing as the means through which governmental officials learn of policies to be adopted as public policy in a country.⁷ Anderson (2006) argues that policy makers identify societal problems as policy issue when they consider it within their responsibility to solve. He maintains that problem identification and agenda setting – either through lesson drawing from international or domestic arena – is the most political and democratic stage because of the number of policy players involved. In that case success is determined by how organized, well-resourced the policy players are and the level of accessibility of actors to the policy makers (Cobb and Elder 1972). Implicitly, the actors’ knowledge of the details of past policies will strengthen the ability to influence the policy process which makes history essential to the success of policy adoption. Essentially, the sections below analyzes the different ways that history influence policy making.

How Intellectual History Makes History fit for Policy Making

A British historian of great erudition and the author of *The Practice of History* (1967), Sir Geoffrey Elton believed that history deals with facts and that a historical fact is something that which happened in the past and left traces in documents that could be used by the historian to reconstruct it in the present. Again, E.H. Carr’s *What is History?* (1961) postulated that “the study of history is the study of causes”.⁸ As per the definition of E.H. Carr, we can infer that by studying and further analyzing historical works ranging from information on earlier problems and attempts or strategies made to solve such societal problems which might include political, social and economic issues among others could serve as a guide for policy makers.

⁷ Rose, R. 2005. *Learning from Comparative Public Policy: A practical Guide*. New York: Routledge.

⁸ Richard J. Evans. 1997. *In Defence of History*. London: Granta, p. 119.

Further arguments by E. H. Carr undermine the notion of history as mere collection of objective facts. He advocated for the production and appreciation of history in relation to contemporary ideas and events within a given period. This historical production however, should reflect the ideas and events that are in vogue within that particular era. In essence, history should be responsive to the peculiar or specific challenges in a society within a given period. This school of thought suggests that such historical productions can provide a fair representation of the actual concerns of a society which has spanned for some period of time. Once such historical productions are consulted, they will have the tendency or the proclivity to shape the policies formulated within a given period.

Over time, a wide range of sub-histories (various fields in history) emerged to give a broader outlook to history as a discipline and at the same time make room for specialization. These sub-histories include Economic History, Social History, Intellectual History, Cultural History, History of Science and Technology, History of Medicine among others. This is an essential development in historiography (history of History) in the sense that the specialization has ensured that historians are able to focus on specific fields of history of their own interest rendering them more efficient. It is also worth noting that all these specific areas have been tailored strategically to meet the demands of the contemporary society.

Arthur Marwick has argued that history is about finding things out and solving problems rather than about spinning narratives or telling stories. He further outlined a number of cognitive skills history as a discipline inculcates in its students. They include,

1. The ability to explicate and evaluate theories and concepts and the understanding of their use and abuse
2. The verbal skills necessary for intelligent participation in arguments and debate and for the presentation of a position on, or interpretation of a particular topic.⁹

⁹ Ibid.

All the aforementioned skills are necessary prerequisites for a good policy formulator; hence history equips its students to become good policy makers.

Moreover, the interdisciplinary approach employed by the historian in the writing of history as well as scientific history (based on the rigorous investigation of primary sources) renders history as one of the most credible sources for policy formulation. The post-modernist theory from the 1980s sought to undermine the authority and essence of history. They argued that historians are in the business of creating not discovering or interpreting. It is against this background that a distinguished Princeton historian, Lawrence Stone, warns that “the post-modernist challenge has thrown the historical profession into a crisis of self-confidence about what it is doing and how it is doing it.”¹⁰ He further cautioned that if post-modernist gained any more influence, “History might be on the way of becoming an endangered species.” In the same vein, Arthur Marwick, a professor of history at the Britain’s Open University, presented his fears on the premise that this post-modernist notion of history has the propensity of deluding even students of history to regard the history produced by historians as worthless; hence he declared that “postmodernist ideas were a menace to serious historical study”.¹¹

