Museums and the Preservation of National History and Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Museum is a place or structure where ancient possessions are kept and demonstrated for the perusal and study by the younger generation. However, the expression referred to as "Museum" originated from the Greek word "Mouseion", which means "seat of reflection. This paper is targeted at investigating the communicative ability of museum in preserving national history and development. The researchers adopted primary and secondary sources to generate the needed information concerning the study. The paper holds that, the origin of pre-colonial museum in Nigeria is traceable to the collection of artifacts, material cultures and monuments, in the palaces of natural rulers (Kings) and traditional environment like the shrine, palaces and other traditional environments, while the origin of the colonial museums in Nigeria were traceable to the period of 1927. The paper establishes that, the museum is pivotal in the sustenance of national history, reawakening of authentic history of a people, preservation of cultural heritage and values, exposing the younger generation to the full national history, and building bridges

of unity. The work concludes that the conscious gathering, and preservation of ancient material, artifacts and traditional relics by African historians for the development of the museum as provide reliable tools to debunk western scholars who argued that, Africa as a people do not have a history neither were they part of the historical society if not for her contact with the western imperial/colonial powers. It is on this premise that, the research opined that museum rejuvenates national history and repositions society for greater socio-economic development and inspires national integration. The paper recommends that government should endeavour to encourage museum studies through adequate funding.

Key Words: History, Museum, the West, Culture, National Development

Introduction

The establishment of museum is momentous in every part of the world especially; the third world countries often referred to as developing nations, Nigeria is part of these countries called the third world or developing countries. Development of Museum in these countries helps in addressing some of the ills and uncultured statement often said by the Western scholars like Trevor Ropper, Sander, Lander and others that Africa has no history prior to their advent or contact with the Western World. Museum reawakes true history of a people and culture, it is only in Museum that an objective historical record between the past, the present and the future can be obtained for national historical studies. The importance attached to museum provides a drive of proper cultural value and historical evidence which may extend beyond the culture and history of a people to areas such as religion, education, politics, economy and warfare.

It is however painful and ill-fated that up till this present days of cultural proliferation Nigeria and its leadership has not yet realized the importance of museums to national history and development by encouraging archaeological excavation of historical sites and the proper research investigation of cultural values of the past in her societies for national historical purposes. Today, many ancient material cultures that are supposed to be kept or sustained in the museums for future studies are regarded useless by the people because of lack of knowledge in the importance of museum in nation history and development. Artifacts and monuments, which is regarded as a old historical objects also provides answers to

some of this issues confronting the objective reconstruction of nation history and development.

Explication of key concepts

Utility: in the context of this paper, utility refers to the usefulness, and satisfactory needs of museum in surviving national histories.

Museum: Museum is a place or structure where ancient possessions are kept and demonstrated for the perusal and study of the younger generation. However, the expression referred to as "Museum" originated from the Greek word "Mouseion", which means "seat of reflection". However, it was nominated as an institute of philosophy or a place of thought. By this view, Museum can be said to be an institute devoted for the preservation and interpretation of ancient solid material cultures of human kind and surroundings.

Sustenance: is the ability of providing support or nourishment to something. It could also be referred to as the mechanism used in maintaining the existence of something

National History: is a past chronological record relating to the past event of sovereign, constituted and stable communities of people formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, ethnicity and culture.

History of the Origin of Museum

The origin of Museum could be traced to man and his curiosity in assembling, accumulating what they consider precious, beautiful and curious materials and object they used for their cultural activities, economic sustenance, and political practices. However, ancient object, material culture or collections includes palace and shrine materials like skull of animals and humans, animal skins especially that of Lions, Tiger, Leopard and so on. Animal horns, stones, ancient farming/fishing implements, and so on. However, the origin of museum in this paper will be considered in the following ways namely, pre-historical museum, historical (colonial museum) and the post colonial museum.

