# Derogating the Norms of Historical Reconstruction through the Application of Artificial Intelligence

**By**

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**Abstract**

The study on derogating the norms of historical reconstruction through the application of artificial intelligence is an expression that explains a misnomer in the documentation of history. In the context of study, as artificial intelligence refers to the emergence and use of computer systems programmed to perform the task that requires human perspective, the paper argues that the discipline history has its own sources and method considered very necessary as against reliance on AI in the writing of history. The work which traced the origin of artificial intelligence back to 1950s also reveals its significance in promoting machine learning. However, the paper in discussing problems that impede the use of artificial intelligence in historical reconstruction, recommends that historical sources of data should be professionally observed in the documentation of history.

**Keywords: Derogating, Norms, Historical Reconstruction and Artificial Intelligence**

## Introduction

In the reconstruction of history, there are basic rules observed by professionals of the discipline as a distinct area of study. On its nature, history is generally referred to as the study of all events that happened in the past which actually manifested through the activities of man into many years ago. It is this characteristics that historians in the writing of history investigate deep in their reconstructions through the use of oral sources, written sources, archaeological sources and interdisciplinary approach to enable them have a valid account of documentation.

Nevertheless, through the process of globalization where the world and her component systems are digitized, there emerged the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) through the use of computer in the reconstruction of historical events. However, as a new-normal, this paper shall explain its damages to scholars in historical research. Such areas are visible in the reconstruction of African history hence oral tradition is central in the study. In view of this paper, it will also reveal how the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is gradually eliminating oral referencing style in history documentation.

**Meaning of Artificial Intelligence**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the development or emergence of computer systems that can perform tasks that actually require human intelligence, such as learning, problem-solving, decision-making and perception. It could also mean the ability or capacity of a digital computer or computer – controlled robot to perform duties or tasks ordinarily associated with intelligent beings. AI is regularly applied to the project of developing systems endowed with the intellectual processes feature of humans, such as ability to reason, discover meanings, generalize or learn from past experience.

**Origin of Artificial Intelligence**

The concept and origin of Artificial Intelligence was coined and traced to 1956 by John McCarthy who was a computer scientist and a computer activist. In the 1950s, computer scientists such as Alan Turing, Martin Minsky and John McCarthy started discovering ways to create and develop machines that could think and learn in the same manner like humans.

Since its emergence, it has made some significant achievements which scholars considered both ways in areas like machine learning natural language processing and computer vision. In the 21st century, the usage of AI has broadcasted widely in the processes of acquiring knowledge and learning to the extent that criticisms are generated.

**Sources of Data in the Writing of History**

In the writing of history, scholars usually depend on primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are derived from oral sources, archival materials,

personal diaries and memoirs. Oral sources are divided into two, namely: oral tradition and oral history. Oral tradition is a historical source of a specific nature derived from the fact that it is unwritten source couched in a form suitable for oral transmission, and their preservation depends on the powers of memory of successive generations of human beings. Oral tradition are all verbal testimonies which are reported statements concerning the past (Vansina, 1965:1, 19). Vansina, further explains that oral tradition exclusively consists of hearsay or testimonies that narrate an event which was not witnessed by an informant.

Alagoa (2014:1, 6) defines oral traditions as "all oral testimonies concerning the past which are transmitted from one person to another". It is also a historical information transmitted orally by processes peculiar to each community and which should be studied first in the context of its culture, before being made available for any analysis and comparism.

Amugo (2008:106) posits that in oral tradition, the informant of the historical data is not the origin of the tradition but only a link in a chain for the process of transmission. He therefore describes oral tradition (document) as a "living historiographical document and not dead one like the achiever document". In spite its significance in historical research, the problems of oral tradition include: failure of human memory, exaggeration of information, events which discredit people are not often spoken of and also the problem of chronology. But with the support of other sources, oral tradition will provide the necessary tool for historical reconstruction.

Similarly, oral history as a source of history writing refers to eye witness account about events and situations which occurred during the life of the informants. It identifies those oral testimonies concerning the past told by participants in the events who were eye witness to them or belonged to the generation of period in which the event took place (Alagoa, 2006:13).

Dike and Njoku (2008:153) explains oral history as an information about the past which is mainly provided directly by a participant observer or an eye witness in an event. It is therefore, on this premise that Thompson (1978:1-2) explains that:

> Oral account is a means of transforming the purpose and content of historical studies. This is because all historical studies depend on their functional and social purpose.

As a source of history that focused on the person who took part in the activities or directly witnessed the event, its problem requires the selection of potential witnesses. The use of oral source requires skill hence the historian will not just accept all oral sources collected as facts, but must be cross-examined and subjected to proper scrutiny. Those that are relevant to the subject in question are accepted, while the irrelevant ones are rejected.

Despite the primary sources, original ideas considered very crucial in history writing comes from the secondary sources which include published books, journal articles, magazines, government publications, newspapers as well as unpublished reports from workshops, seminar proceedings, dissertation and thesis research (Odey, 2011:48). These sources of empirical data contain themes and ideas which motivates historians in the documentation of events.

Apart from sharpening the writing of history, secondary sources remains helpful in the formulation of theoretical framework and also provides a comparative stance in the analysis of data. But as scholars rely on written sources as the most appropriate evidence for research, historians must be careful of the circumstances which might make them unreliable. Even as the written source provide a lot of materials for the historian to reconstruct the past, its limitations include time lapse between when an event took place and when it was recorded. The writer may be bias if he was not a participant in the event. There is also the possibility of distortion of facts which users may ignorantly believe to be true (Amugo, 2008:105).