Nevertheless, it is very significant to state that the historian employs the interdisciplinary and the scientific approach in his methodology. Thus, historians corroborate sources from various fields or disciplines ranging from philology, economics, sociology, anthropology, statistics, geography, psychology, political studies among others. Again, objectivity is a key virtue to the historian. Objectivity in essence is a highly held value in historical production, hence rendering history possibly the most reliable evidence for policy formulation. This position is evident in Leopold Von Ranke’s famous saying that he seeks to present history as it actually happened.¹² A phenomenal legacy of Leopold Von Ranke in historiography has to do with the spadework of

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 12

¹² Ibid.

investigating the provenance of documents, of enquiry about the motives of those who wrote them, the circumstances in which they were written, and the ways in which they relate to other documents on the same subjects. These principles have been studied by historians since the nineteenth century.

Closely linked to the methodology employed in the production of history is the debate on “History as a Science” or an art. There is ample evidence to suggest that history could be considered as a science since the principle of ‘source criticism’ (Gobbets) was introduced into historical studies. The French historian, Faustel Coulanges of Strausbourg University declared in 1862 that History is, and should be a science. This position was affirmed in a famous inaugural lecture by Regins Professor of modern history in Cambridge, J. B. Bury when he also declared that History is a science, no less and no more.¹³

History’s Role in Health Policy Making

The article written by Professor Virginia Berridge turns to highlight the role experts play in the field of policy making. It focuses on the role of the historian in policy making in the health sector. Attention is paid to the health sector in the United Kingdom. The highlights are on how History is being used, Interpretations and Time Frames, Historian Free Data: Statistics and Other Archives, Role of the Media, Funders and Foresight and the Way Forward.¹⁴The article highlights on Stephen Fry’s article. Stephen Fry states that history has an impact on moral and ethical principles and a sense of relativism and self-criticism. He argues that the events of yesterday are criticized by the new generation in order to make the right decisions today.

This section of the essay uses Berridge’s article as a background to focus on the use of history by politicians involved in health policy making and by those who advise them. It focuses on how politicians use or see history in policy making. In the course of this the following questions could be asked:

- Are historical interpretations used?

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Virginia Berridge, pp. 311-326.

- What has been neglected in past events that would help with the formulation of new policies?
- How are old systems being used as a model to create or develop new systems in the same field?

Highlights on the neglect of past systems and traditions of the people in United Kingdom in the formulation of health policies and how other governments looked at history to formulate new policies or developments in the health sector is very crucial. An example as cited in the paper is an argument made by John Reid, the Health Secretary concerning the development of foundation hospitals in the early 2000s. He based his views on the argument that they rejuvenated mutual tradition alongside the heritage of Nye Bevan. Another example which shows the neglect of history as cited in the paper is the 1945 Labour Government, in going for a policy which equated uniformity with equality, neglected the Labour movement's tradition of co-operation and mutualism. The success of the politics of nationalization and central government organization under that government had a severe impact on the development of that tradition. However, the use of history was employed in 2003 by the then Minister of Health, Hazel Blears. He used the 19th century traditions of democratic community as a model for new forms of patient and public involvement in the NHS. Also Tony Blair in July 2006 on ways of improving public health by promoting healthy living based his speech on an extensive historical analysis of the role of the state in relation to the improvement of health.¹⁵

The article also lists levels that history could be used in the field of policy making. These include direct policy advice to ministers and policy thinking, deliberation of expert committees, and media use of history with potential policy impact. Historical analysis, however, often does not play formal roles in policy making. This is because policy makers find kudos in innovation, but often that is not evidence based. It is also noted that the information for policy makers has its source from different people with little bearing of history. The sources of information include special advisers, experts, think-tanks, lobbyists and pressure groups, professional associates, media and constituents, and

¹⁵ Ibid.

users. History being used by these groups is made evident by members of expert groups as precedence was found to be important. This is because members used the history of their committee and its past decision making to try to learn. One may however ask in relation to Ghana how often are policies reviewed by committees set up to avoid mistakes and are previous documents kept well for future references?