The Origin of Pre-Historical Museum in Nigeria: the origin of pre-historical museums is associated with collection of artifacts, material cultures and monuments, in the palaces of natural rulers (Kings) and traditional environment like the shrine. The palace heads or keepers as well as the priests of the deities functions as curators, caretakers and interpreters of the artifacts. Wooden masks, animals and human skulls, animal skins like Lion, Tiger and Leopard, Animal horns, iron and bronze, staff, hart of Kings, statues and thrones, ceremonial dresses of past kings, war attires, and implements were artifacts kept in the royal palaces and shrines. However, the artifacts in pre-colonial eras were consciously preserved by the palaces for functional purpose because it plays symbolic values in interpreting the culture and history of the people to the younger generation, while the artifacts or relics found in the shrines helped to interpret or explain the functionality and existence of the deities in the kingdom.

The pre-colonial history of museums in Nigeria can also be traced to the period of Arab contact fondly referred to as the Tran Saharan trade era. During these periods, various cultural materials of the communicating parties were exchanged and preserved. This argument can be further sustained by the historical record of **chidi** which opined that one the fastest means through which the Trans Saharan intruded religion known as the Islamic religion gain ground in Nigeria was through the Palace contact. The trade helps promoting the preservation and fashioning of Religious and political artifacts in the palaces. Also traditional environment like burial grounds serves as a preservative medium of solid relics like monuments, burial attires of kings, chiefs and traditional personalities, these historical sites provides material remains of the kings buried and also functions as a historical site for archaeological excavation and studies. Some natural features like caves and mountains serves as a natural barrier for external aggressions and provided link for religious worship were also preserved and protected as natural artifacts. As earlier noted, the people in charge for grouping and preservation of all this museum material cultures (artifact or relics) are the head of families, priests of deities and shrines, keepers of palaces and chiefs courts. Using the Ijaw people as a case study, a head of the family is called the Alaowoi or Alabo of War Canoe House and he is in charge of his family's shrine and as such the keeper and interpreter of relics found in the shrine. In such shrine, material cultures or artifacts like iron or bronze amulets, wooden statue, animal or human

skull, animal skin like Lion, Tiger and Leopard, mask of representing deities were kept. The head of the family (War Canoe House) or the chosen one called the priests (lubu saraowoi) takes care of the maintenance and ritual in the shrine for appeasement of the powers in shrine as well as protection of tradition artifacts like iron gongs, ivory trumpets, drums as well as stone or clay images of deities in the shrines.

The Historical Colonial Museum in Nigeria: the development of historical or colonial museums in Nigeria is traceable to the period of 1927. According to Nzewunwa (1984:101), Mr. Kenneth Murray, who is a colonial art teacher in the British colonial service, upon his appointment as the adviser to the colonial Government on arts and culture proposed to the government the need for establishment of colonial education system that is based on local arts, however, the proposal was accepted and Mr. Kenneth Murray was mobilized to carry out the function. While carrying out the project, Mr. Murray made a personal collection of several Nigerian arts from different areas. Much more lately, Mr. Kenneth Murray, proposed to the government on the need to establish a laws that will enhance the establishment of museums and to prevent illegal exportation of Nigerian works art

According to Murray (1966), three locations were suggested by the Mr. Kenneth Murray's led team for the establishment of the Museum in the country, but his effort was truncated following the outbreak of the Second World War. Since the colonial authority could no longer continue with the establishment of the museums in the selected three areas, Murray was therefore advise to continue with one location instead of the three, this action was accompanied with the purchase of land to establish a permanent structure for the collection of the artifacts or material cultures.

The already established mandate of Murray's led panel and the intervention of some European scholar like Duck propelled the official establishment of Nigerian antiquity service on July 28th 1943. Also in 1946, Mr. J.H. Bravnholtz a worker in the department of Ethnography of British museum arrived Nigeria (Lagos) on official tour mandated by the colonial office to evaluate Nigerian artifacts and provide a professional advise to the British Government on the preservations of

the artifact, material remains or the material cultures of the people. Subsequently, in 1947, Mr. B.E. Faggs, an archaeologist was saddled with the responsibility of been an assistant surveyor of antiquities in charge of archaeological collection. Plateau Jos became a center of much concentration for Mr. Fagg archaeological research and as a result, Jos museum was setup in 1952 and up till date, most of the archaeological materials gathered by Fagg is still at the museum.

