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A CRITIQUE OF HISTORIOGRAPHICAL METHODS AND CRITICISM OF THUCYDIDES: AN ARCHETYPE OF EUROCENTRIC CENSURE OF AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Abstract:

Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon are the three greatest historians whose works have preserved the socio-cultural and socio-political practices of the Greeks and non-Greeks. However, among the three mentioned historians, it is Thucydides who openly criticises his predecessors for using inappropriate approaches and sources of writing history, which have resulted in account inaccuracies (Cf. Thucydides, 1.20.1ff; 1.21.2-8; 1.22.1ff). On the one hand, some accounts of Thucydides are considered accurate due to his evidence-based account. On the other hand, some silent questions have not been answered over the years when reviewers are discussing the accuracy of Thucydides. Using historiographical interpretation analysis, we note that some issues, such as omissions, past judgment errors, and inadequacies, render some of Thucydides' accounts doubtful. Hence, the paper argues that, despite Thucydides' criticism of Herodotus and those before him, Thucydides' own historiographical approaches did not lead to an error-free. We also note that Thucydidean criticisms found their way into African historiography. For example, scholars such as David Hume, George Hegel and Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper, like Thucydides, have criticised Africa as having no accurate history because of the sources, especially reliance on oral traditions, which make African historians' accounts inaccurate. Based on this Thucydidean and Eurocentric criticism, the paper concludes that methods and techniques alone are not the yardsticks for arriving at an acceptable or factual historical account. This is so since such criticisms are often made to discredit and suppress the "other". Hence, emphasis should

be placed on carefully analysing people's experiences, narrations, and recordings of events.

Keywords: Historiographical, Methods, Criticism, Eurocentric Censure, African Historiography

1. Introduction

Historiography is the writing down and keeping of events or aspects of the past by humans for posterity use. In other words, historiography is a study of historical writing which describes the notion as the study of historians' approaches in creating history as a field of study, and by expansion, anyone who does historical inquiry on a specific topic (Obeya, 2019, p. 36). Thucydides was occupied by the history academy based on this conceptual clarification of historiography. The main aim of Thucydides was to write down the events of the war between the Spartans and their allies and the Athenians and their allies. Thucydides believed that the war would be greater than any other war that had happened before (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian. War*, I.1.1-17). However, he made a quick conclusion and overrode the difficulties he encountered concerning the remoteness of the war to say that the evidence he has gathered led him to conclude that his account of the war "shall be better" than past events narrated by Herodotus and predecessors, who relied on oral traditions or sources.

Thucydides, after informing us about his intended reason and aim of writing about the war, went further to create a sharp distinction between his work and that of his predecessors by criticising their oral methods of historiography as inappropriate and then moved further to tell us of the appropriate historiographical methods which he has used for his work (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian. War*, I.20.1ff; I.21.2-8; I.22.1ff). In simple terms, because poets, storytellers, and prose writers exaggerate, lie, and accept any information that comes to them without "critically" assessing the credibility of their sources and mostly rely on myths that denounce factual reporting of events, Thucydides believed that their accounts and approaches should not be taken seriously, but his (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian. War*, I.21.2-8). With this

exposition given, there is a need to delve into Thucydides' methods employed for his account.

2. A Critique of Selected Thucydidean Methods of Historiography

The selected Thucydidean historiographical methods include scientific methods, eyewitness accounts (direct and vicarious), field trips, archaeological and primary approaches, chronology, and set speeches/direct quotations.

2.1. Scientific Method

Like the Ionian Greeks who started demanding answers from a human perspective about the continent, heavenly bodies, metals, matter, and scientific method about the allegedly well-known truths (Finley, 1959, p. 2; Kagan, 2009, p. 5), by relegating myths, religion, tales, and oral traditions, among others in their rational thinking, Thucydides did not incorporate centuries of religious ideas, gods, and those listed as seen in Homer's and Herodotus' accounts. As we observe, Thucydides did his research using a logical and scientific approach. Unlike Homer and Hesiod, who attributed causation to the gods, Thucydides saw causation(s) as a human affair. Nonetheless, his scientific mode of research was prototypical of the Ionian writers of Miletus, Asia Minor (Kagan, 2009: 5-6). It is believed that two major factors or development ideas shaped Thucydides' scientific, historical research: (1) the sophistic movement, the temper of which was established by the dictum of its founder Protagoras – 'Man is the measure of all things'; (2) the growing science of medicine (thus the school of medical writers surrounding Hippocrates of Cos) (see Kagan, 2009, p. 9; Ober, 2006, p. 133; Thomas, 2006, pp. 92-93).