An important point to note is the use of Institutional memory. Institutional memory as noted has an effect on the operations of expert committees in the sense that they are repositories of political history and tactics. They served as point of reference in other administrations. The use of Intellectual memory could be an added advantage to Ghana as compared to the UK because most civil servants stay at post for longer years. These people will be good stores of institutional memory which could be a source of history and used to inform policy making bodies in all fields which includes the health sector.

Another issue raised is the Role of Historians in Policy making. The question asked is whether policy makers used works of Health historians or if they even knew any. The work of historians should serve as a point of reference for policy makers. Their works are used in speeches, especially by politicians.¹⁶ It is noted that the role of history seems to be waning as the field developed a broader basis of research evidence. The impact made by historians in the field of health varies. Historians that had influence in health policy were those with close existing connections to policy, those with a media profile and those who wrote accessibly and addressed a medical audience in health publication, who appeared to have a message for policy.

Another point worth noting is the differences in the interpretation of facts. The issue of competing interpretations is a problem. The issue of a number of historians giving different interpretations creates difficulties for its users. This however is a potential strength because two legal opinions are better than one. Interpretation of facts is a major problem identified in the article. Another associated to it is time frame. Time bound research is often carried out, thereby some periods being

¹⁶ Ibid.

ignored though they may be of relevance. Historical work has been done on some periods; however it remains unknown to policy makers. Areas of health have been researched on but have little or no relevance to policy makers. My view is that it’s potentially valuable, but it would have to be fairly recent. In modern society and with modern structures, it’s difficult to extrapolate from the more distant past up to the present day. Another issue related to the use of past historical analysis is the problem of present day government admitting the positive impact of policies of previous government because they criticized them. A process of rebadging often takes place. This is history being known however not an appropriate form of evidence or justification to use.¹⁷

Another aspect of the article is captioned Historian Free Data: Statistics and Other Archives. This section basically talks about historians not using their works directly but rather using their works in determining policies. The issue of interpretation again plays a role. The use of quantitative data and the use of documents are the two other uses of history with regard to policy making. The use of statistics as a form of historical evidence in health circles helps avoid the problem of historical interpretation. Documents are used to search for historical precedent. Works of historians are used rather than the historian.

Role of the media, another aspect, focuses on the impact the media has on policy making. History is used during crisis situations. Social policy coverage employs little knowledge of history though it may be helpful in some sectors of development. History being promoted or used by the media includes news segments in the main news package where issues are discussed from a historical perspective. An example cited is the Newsnight hosted by Greg Neale, a journalist/historian. Also the use of medical journals is worth noting. Journals are part of the ‘circuit of mass communication’ that is an avenue for ideas that filter through and gain policy currency. Accessibility of these journals is difficult to the historian. A contributing factor to this dilemma is the issue of historians not associating themselves or becoming experts in particular fields. History however is often used imaginatively in journals.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Funding bodies have a commitment to bringing evidence including historical evidence to bear on users in policy and elsewhere. Knowledge transfer mechanisms have the potential to involve the work of historians. The role of funding bodies has made historian’s interpretation appealing and also used in innovative ways. History is used to outline the future; however the historian plays little part in determining this future. New policies formulated are based on historical analysis and evidence. Most of these policies have historical references. An example is Angela Mawle, UK Public Health Association Chief executive who used John Snow extensively as a historical exemplar in her introduction to the 2006 meeting of the Annual public health forum.¹⁸

The writer also noted that history was used in an ad hoc way, mostly without the involvement of historians. This is because historians are seen as providers of raw materials for analysis. There is also little knowledge and use of the interpretative role of history. There is also the attitude of policy makers. These policy makers often have mistaken views or out-of-date perceptions that does not auger well for the use of history and the historian. Another point noted is lack of networks and entrée. This factor does not help historians to be abreast with current issues and the new move in various governments. Social scientists often have more advantage with policy antennae. The history being used by these social scientists is not always in accord with what historians are saying and this is a general problem in the health advisory field. Historians are often by-passed in the formulation of policies; however historical evidence or analysis are used often without the interpretation as most users find it difficult to decipher the work of historians.

