
‘At Daggers Drawn’: History, Political Science and the ‘Soul’ of International Relations Discourse in Nigeria

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Abstract

The emergence of International Relations (IR) after the First World War as a distinct field, separate from diplomatic history was primarily conditioned by the need to build a special body of knowledge aimed at unravelling the causes of war as well as the prescriptions for peace. In order to arrive at something close to a systematic knowledge of the varied relationships among states, a positivist methodology was found for IR. At the same time, the scholars and practitioners of International Relations (IR) continued to rely on history for bulk of their information. This explains why the IR is denoted as a multi-disciplinary field. In Nigerian scholarship, the growth and popularity of IR have been brought about by the crisis that bedeviled the discipline of History from the 1980s. In the ensuing crisis of relevance, most departments of history began to rechristen to Departments of History and International Studies or Relations. Consequently, a struggle arises between historians and political scientists for the ‘soul’ of International Relations discourse in Nigeria. While claims and counter-claims are rife, the main issue appears to bother on the methodological approach of the two disciplines. This study undertakes to examine this matter and as well, attempts to reconcile the differing position of the historian and the political

scientist – for, in fact, they are not mutually exclusive. Information for the study came from primary and secondary sources.

Keywords: History, Political Science, International Relations, Methodology and Scholarship

Introduction

A new discipline is often sired by one, two or more older disciplines. This also applies to International Relations (IR) which emerged as a field of enquiry after the First World War (Johari, 2014) The birth of International Relations was occasioned by the need of building a specialised body of knowledge aimed at systematically examining the causes of war and what could be done by humanity to minimize, if not, obliterate the conditions that foster conflicts and wars (Hill, 2001). The destruction that trailed the First World War was so appalling that Euro-American statesmen considered the old approach to the study of war and peace insufficient for the demands of the time. The thought at the time was that a more 'scientific' approach to the issues of international politics would help to prevent wars among states. Besides, the rise of positivism in Europe was a crucial determinant of the initial wave of enthusiasm for IR as a distinct field of enquiry (Daddow, 2013). It requires to be stated that some scholars of the new discipline, especially in Europe continued to undertake their studies within the precincts of international history or diplomatic history. It is on record that the first Chair of International Relations in the United Kingdom was the historian, Professor Edward Hallet Carr (<http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/inernationalrelations>).

There was thus, from the scratch, some level of methodological differences between the deductionists and inductionists (Dourgherty and Pfalzgraff, 1996). While the

historians believe that the patterns of international relations are deductible from history, the positivists, mainly political scientists contend that international relations should be studied as a science. These contending perspectives on the methods to be employed for the study of IR have come to be known as the paradigm wars. The *problematique* may have caused Alfred Zimmern to see International Relations as “a bundle of subjects viewed from common perspective” (Zimmern, 1939: 8). For Bakuttswah Bakut, “IR remained a discipline without identity, but more receptive to diplomatic history” (international history) (Bakut: 2006: 8). Writing on International Relations as they saw it in the immediate post Second World War years, N.D. Palmer and H.C. Perkins posit that “although International Relations has emerged from its status as a poor relation of political science and history, it is still clear from being a well-organised discipline” (Palmer and Perkins, 2005: xii).

The point to note is that even before the establishment of the first institution of higher learning in Nigeria, the paradigm wars on the best methodology for the study of IR had begun. However, in the Nigerian situation, the paradigm wars appear to have been worsened by the crisis that History found itself in, beginning from the 1980s (Obi, 2015, Personal Interview). In the ensuing crisis of relevance, most departments of history began to rechristen to Departments of History and International Relations/Studies. This situation appeared to have seriously piqued political scientists in whose domain International Relations had been hitherto studied. The suffixation to the departments of history in Nigeria has, therefore, heightened the paradigm wars between historians and the political scientists. The crux of the matter is that this paradigm war does not bode well for the study of international relations in Nigeria. Often time, it has tended to create unnecessarily tension

and animosity between the historian and political scientist who ordinarily should synergise to promote the study of the multifaceted relations between and among sovereign states and other actors of the international system. This study undertakes to examine the roots of the matter and, as well, attempts to reconcile the differing positions of the two sides of the divide. For convenience, the paper is divided into five sections. This ongoing introduction is directly followed by conceptual explanations. The third part examines the origin and evolution of International Relations as a field of Study. The fourth part considers the paradigm wars as well as the place of history and political science in the study of international relations. The study is concluded in the fifth section