The History of Post Colonial Museum in Nigeria: In the bid to trace the history of post colonial museum in Nigeria, there is need to put into consideration the then department of Antiquities and the present National commission for museum and monuments. The post colonial museum was establishment to improve on the existing pre-colonial and colonial museum collections in different parts of Nigeria for the preserve Nigerian national cultural values and history. Today, the nation has to its credit about 29 established federal museums, including museums in the colonial Nigeria.

Importance of Museum in the sustenance of National History

Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2000) Museum in general view is a store house of artifacts, relics, material remains and cultures. Museum performs the functional mandates of keeping and preserving ancient materials of man and his environ for the purpose of future documentation and references. The function of Museum to historian and archaeologist can be likened to the function of libraries and archives in the area of book storage and Government records respectively for scholarship purpose and reconstruction of histories. However, there should be no doubt, therefore about the enormous sustainable importance of museum to the overall shaping and reconstruction of national histories and development.

Until the importance and usefulness of museum in the general enlightenment and education of the public is exposed to the general public, the reconstruction of nation histories will suffer bias, distortion and a deteriorative setback. Lack of knowledge in the usefulness of museum by the general public and even in the body of scholarship has made the public to view museum as the store of ancient materials that is of no value to the present and the future society, this type of impression attached to museums by the general public can be blamed on the negligence of the government to encourage history and archaeological studies and

sponsor history and archaeological research that could investigate the past cultural values of the people and it interrelation for the purpose of unity and peaceful co-existence. As early noted that, the importance of museums in the preservation of national histories cannot be well treated if a proper trace of historical origin of museums are not placed, and now that the work has properly discussed the existence of museum, its importance to the preservation of national histories can be considered as follows.

Museum Brings Nations to Historical Page: prior to development of Museum in Africa countries, the western scholars has established that, Africa as a people does not have history or were not part of the historical society until her contact with western imperial/colonial powers. This claim was proposed by the western scholars like Trevor Ropper, Sander, Lander and others because, they had judged being part of historical world, is to having a well developed writing skills that could help in documenting historical events, but it is quite unfortunate that the western scholars could only judged being part of historical world from the point of acquiring writing skills without putting into cognizance that their history also grow from the point of verbal transmission and collections of ancient material (Archaeological remains) to the point of documentation.

Maybe this might be a memory failure on the part of the west or a deliberate omission of African world from the historical page. However, in finding remedy to these ills and uncultured statement or claims of the western scholars by the African scholars the need for the visitation of historical sites and collection of material remains, artifact or relics became eminent. Today, with the establishment of museums with collections of African ancient material culture, artifacts and traditional relics has availed the African world the evidential facts to debunk the western claims and reconstruct African history objectively.

Museum Reawakes True History of A People and Culture: it is only in Museum that an objective historical record of the past can be achieved, the cultural materials and artifacts gives a clear and realistic explanations of a people history to the future generations. Museum serves a visual mirror between the past and the present and gives a mental picture of how the future will look like, this is because

a properly preserved ancient remain serves as a reawaking force of true historical values amongst the people.

Knowledge of having common historical fact by a people strengthens their sense of unity and harmonious co-existence. Whenever there is a trace of historical commonness through traditional relics and material cultures amongst a group of people it springs up objective co-existence and willingness of compatibility and undiluted waves of love in the union. This historical fact cannot be better understood through verbal transmission only but with the visual expression of the artifacts, material cultures and remains in the museum makes fast achievable.