Professor Virginia Berridge noted that measures that must be considered can be categorized in three ways – developing the narrative; using informal networks; and the rational model, developing formal mechanisms. Under developing the narrative, facts must have bearing or influence on policies or policy making. In her work, *Looking Back: History and Decision-Making in Health Care*, Sandra B. Lewenson argued that when nurses make decisions, they often use decision

¹⁸ Ibid.

making frameworks that do not take into account past practices. In this work, Sandra refers to Nelson and Gordon’s (2005) “Rhetoric of Rupture”, stating that nurses often discard and distant themselves from their past leaving huge gaps in their knowledge.¹⁹ She further argued that nurses continually re-invent themselves at their practice at the expense of their history. Here our attention is drawn to ‘nursism’ which emanates from nurses neglecting or failing to understand and value the past contributions to practice or to society; nurses contribute to the bias (nursism) that pervades the society.

Again, in 1939 nurse historian Mary Roberts argued that trends and events of today are the results of past experience as well as of varying conceptions of both present and future needs.²⁰ It is significant to note that Roberts recognized the need to examine the history of nursing to see how the profession could move forward. For example in Sandra’s work we learn that to teach nurses how to assess a community, prioritize primary healthcare needs of the community, plan and develop an appropriate intervention, and examine the impact of their decisions, a look at historical data is useful. Again, Sandra’s case study hinted that graduate nursing students interested in community and Henry Street Settlement in the Lower East side of New York City joined in doing a historical community assessment as part of their requirement for a master’s project.

In 1993, Strumpf and Tomes examined the historical use of restraints in ‘troublesome patients’ in the United States during the nineteenth century. They observed the common use of restraints in the United States during the nineteenth century. They observed a difference between the common use of restraints in the US versus the infrequent use of such devices in Great Britain. The cultural beliefs about the kind of care that these patients including the mentally ill and the elderly differed historically in both countries and the outcomes of care varied as well.²¹ Strumpf and Tomes (1993) recognized the need to study history in order for nurse administrators and nurses to examine their decisions

¹⁹ Nelson S., & S. Gordon. 2005, p. 53-4.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

about the use of restraints and to give them a better understanding of why they continue to use them with the elderly when evidence does not support the use of these devices.²²

The literature discussed above suggests apparently that historians must take key interest in the field of health since historians are scarce in this field. This will help experts in the field to consider the work of historians and the historians themselves in the course of policy formulation and implementation.

History and the Wealth of Nations

Reiterating E.H. Carr’s strong assertion in *What is history?* that the study of History is the study of causes, one can draw the inference that the study of major themes such as Colonialism, Imperialism and Neocolonialism in the history of the continent will give, for instance, African policy makers a better understanding of the basic ideologies that regulate interactions among nations in all spheres. It may also provide an insight to the motives behind the various transactions. In this way, policy makers will learn to make informed choices that will go a long way to safeguard the interests of their home countries.

In his contribution to the edited piece, *A Concise Companion to History*, Christopher Bayly wrote on History and World History which has major ramifications on International politics and decisions policy makers ought to take in favour of their nations or jurisdictions.²³ The knowledge he postulates from history amplifies the fact that the West’s (here reference is made to Europe) superior technology and tastes of aggression allowed it to capture the Wealth of the non-West and recycle it into the machine of the Industrial revolution. Reference can be made to the exploitation of the natural resources of Africa and Ghana in particular by Europe to boost their industrializing economy at the expense of the Africans. In the case of the then Gold Coast now Ghana, attention was paid to the growing of palm trees, cocoa, coffee, the cutting down of timber ‘*Funtumia Elastica*’ or the rubber tree as well as precious minerals like Gold, Bauxite and Manganese among others.