Conceptual Explanations

Three key ideas require to be conceptualized. These include: International Relations, History and Political Science. International Relations has been defined, re-defined, again and again and yet no definition has laid claim to universality and general acceptance. This is often the case with most phenomena in the humanities and social science. International Relations is defined in this paper as the study of the entire relations or interactions among states, non-state organizations, and transnational corporations, among others. The nature of these relationships may be political, social, economic, military, humanitarian, and scientific, among others. For Karen Mingst (1999: 2), International Relations is:

the study of the interactions among various actors that participate in international politics, including states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, sub-national entities like bureaucracies and local governments and individuals. It is the study of the

behavior of these actors as they participate individually and together in international political processes.

It is probably because of the encompassing nature of International Relations that some writers have separated it from International Politics which appears to be the main subject-matter of political scientists. The mistake of using the terms 'international politics' and 'international relations' interchangeably is often made by scholars and writers. This has been made possible by the centripetal power of political realists who see international relations as meaning nothing other than the struggle for power among the state actors. J.C. Johari uses upper and lower cases to distinguish between International Relations (IR) as an academic discipline, on one hand and, international relations as subject-matter on the other hand (Johari, 2014). This has given rise to the concept of `IR` and ir`.

As a field of enquiry, History is concerned with the 'how', 'why' and 'when' of events and situations. Historians are not only concerned with what happened in the past; they are also interested in explaining how it happened and why it was so. According to Arthur Marwick, there are three levels of meaning of history, first, history connotes the entire human past as it actually happened. Second, history connotes man's attempt to describe and interpret the past. The third is the study of history as a discipline (Marwick, 1970). There are many subgenres of history, these include political, economic, social, military/strategic, diplomatic/international history/relations, among others.

Political science, on the other hand, concerns itself with the State, it endeavours to understand the state in its fundamental conditions, its essential nature, its various forms of manifestations and its development. The continued expansion of knowledge in the last one hundred years has broaden the scope of political science

and helped to differentiate it from history. Like history, political science has several subgenres which include comparative politics, political theory, public administration and international politics/relations, among others.

Origins and Evolution of International Relations

The origin of international relations is traced to the evolution of the European states system. J.C Johari writes that “an account of the rise and growth of international relations is as old as the history of the state system” (Johari, 2014: 37). However, there are evidences to suggest that international relations was a phenomenon as far back as the ancient times. For example, the ancient Greeks under the auspices of Peloponnesian League related with each in the Greek city-state system. There were Greek scholars who wrote and taught how best the Greek international system could be preserved. Thorstein V. Kalijarvi (1961), for instance, writes that ancient Greece was a torchbearer in the evolution of international relations. According to him,

Disputes were arbitrated, criminals extradited, ambassadors, messengers, heralds, diplomatic officers, and secretaries exchanged; temples accorded immunity from attack or violation; and cooperation among states fostered. An international law far more effective than our own was observed. It covered items already mentioned and in addition such subjects as asylum, naturalization, immunity of monuments from destruction, diplomatic privileges, consular regularization and the pacific settlement of international dispute. So numerous were the subjects dealt with that classical scholars delighted in asserting that every international institution of our time had its antecedent in ancient Greece.

The Romans also made some distinctive contributions to the evolution of international relations. For example, while the Greeks established their empire by the might of sword, the Roman public intellectuals contrived a strategic formula – the power of persuasion and where this failed, the sword (Johari, 2014). The foregoing, however, does not suggest that there was a distinct discipline dubbed International Relations. Knowledge, as we have it today, was not departmentalised in Greco-Roman civilisations.

In the post-Westphalian order, the origins of the study of international relations as a distinct field of enquiry began in the years following the First World War. Johari (2014: 39) further explains that “chairs were created in leading American and English Universities so as to understand international political developments”. Among the earliest practitioners of the new discipline were historians, international jurists and scholars of politics. However, the outbreak of another disastrous global war in 1939 was taken by a new generation of younger scholars to signal, among other things, the failure of the idealism of International Relations the faultiness of the historical approach to the study of International Relations. Taking inspirations from the earlier writings of social theorists like Talcott Parsons and Almond, post-World II scholars of International Relations subscribed strictly to the course of empiricism. Johari (2014: 58) notes that,

Karl Deutsch, David J. Singer, Richard Snyder, H.W Bruck, B. Sapin and a very large number of new scholars devised new methods, tools, strategies, paradigms and the like, so as to understand and explain international political reality in exclusively empirical terms. They discarded every consideration of normativism and instead sought to convert the study of international politics into a science.