The inter-disciplinary approach is another veritable source of history widely considered in its reconstruction. Since history is a discipline that is all embracing considering its study of man and his interaction with the environment, history requires the services of other disciplines in humanities, social science and sciences that could be helpful in historical research. It is because of the relatedness of history to other disciplines that Alagoa (2014:51) posits that:

> It is the responsibility of historians undertaking research to write history either by using ideas developed through specialist studies in related disciplines in humanities and social sciences.

In the light of this, it is obvious that the use of interdisciplinary approach in historical research lies in the fact that they supply theories and generalizations about the operation of societies and processes of change which are the subject of history. In its application, the historian needs not to turn his or herself into something other than a historian in order to take advantage of the relationship that exists between history and those other disciplines.

Furthermore, archaeology is another source of history that is unavoidable in the study and writing of history, hence it deals with the study of the past of man and society through material remains that man had left behind. Sunday (2015:32) explains that such material remains consist of relics of cultural materials created and used by man. The remains which include artifacts of all sorts, archaic of industrial processes and remains of buildings offers information about people for historical reconstruction. (Agbalino, Okpeh & Imbua, 2023:62).

Inspite the dearth of professionals in the field, archaeology on its impact has the ability to provide data out of which absolute dates could be calculated through analytical tools and techniques from other disciplines mainly the natural sciences.

**Historians and Information Gathering**

Historians gather information through field work and published materials. During the field work, interviews are conducted on individuals and groups of persons who had good knowledge of the study area. In a group interview, the interviewee shall represent a particular group of persons whose account they may correct or supplement. During such interview, all those present could have an agreement on the information given. In this process, inexpensive method of making handwritten notes from the respondents will be adopted. Similarly, in assembling oral sources, a historian should prepare his questions before interview. Although, some questions could be developed while discussions and interactions are in progress.

Published materials such as books, newspapers, magazines, students dissertation and thesis are derivable from the libraries. Examples of the libraries for historical materials include: the university library, national library, state library, private library and departmental library. Also important is the archives where materials relevant for historical documents are carefully preserved.

It is therefore, these various sources of historical data that Vansina (1997:47) explains that "it is very rare for any single source of historical writing to exhibit all the features of the ideal source".

Thereafter, at the stage of analysis, the interpretation of historical data for reconstruction of history is a major function of historians that use the conventional methods of the discipline to evaluate the evidence and to arrive at conclusion. As oral sources are purely narrative, to achieve good interpretation and analysis of data from both primary and secondary sources, a historian shall adopt the narrative, analytical and descriptive approach. Information derived from variant sources should objectively and carefully compared, criticized and cross-examined before they are considered as facts for historical documentation.

It is therefore these approaches adopted as against the use of AI to have a valid account of history that the discipline as a field of study is honoured with great value.

**Problems of Artificial Intelligence in the Writing of History**

Originality in historical reconstruction, solely depends on the effective application of sources of data which simply is classified into primary and secondary sources in the documentation of past events. But in the contemporary times, with development in technology where machines and computers tries to perform the duties of a human in research studies led to the emergence of artificial intelligence. However, its usage as against the norms of history are faced with problems which include:

1. **Bias and Interpretation:** A historian in his writing always detach personal interest while collecting data. The reason for this is to avoid bias and undue influence in the interpretation and analysis of data collected. Against this

principle, Johnson (2019) explains that AI systems are trained on already existing data which probably contain biases of historical events. It is therefore evident that with artificial intelligence generated histories, there are biases which could lead to distorted narratives and interpretations.

**ii. Lack of Contextual Understanding:** As artificial intelligence can analyze data and identify patterns, it may struggle to interpret the significance of events. Hence every historical event has its significance in the society, the inability of AI to interpret significance of events implies destruction of historical events. Moreover, to have a good historical interpretation, it requires fine understanding of social, cultural and political factors that surround such event. This, AI cannot be able to grasp or capture while analyzing data (Patel & Nguyen, 2023).

**iii. Loss of Human Perspective:** History is as much understanding human experiences, motivations and emotions as it documents events. This is only possible through one on one contact between the historian and the informant. This essential area in gathering historical materials is lacking in artificial intelligence.

**iv. Failure of Originality Text:** At present, because of changes in historical research pattern, most institutions since the 21st century have diverse means to check originality of scholars research work through turn-it-in text. It is however, obvious that historical works delivered through AI and internet materials always read between 40% and above when subjected to text. Sometimes most of the answers provided appears not to be correct for historical documentation.

**v. Neglect of Oral Referencing Pattern:** In the writing of history, oral referencing which shows the details of informants explains originality and activities or approaches adopted in the process of historical documentation. Against this, oral referencing which explains originality in historical works remains difficult on any reconstruction which relies strictly on the use of artificial intelligence.

## Conclusion

The use of artificial intelligence in the writing of history is recent development that seek to undermine the traditional approaches involve in the reconstruction of

history. As history is based on human activities and not machine learning, its integrity as a discipline could only be uphold by adherence to its methodology. It is therefore argued that considering the merits of historical sources as against artificial intelligence, scholars of history should de-emphasize the use of AI in historical reconstruction.

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