²² Strumpf and Tomes. 2004, p.19.

²³ Christopher Bayly. 2012, p. 5.

This was accompanied by the construction of railroads to connect the productive centres, neglecting the Northern and Upper Regions of the country to satisfy the then European Industrial Complex. History has taught us that such raw materials were processed into finished products and hawked down the import throat of the Economy of the Gold Coast, an injurious trend which Kwame Nkrumah made efforts to curb. Fifty-eight years on, Ghana is back to the drawing board on what causes balance of payment deficit. They are back to history; there is the need to industrialize because Europe shall not wait for Africa and Ghana in particular to do so. They will rather go through the European Union to continue to consolidate their gains on the African market, something Asia and China in particular is not only eying but also making efforts to dictate the pace. Africa must be free, a theme expostulated by the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, should come first but it should be seen in present times, through economic emancipation. Africa's policy makers ought to have known that countless number of times Europe has been shrewd; a united economic front in Africa that is malleable but not docile can do the trick. History has taught policy makers, but they have sometimes refused to learn or lacked the political will to implement or to provide for her people rather than experiment with economies just like we have seen some African leaders do in their home countries, worsening the economic plight of their people than Europe left them some decades ago.

To emphasize Christopher Bayly's argument, China's advances in the late nineteenth and twentieth century has made Europe's present technological, intellectual and scientific prowess relative. Again, as we touch on the activities of Europe, the activities of the Dutch in the Atlantic and the New World did not escape the notice of Adams Smith. May be we must also look at the causes of the wealth of nations again and do a further historical enquiry into the nature and causes of the Wealth of nations. The existing literature advances the argument that Britain and France benefitted greatly from the exploitation of resources from Africa. The key European breakthrough from our knowledge took place ultimately in relations between the states, military technology and the elite citizens who operated various forms of surveillance between

state and society. The Dutch East-Indian company and its imitators for instance harnessed capital and risk on an unparalleled scale.

The 2011 publication of *The Economist* takes a cue from the lessons modern nations and managers of state firms must learn from the East Indian Company which operated from 1602 till its demise in 1779, as a take-off point:

The East India Company foreshadowed the modern World in all sorts of striking ways. It was one of the first companies to offer limited liability to its shareholders. It laid the foundations of the British empire ... and particularly relevant at the moment - it was the first state backed company to make its mark on the world. The parallels between the East India Company and today’s state owned firms are not exact, to be sure. The East Indian Company controlled a standing army of 200,000 men, more than most European states. None of today’s state-owned companies has yet gone this far, though the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) has employed former Peoples Liberation Army Troops to protect oil wells in Sudan. The British government did not own shares in the company (though prominent courtiers and politicians certainly did). Today’s state-capitalist governments hold huge blocks of shares in their favourite companies.²⁴

It argued that “both the company and its modern descendants serve two masters, keeping one eye on their share price and the other on their political patrons... Many are enthusiastic globalizers, venturing abroad partly as money making organizations and partly as quasi-official agents of their home governments. Many are keen not only on getting their government to provide them with soft loans and diplomatic muscle but also on building infrastructure – roads, hospitals, and schools – in return for guaranteed access to raw materials. Although the East India

²⁴ “The East Indian Company: The Company that Ruled the World.” *The Economist*, 17th December, 2011. Accessed April 16, 2015. www.economist.com/node/21541753.

company flourished a very long time ago, in a very different world, its growth, longevity and demise have lessons for those who run today’s state companies and debate their future, lessons about the benefits of linking a company’s interests to a nation’s and the dangers of doing so.”²⁵ Do the forgoing arguments not saturate the nature of interactions between governments of satellite states in Africa including Ghana and the Capitalist and the Centralized states in Asia including China? Or is the nature of the interactions between Chinese firms and African governments different and not driven with covert motives? Is it not the case that neo-colonialism and the ineptitude of some African leaders have contributed to the staleness of a majority of African economies including Ghana? To this end History has already shared lessons with African policy makers.