It was thus, the rise of the behaviouralists, especially among political scientists that seemed to have pushed history to the fringes, seeking, as it were, to claim for political science, the new discipline of International Relations. One cannot help but ask: how did historians respond to this trend? In an attempt to answer this question, Micheal G. Fry, in the case of American historians, contends that,

Diplomatic historians stood among the founders of international relations but have been elbowed aside, and some of the fault lies with them. They allowed history to become a mere preface to current events, their empiricism to become little more than a source of data for social scientists, and their intellectual preferences to be used as a bulwark against science itself. They all too frequently dismissed international relations or mistook it for journalism (Fry, 1987: 5).

The above contention does not only describe the altitude of some American historians to International Relations but applies to Nigerian historians as well. Even with advent of the post-behavioural paradigm, which American scholars refer to as 'the return of history', the empiricists continue to berate those who employ the historical approach in the study of international relations. In the Nigerian situation, political scientists often argue that historians are not methodologically equipped to make any meaningful contributions to IR. Nigerian historians who have an interest in IR have since countered this claim by producing studies on varying aspects of the discipline of International Relations. In fact, the founding Director-General of Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), Dr. Lawrence Apalara Fubunmi, was a historian who had studied the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium in the Sudan for a PhD.

It should be noted that the discipline of International Relations has undergone five distinct phases. The first phase was characterised by a high degree of historical accuracy and strict adherence to the principles of historical research and documentation. In the phase, the accounts of history were presented in a descriptive and chronological manner without much reference to how specific and situations fitted into the general pattern of international conduct (Thompson, 1958: 433-34).

The second phase was a rejection of the methodology and orientation of the diplomatic historians which appeared to have had a free course in the first phase. K.W. Thompson reveals that two general approaches emerged in the second phase of the evolution of the discipline. First, the diplomatic historians of the period continued to ply their trade in the strictest historical methodology and cared less about the current events approach emphasised by those who had rejected the approach of the first phase. Second, the new methodology championed by the scholars of the second phase placed the teacher of international relations in the position of an expositor and interpreter of the immediate significance of current events” (Maliniak, et al, 2007). Additionally, little or no attempt was made by these writers of the second phase to relate history to the contemporary problems of the international system. The approach of the second phase, therefore, developed no firm methodological foundations by which the events of the present could be related to the long run of history.

In the third phase, scholars of IR, disenchanted with the normative traditions of the discipline were moved to adopt a new approach which stressed the institutionalization of international relations through international law and organisation(Thompson, 1958: 433-34).

Besides, the idealism of the founders of the League of Nations was to rub off significantly on the academic persuasions of the writers of the third phase. They all too frequently, consented to the assumption that the peace of the international system would be best preserved by international cooperation and thus, devoted their energies to promoting international cooperation via international law and organisations.

The fourth phase in the evolution of International Relations, according to, Thompson was a behavioral revolution. Given that the idealism of the inter-war scholars was unable to forestall another global war and, considering that power politics continued to subsist as the basic element of international relations, scholars and practitioners of IR began to emphasis political power, rather than law and institutions as the essential dynamic on international relations (Thompson, 1958: 433-34).

The fifth phase in the evolution of International Relations has been termed post – Behaviouralism or ‘the return of history’. This approach was championed by David Easton, who in his inaugural address at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association called for an abandonment of the crazed quest of ‘scientifising’ international relations (Thompson, 1958: 433-34).

The supporters of Easton describe the Eastonian Approach as a new revolution in the study of international relations. Accordingly, it is argued that, It (the Eastonian Approach) signifies abandonment of the ‘hard-nosed empiricism’ and instead, reaffirmation of norms and values in political analysis. The scholars of this latest phase are exhorted to give up the ‘mad craze for scientism’ and instead, make their research socially relevant Thompson, 1958: 433-34). In this new phase, attention has been made to return to history as well as sociology. This still does not suggest that paradigm wars between the historian and the political

scientist has abated. In line with the foregoing (Maliniak, et al, 2007), inform us that “although there seems to be little reason to persist in the belief that paradigm wars define the fields, methods wars remain alive and well”.