Collection and Preservation of National Historical Value: Collects and preservation of ancient objects, materials of religious, cultural and historical values helps to revive national cultural consciousness that most have gone into extinction as a result of ignorant or lack of interest in the important of such cultural values. Museum is a store house of the past cultures and historical objects for the guide, modification and promotion of cultural activities in the contemporary society.

Quittance of Full National Historical Knowledge: Museum is an embodiment of historical knowledge and a good source of historical, scientific, political and socio-cultural research. Museum offers a gate way for historical trace and knowledge of the past histories of a particular area. Museum avail the human society the understanding about human past activities and also will provide a sound mental foundation for the present societies and to conduct their actions. Any human society that neglects the past or failed to take cognizance of the facts about the past, such society is invariably painting the present and the future in black and such society can to grown beyond it fears. It is in this background that the establishment of National Museum for the sustenance of national history is justifiable.

Quittance with the Past: Museums and galleries provide an insight into the history of past human kind; also the lessons learnt from collection and preserved past artifacts in the museum cannot be quantified because it has spring up many natural festivals, and other cultural events in the country. The contact between the past and the present made available by the preserved cultural, political and economic artifacts in the museum has help to expose to the present society the

wonders (success) and tragedies employed by the past society in tackling their differences and building a sustainable cultural values that is priceless especially when applied in the period of social conflict or environmental disorder. Museums bring history to life, dead memories to life by shining visual light on the past through the display of the past material cultures for present and future successful drives. The most significant role of museum is to collect exhibits, and preserve the human history of the past, it purposes are not far from near because, the museum has helped to enable the public see the historical events that took place before colonial contact, during colonial contact and after colonial contact (independence).

Building Bridges of Unity: it is an untouchable truth that museums have a role to play in giving every human society to road map of building a formidable relation. Museum have a very strong perspective in helping the public to re-establish their commonness on the ground of historical and cultural unity that provides the foundation for building interconnected bridges across the nation rather than breeding division on ethnical and cultural grounds. Museums have the power to create unity at both social and political level and also on a local level. Local museums often kept in the traditional environments like palaces, shrines and ancient legendry houses are able to provide a sense of community unity and cultural habit of celebrating a collective and common heritage amongst the people.

Museum Provides Retainable Memories: the establishment of slave museum in Calabar provides the Nigerian nation a retainable memories of the distasteful and atrocious slave trade and the horrific nature of the meddle passage. The preservation of the artifacts, relics material cultures used in the trans Atlantic slave trade helps the nation to have the full and retentive memories of western activities in Nigeria (Africa). If the artifacts were not kept in the museum as evidence, the efforts of African historians in exposing the menace of the European world on the African and soil would have been subject to debate amount to nothing but fables. Museum serves as an information center, it is responsible of informing individuals or groups of their and cause them to strive for nation development as a people.

Objectivity in Historical Reconstruction: it makes the study of national history interesting and free from bias and extortion. Histories can be reconstructed on bias or can be deliberately extorted by anybody especially those with the privilege

knowledge about the past event. Sometime it is deliberately extorted because it is to favourable to the testifier (s) the person can also adopt bias in presenting the historical fact, but all this historical shortcomings can be put to rest through evidences in the museum. Base on this museum is store of facts and reconstruction of complete history.

It Solve the Problem of Existence of a People: artifact found in the museum helps societies to have a good balance in their historical past. For instance, every human society is peculiar to a particular material culture and a trace in this cultural artifact in the museum can help such society to carry out a balance study on the similarity of its cultural artifact to the others as a way tracing her ancestral origin. Today, many societies are struggling to trace their origin and because lack of historical material cultures, they are wrongly accepting and reconstructing their histories toward one powerful society or kingdom. For example, the trace of the true origin of the Nkoro (Krika) people was a serious trouble in Nkoro as many oral tradition floors the historical environment of the origin of Nkoro. However, this unhealthy historical trauma was quickly managed through the effective collections of material cultures which eventually expose and linked the Nkoro people to the ancestral origin.