Let’s take a look again at the question of elite surveillance of the state. In Great Britain, elite surveillance by parliament ensured that money was spent relatively productively in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. History advises policy makers that state taxation, no matter how efficient it is, if not spent productively by the executive arm of government will lead to failure of the economy. Parliament and interest or pressure groups should ensure the reduction or capitulation of such unproductivity. We also learn that small monarchies maintained powerful and intrusive taxation systems which mobilized resources highly effectively and were only undermined by the excessive ambition of European overseas conflicts. The contrast as advanced by historian Pamela Crossley²⁶ have shown that a country like China imposed a light taxation regime to pacify its provinces and gained resources by external conquest on its land frontiers.

Internal Disintegration and Lessons from History to Policy-Makers

One of the key lessons policy makers learn from history is the avoidance of internal disintegrations. A historian, Christopher Bayly has argued that the vision of deity working through history, which was a parallel theme to the political historicism of the eighteenth century, has received a new impetus from the rise of Evangelical Christianity

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Christopher Bayly. 2012, p. 5.

and militant Islam across the world. He argues that recent liberal historians of the Islamic world have attempted to downplay the themes of Jihad and conquest in favour of the idea of Islamic Brotherhood and peaceful expansion of the faith. This, she said, was clearly a reaction to the demonization of Islam in the wake of the rise of AL-Qaeda and the Taliban. Again, she takes us back to the argument of T.W. Arnold who in fighting contemporary Islamophobia and Turcophobia (Anti-Turkism), wrote on the expansion of Islam²⁷ as a religion of equality blind to race. This takes us further back to Gibbon and Voltaire who praised the rationalism and the equality of the Islamic Umma (people group) against what they saw as Christian irrationalism and despotism. Most importantly, our knowledge of historical writings and pronouncements of some non-liberals in both the Christian and Islamic faith has triggered off tensions and produced nascent religious guerilla groups who haunt, bomb and threaten innocent members of civilized society and in some instance some groups and individuals or puppet masters or nations create tensions or project such tensions to cash in on other weak regions or countries to further legitimize their control over them. A quote from Gyanendra Pandey, would be helpful to this discourse:

British common sense ideas about India involved “false totalities of ready-made religious communities-Hindu, Muslim, Sikh etc. Ignoring not only the linguistic regional and economic divisions within such groups but also the extent to which their members commonly co-existed and their relationships continually evolved, the British instead stressed that religious communities-particularly Hindus and Muslims were fundamentally exclusive, fractured and destined to remain forever antagonized.”²⁸

Closely linked to the above is the question of ethnocentrism, which is the belief in the inherent superiority of one’s own ethnic group or culture or a tendency to view alien groups or cultures from one’s own

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

perspective. Another historian, Elizabeth Buettner has paid attention to ethnicity. It is a piece that should guide policy makers to help them make policies that will prevent internal disintegration.²⁹ According to Buettner, ethnic distinctions and boundaries have served as decisive means of calibrating the supposed superiority of the self vis-à-vis the purported inferiority of the other.³⁰ In fact, Aristotle applied the term ‘ethnos’ to foreigners or barbarians. This is further explained by Buettner to have deep connotations of naturality (We perceive it is about state of nature), a non-legitimate social organization, of disorganization and of animality, while the derivative term ‘ethnikos’ meant nearly the same thing as barbarous- the barbarian thought to lack civilization. It is prudent to re-hash the historical argument as advanced by Buettner that the divisions of humanity into distinct superior and inferior categories served to rationalize European’s rights to conquer, colonize, and rule other peoples dismissed as less civilized and unfit to govern themselves. Is this the kind of mindset or path some of our politicians or political groups want to tread? Will this domain be safe if they have chosen it or are already treading? By extension, Illife summarizes, “Africans wanted effective units of action just as officials wanted effective units of government... Europeans believed Africans belonged to tribes, Africans built tribes to belong to.”³¹ Today, some politicians with less historical understanding preach ethnocentrism to gain political capital amongst some ethnic groups because it is perceived that they can have strength with such groups against the others. We are in the 21st century not dealing with an old demon of neo-colonialism and bad leadership in Africa but seeking to divide ourselves to satisfy selfish political interests. Are we confirming twentieth century Eurocentric views of Africa in the twenty-first century democratic Ghana?