History, Political Science and the ‘Soul’ of International Relations Discourse in Nigeria

The study of international relations in Nigeria appeared to have been hitherto domiciled almost exclusively in the departments of political science. For a number of reasons, Nigerian historians seemed to have been uninterested in International Relations, until recently. Thus, even though political science at first, emerged as an area of study from political history, political scientists and historians often find themselves quarrelling over the borderlines of their discipline and over methods (Akpan, 1988).

On the issue of the attitude of historians to International Relations discourse in Nigeria, it has been noted that historians were late in showing interest in international relations. The late entry of Nigerian historians in the International Relations discipline has a history of its own. We may recall that history until 1980 (what A.O. Adeoye has termed the ‘golden years’) was the ‘golden child’ which “provided the intellectual arm that was necessary to dismantle colonialism and the lies on which it rested...” (Ogbogbo, 2011). Ogbogbo observes that the task of fighting imperialism from the intellectual angle was championed mainly by Historians who were then based at Ibadan (Ogbogbo, 2011). This situation made history and historians relevant in the scheme of things of the period. Ogbogbo further posits:

The demonstration of the relevance of the discipline of history is not just in the number of students that throng the Department of History as their first choice of course, but

the recognition conferred on its practitioners by virtually all units of government. The point being made is that these historians found accommodation and patronage with the ruling political elite(Ogbogbo, 2011: 170).

With independence won, the historians of the Ibadan School of History, prominent among who were K.O. Dike, S.O. Biobaku, J.C. Anene, C.C. Ifemesia, J.F. Ade- Ajayi, A.E. Afigbo, Obaro Ikime, P.A. Igbafe, among others, seemed to have all agreed that the next crucial task to undertake in the wake of independence was to produce studies which promote the oneness of Nigerian peoples. The best way to achieve the oneness of Nigerian diverse ethnic groups, as these pioneer scholars saw it, was in the unrelenting promotion of intergroup relations. In such an atmosphere, no Nigerian historian was found making any appreciable inroads into International Relations. With the possible exception of J.C. Anene, S.O. Agbi and a few others who pioneered boundary and Afro-Asian studies, respectively, the Ibadan historians all appeared to have been too preoccupied with nationalistic history to show any appreciable interest in international relations.

Not minding how patriotic their academic fervor for the promotion of mutual understanding amongst the peoples of Nigeria via intergroup history was, they often appeared to have sanctioned the somewhat “limiting” understanding that the oneness of Nigeria (was) is irrevocable. The patriotic and the nationalistic history of the pioneer Nigerian historians would not have been called to question, if not for the fact that the discipline progressively began to falter and decline. Incidentally, the intergroup project never succeeded in entrenching the much needed national integration. Consequently, the decline and ill-fortunes of History were such that by the 1980s, a state of emergency had to be declared in

historical scholarship in Nigeria. Ogbogbo succinctly underscores this situation thus:

Its graduates (history graduates) that were formerly sought after by government agencies and private companies began to witness a drought in their marketability. This was partly due to the flourishing of other disciplines that emerged from history. Amongst these are political science, hitherto christened Political History, Economics became increasingly disentangled from Economic history, and other disciplines like International Relations came to the fore. This balkanization of history weakened its appeal to the larger Nigerian society. Indeed, their fortunes dwindled as the currency of their profession paled into insignificance in the socio-economic market place(Ogbogbo, 2011: 170).

The above challenge that confronted History continued into the 21st century and, in the ensuing crises of relevance, many Departments of History began to add suffices to History in order to stay afloat. International studies and Diplomatic Studies became the most popular suffixes. Uzoigwe (2008: vii) gives a clearer insight into how the suffixes started:

Sometimes in 1995, Dr. Ndu Life Njoku... suggested to me what he said he had worked out and thought could be a solution to the dwindling student enrollment in History programme at Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria, a slow but consistent attrition that was approaching a crisis situation. At that time, I was Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University; Dr. Njoku was Head of History unit (which he started in 1992) in the same institution. He proposed that the name of the department be changed to Department of History and

International Studies, arguing that what was traditionally studied as “History” was more or less a study of past and contemporary issues of the world

Uzoigwe further reveals that,

He (Dr. Njoku) also argued that the addition of international studies to the traditional concerns of teaching history, apart from improving its social relevance, would assuredly appeal to students. He said he had interviewed some prospective students and some history majors at the time and that they were all enthusiastic about the proposed change... within a couple of years, student enrollment in History at Imo State University increased dramatically...Not surprisingly, this welcome revival of the fortunes of history at the institution quickly attracted the attention of other Head of Departments of History in Nigerian universities. They did the smart thing by copying the Imo State University initiative and witnessed also a dramatic upswing in student interest in History in their institutions (Uzoigwe, 2008: vii).