Importance of Museum in the sustenance of National Development

Income Generation: main attraction for tourist and helps in research and study. Museums serve as a means of creating wealth for the nation because as the tourists come in for the sight seen, it creates means of income to different categories of people such as, Transporters, hotels/guest house owners, those who sell one souvenir or the other, as well as food stuff dealers, and as such, promoting the economy of the nation.

Encouragement of Investors: the historical fact drown from the past society through the artifacts in the museum gives investors new mind set about the society on how to improve the already established ideas and technology of the past. Industrialization came into play through the trace of the ancient civilization of the European world by historians of Great Britain. For example if the Nigerian nation had build on its civil war experience today she would have been rated amongst the fast growing industrial nations in the world. The war museum avail to the

younger generation that Nigerians as a people are technologically gifted by the bad government who are not interested in harnessing those technological ideas into play has kept Nigerian nation the back bench position amongst industrial nations of the world. Good investors will quickly harness all those ideas by searching for those directly involve in the technological ideas for higher productivities.

Inspiring Development: Museum is more relevant today than it has ever been because it has the powers to reflect and shape every human society to think better, progressive and motivational. It is pertinent to note that the most important occurrence that has influenced the direction of human development and progress are scientific discoveries and warfare and all this are done through the knowledge of these greater vents of the past. Scientist strives higher by paying attentions to the preserved and presented histories of the past society. Museum is a motivational force that champion's development because it exposes the ancient developmental deals and how they go about it, sustained it, and where they failed for improvement of the current society. Development is the progress of one society from where it was to a new level, if this is a true fact about development, then, development is motivational in nature because it is pushed by a historical shift of one society learnt by the immediate society that a meaningful result of progress is attained. Secondly, what we see physical inspires us more than what we heard but never saw. Museum is the mirror that shows us the past to inspire our actions today.

Preparation of the Society to good values: Yet information about scientific episodes and the development of warfare are of equal importance if we are to have a balance view of the course of human development and progress. Man, from the prehistoric times has always been inquisitive. However, there should be no doubt, therefore about the enormous role which historic museum has played in the overall shaping of the society.

Museum and the Nation-Building

According Simon, (2010) Museums have played a significant role in nation-building by serving as institutions that preserve and promote cultural heritage and

national identity. Here are some ways in which museums have contributed to nation-building:

Preserving Cultural Heritage: Museums have been instrumental in preserving cultural heritage by collecting, documenting, and interpreting artifacts and objects that reflect the history and traditions of a nation. By doing so, they provide a window into the past and help to educate the public about their shared cultural heritage. For example, the National Museum of Kenya has collected and preserved over 20,000 artifacts that showcase the country's rich cultural heritage, including traditional weapons, jewelry, and artwork.

Promoting National Identity: Museums also play a crucial role in promoting national identity by highlighting the achievements and contributions of a nation's people. For instance, the National Museum of Singapore features exhibits on the country's history, culture, and achievements, such as the development of the Singaporean identity and the country's struggle for independence. By celebrating the accomplishments of a nation's people, museums help to foster a sense of pride and belonging among citizens.

Fostering Social Cohesion: Museums can also contribute to social cohesion by bringing together people from different backgrounds and cultures. For example, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., provides a platform for exploring the experiences and contributions of African Americans, and serves as a symbol of unity and inclusivity. By providing a space for diverse communities to come together and engage with one another, museums can help to bridge cultural divides and promote social harmony.

Supporting Education and Research: Finally, museums support education and research by providing access to their collections and expertise. For instance, the British Museum in London offers educational resources and workshops for students and teachers, while the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City provides online resources and research opportunities for scholars and researchers. By supporting education and research, museums help to advance knowledge and understanding of a nation's cultural heritage and history.

Conclusion

Museums have played a vital role in nation-building by preserving cultural heritage, promoting national identity, fostering social cohesion, and supporting education and research. By serving as institutions that bring people together and provide a window into the past, museums help to create a shared sense of purpose and belonging among citizens, and contribute to the development of a strong and vibrant nation.

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