History of Alternative Energy Sources and Roads

Twentieth century historians of science and technology like Ergon Larsen have drawn our attention to how man has made several efforts to

²⁹ E. Buettner, 2012.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

utilize the power of nature for his benefit or well-being.³² Concerning the energy resources of the earth man has used the tidal waves of the sea, water, sunlight, nuclear energy for useful purposes. For example, it has been noted that the first power station to be completed was that of the Rance estuary between St. Malo and Dinard in Brittany. It was opened in November 1966, by the then French president, General de Gaulle. Harnessing the power of the sea's tides seemed a particularly important task in France where since the end of the Second World War, energy consumption doubled every ten years.³³

Again, man has utilized the power of the sunlight to generate electricity. The most efficient way of generating electricity from sunlight is from the solar battery. The first of this type was demonstrated in 1954 by a team of scientist from the American Bell laboratories. A bell battery of 400 silicon cells could produce 12 volts current. Since its first demonstration, the solar battery has been extensively developed and has taken part in one of man's greatest adventures – the sending of satellites and rocket vehicles into space. Solar cells alongside with fuel cells and atomic batteries have produced their practical advantages in space. They are continually recharged by the sun.³⁴ In the 1960s, Larsen argued that the "Western World has forty to eighty times as much energy at its disposal as the people in undeveloped countries in Africa and Asia- and energy means food, housing, clothing, health transport and everything that is produced and consumed or exchanged for goods and services from abroad."³⁵ The expectation of historians of science and technology in the 60s and 70s was that since the world had enough technical means for generating enough energy (electricity) it has therefore become the noblest task of policy makers, heads of states, engineers, civil society) to ensure that the emphasis on that which will not cause people to go to bed on empty stomachs.

³² Egon Larsen. 1977, pp.15-88.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

The Global Energy Assessment report on “Toward a Sustainable Future” published in 2012 affirms the argument of twentieth century historians of science and technology. The report emphasized that energy offers a useful entry point into many of the challenges because of its immediate and direct connections with major social, economic, security and development goals of the day. Among many other challenges, energy systems are tightly linked to global economic activities: to fresh water and land resources for energy generation and food production, to biodiversity and air quality through emissions of particulate matter and precursors to tropospheric ozone and to climate change. Most of all, access to affordable and cleaner energy carriers is a fundamental prerequisite for development, which is why the GEA places much emphasis on the need to integrate energy policy with social, economic, security, development and environmental policies.³⁶ This is what history has articulated for years and policy makers and their host countries that have heeded to her call have eaten the fruit of it.

We have learnt that France, after the Second World War, saw its energy needs doubling every ten years; hence she saw the need to look for varied sources of energy that had the tendency or the proclivity to avoid lock-in to energy supply. The summary of the GEA stressed that an effective transformation required immediate action since long infrastructure lifetimes mean that it takes decades to change energy systems, so immediate action is needed to avoid lock-in of invested capital into energy systems and associated infrastructure that is not compatible with sustainability goals. For example it is noted that by 2050 almost three-quarters of the world’s population would live in the cities. The provision of services and livelihood opportunities to growing urban populations in the years to come presents a major opportunity for transforming energy systems and avoiding lock-in to energy supply and demand patterns that are counterproductive to sustainability goals.³⁷

Let us turn our attention to road construction. Historians of science and technology in the 1960s and 70s argued that the most modern type of road then, the motorway required concrete foundations usually with a

³⁶ Johnson et al. 2012.