Indeed, most departments of History in Nigerian universities have had to add the above noted suffixes to History, the most popular being ‘International Studies’. As should be expected, Nigerian political scientists did not take this incursion into their hitherto exclusively domain lightly. It has been observed that:

At first, they laughed it off as the case of a drowning man catching any available straw but when historians persisted and continuously rechristened into History and International Studies, there was this campaign among political scientists that International Studies is not the same

thing as International Relations (Aja, 2016, Personal Interview).

Remi Aja further contends that “it is perhaps, in other to avoid any further problems with the obviously irked political scientists that Nigerian historians delineated theirs as International Studies instead of Relations” (Aja, 2016, Personal Interview). It should, however, be noted that there are no known-clear cut differences between International Relations, International Studies, or International affairs. Most European and American Universities use these terms interchangeably – the subject-matter essentially remains the same. It is nothing other than the methodological differences that cause a rift between historians and political scientists. In line with the foregoing, Maliniak, et al, (2007: 2), note that “IR scholars teach and think that paradigms divide the discipline when they do not”. Historians tend to analyze international relations deductively and are given to view history as providing the needed raw materials for any meaningful analyses of international behavior.

Accordingly, most historical scholars of International Relations believe that all they needed doing is interpreting their historical data accurately to be able to explain the general and specific patterns of international interactions. Political scientists, on the other hand, reject the deductive approach and insist on the study of international relations based on scientific methodologies. M.A. Kaplan posits admonishes political scientists to regard history merely as a source for raw material and go beyond mere interpretation. “The scholar of International relations”, in his viewpoint, “should be interested –in all systems – past, present, future, and hypothetical (Kaplan, 1966)

Towards a Reconciliation of the Positions of the Historian and the Political Scientist

A reconciliation of the positions of the historian and the political scientist is not impossible – for indeed, they are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the methodologies championed by both sides reinforce rather than obstruct each other. The narratives and deductionist approach of the historian may have one or two things to learn from the inductionist approach of the political scientist. Besides, historians are beginning to utilise theories and some useful social science models in the explanation and analyses of historical events. The political scientist too, has to depend on the facts of history for testing and validating his hypotheses. In this, the input of the historian cannot be gainsaid. For the facts of history are not like fish on the fishmonger's slab, it is the historian that selects relevant facts from irrelevant ones (Carr, 1961). Karen Mingst, a political scientist for example writes that,

Without any historical background, many of today's key issues are incomprehensible. History tells us that the bombings of Israel are part of a dispute over territory between Arabs and Jews... Thus history provides a crucial background for the study of international relations... history invites its students to acquire detailed knowledge of specific events, but it can also be used to test generalizations. Having deciphered patterns from the past, students of history can begin to explain the relationships among various events (Mingst, 1999:112).

Thus, the synergy of the historical traditional approach and the political scientist's inductive paradigm cannot but propel and promote the overall interest of International Relations in Nigeria. It should also be noted that apart from History and Political Science,

such fields as Philosophy, Economics, Psychology, Sociology, and Religion, among others have made significant contributions to I.R as a discipline and are all stakeholders.

Conclusion

Arising from our examination so far, it may be appropriate to state that contrary to the notion that paradigms differences create a permanent chasm in International Relations discourse, there seems to be truly no irresolvable differences between the research methods of the political scientist and those of the historian vis â vis the International Relations discourse. Thus, a synergy of the methods of the two disciplines would only enrich International Relations discourse rather than obtund it. The continuities between the historical and scientific approaches outweigh the discontinuities, and the development of a scientific explanation of international relations depends upon accepting some of the fundamental epistemological assumptions which underpin the historical approach.

Nigerian historians should thus encourage their students who show an interest in international relations. Some conservative Nigerian historians assume that the growth of International Relations detrimental to the historical discipline. This is simply not the case. If anything, International Relations has helped to demonstrate the salience of history in both the humanities and the social sciences.

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