³⁷ Ibid.

re-enforcing steel structure embedded in it to reduce the stress of very heavy traffic, as well as concrete surfacing. Concrete has the advantages that its required thickness can be calculated with great accuracy, and that its homogenous mass distributes the load evenly. Concrete roads get an extra layer of waterproof paper, which is spread in great sheets over the foundations to prevent water creep. When the concrete has dried and hardened, a surface of asphalt or tar macadam can be applied, but the modern tendency then was to leave the concrete as it is for few years then surfaced latter. However, fashions in road making change, new materials, machines and techniques are introduced every year and great deal of research has been carried out in Europe and America. Does the above technology look obsolete? How many of such do we have in West-Africa and Ghana in particular? What kinds of roads do we travel on? Are governments, road builders or engineers and contractors in Africa and Ghana in particular willing to give their country the best? Historical knowledge as to best practices in road construction and management should encourage leaders and policy makers in particular not to fall below at least what their predecessors achieved in the twentieth century. Will John Metcalf (Blind Jack) of England, Jon Macadam, Thomas Aveling, the farmer and agricultural mechanic who invented the road-roller, the world leaders of the late nineteenth and twentieth century including Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah not turn in the grave?

In Britain a new epoch of road building began in 1878 with the Highways and Locomotives Act. It ended the old turnpike system, under which road users were made to pay toll towards construction and maintenance; now for the first time the state recognized that it had to accept responsibility for road construction and maintenance. Comparatively we have to answer the following questions: Has the collection of road tolls in Ghana contributed effectively to the construction of lasting roads? Do we have to encourage or continue to engage private persons or owners of capitals firstly within Ghana, Africa, and the world at large to construct roads and plough back their profit for some period or years with negotiated terms that are favourable firstly to the people in the country and also to the investor? Do we have to consistently call on institutions and the government to render

accounts on issues of construction of new roads and maintenance of old ones?

Challenges

Issues like networking by historians, having allies in social science, involving funding bodies, engaging historians in governance and the building of knowledge transfer, using informal networks, have not been fully utilized. Neglect of the fundamental political and conceptual constraints which operate by evidence-based historians, making sense of complexity, communication and language across history or policy boundary as well as access to historical work has been quite limited.

Conclusion

History offers classic function on enlightenment that no other discipline can offer. History offers great insight, interpretative richness and a sophisticated understanding of the past; for the lack of these, current policy is poor. Studying history will afford us to use a history that focuses on continuity and change and helps us to avoid the repetition of the mistakes of the past. Just like Strumpf and Tomes (1993), historians search for reasons why things occurred and do so in the hope of informing contemporary issues that need thoughtful decisions. When nurses for instance do a nursing assessment on a patient, they start with a nursing history. Nurses would not be able to appropriately assess their patients or develop plans of action without one. If that is the case, why would nursing leaders, educators, practitioners, researchers, and the like attempt to make decisions without getting the history first?

Lynaugh and Reverby (1987) noted that history provides us with tools to examine the full range of human existence and to assess the constraints under which decisions are made.³⁸ Austin (1978) argued that “history is alive, and the search for answers in history is useful for solving present difficulties, directing behavior and accomplishing the objective of the nursing profession. When the answers are found, it is not the end; it is the beginning. Policy makers in general, including heads of institutions and leaders of nations especially those from Africa

³⁸ Lynaugh and Reverby. 1987, pp. 4,69

and Ghana in particular, should pay attention to history and learn from it before taking any step or making any progressive decisions. The usefulness of history to the policy process is very crucial and cannot be underestimated.

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