According to Usher (1969: 27), the teachings of the Sophists aimed, in general, to encourage men to have confidence in their own mental powers, even to the extent of throwing back the frontiers of Zeus' Olympian kingdom. On the other hand, the substantial bulk of therapeutic writings in circulation in Thucydides' time incorporated a wide range of themes concerned with man's physical and psychological state. With the same methods of the Hippocratic (an anonymous body

of medical writers), Thucydides' conclusions as to the identity of diseases (about the great plague of Athens) were reached by the careful observation of symptoms; comparison with previously observed cases was followed by treatment where this was known, and a prediction of the patient's likely future health was made; and most relevant to the study of history, particular attention was paid to the conditions and environment in which different illness occurred (Usher, 1969, pp. 27-8, Mitchell-Boyask, 2009).

The possibility of applying such scientific methods to history was not lost to Thucydides' predecessors, but they never used them systematically. But for Thucydides, the attainability of practically useful knowledge by empirical means gave him a sound foundation on which to build an entirely new conception of historiography, as we see in his description and analysis of the great plague which ravaged Athens for two summers in 430 and 429 (Kagan, 2009, pp. 9-11; Usher, 1969: 28-9). Based on what Thucydides did – his description and analysis of the plague – we can say that Thucydides deserves praise. However, the society he found himself in may have influenced his thoughts. However, he was able to apply such influence in the historical interpretation and analysis of events. Also, one can see a sort of accuracy in what Thucydides does and what he says about his method: "... either I was present myself at the events which I have described, or else I heard them from eye-witnesses whose reports I have checked with as much thoroughness as possible" (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 1.22.1ff). We also see a relationship between his scientifically systematic method and the accuracy of the plague.

Conversely, it is not on every occasion that we see a relationship between what he says ("systematic analysis of events") and what he does. Thucydides' exclusion of some data subjects his narratives to criticism, suggesting he might have presented a lopsided account. It is noticed, for example, that Thucydides, in his attempt to write a detailed and lengthy analysis of the internal crisis in Corcyra and afterwards, ended up omitting or ignoring some key issues of fifth-century Greece incomplete since he did not discuss a series of other events at all (see Finley, 1959, p. 11), which likely subjects some of such

account into criticisms. However, we can consider this presentation style as *Thucydidean censorship*, whereby he deprives us of other information about the events of the Peloponnesian War. Whatever the case may be, according to Finley (1959), we do not see the likely scope in which Thucydides judges the archons or political figures at the time of his writing. Thucydides paid attention to only a few of them in the analysis. Of the famous leaders in Athens, and after Pericles had passed away, only Cleon receives attention in Thucydides' account; the rest do not come into the picture. Although historians are allowed to censor to select what is best or considered important for their narratives, they are also expected to present a balanced account when dealing with important characters or state officials.

Based on what Thucydides says about his methods and his predecessors', we expected to see Thucydides presenting a balanced account of his characters, but we look in vain. Nonetheless, generally, since history is what historians consider important (see Carr, 1961, pp. 30-7), Thucydides decided to play value judgment in his account of individual personalities. This is where we agree with Finley (1959, p. 11) that, in general terms and so far as the writing of history is concerned, this style of presenting a lopsided history should not be dismissed as carelessness of the historian since it has the potential of rendering an account suspicious and inaccurate. On the other hand, we can agree with Austin (1969) that Thucydides tried as much as possible to adapt the methods of his predecessors in a manner of active commitment to ideas and attempts that subjected history and historiography to a scientific analysis based on ideas that gave his *Peloponnesian War*, inconsistent as it may seem, a vividness and an impact more direct than we find in his predecessors (Austin, 1969: 45-6). Thus, at times, Thucydides' statement about historiographical approaches and accuracy is consistent with his systematic analysis; other times, it is too practically inconsistent with what he does. On the other hand, we notice that historical criticisms, whether literally or a rhetorical ploy, were common among ancient Greek historians, as seen in Herodotus' comment about Hecataeus' account (see Herodotus, *Histories*, II.112-116; Austin, 1969, p. 5).

2.2. Eyewitness

According to Shrimpton (1999, p. 351), putting together a major history may have heroic dimensions, especially since it often involves the trials and expense of travel. According to Shrimpton, travel was advisable if only because of the ancient propensity to value autopsy. It is believed that “eyes are better than ears” (this was also the saying in Greece when historiography was becoming more interesting and more evolving), as testified in the dictum of Thucydides. The best source is eyewitnesses (Shrimpton, 1999, 351). However, it is not every history that one can depend on the eye-witness as a method. If the event being inquired about is as old as creation itself, then one cannot employ eyewitnesses except through oral traditions and methods, which Thucydides censured. Since Thucydides tasked himself to write about events in his own time, there was no way he would have left out eyewitnesses (both direct and vicarious) as part of his methods in writing his *Peloponnesian War*.

It is common knowledge, from Thucydides’ own words, that he did not write about events of the dead past but contemporary: the issues he himself witnessed under his own observation and that of other people’s observations whom he thoroughly examined when receiving their version of the events (Finley, 1959, p. 9). Thus, in Thucydides’ sense, only a contemporary and an eyewitness account can one get to know what happened, the facts and the causes of domestic instabilities of one’s own period.

Regarding a vicarious eyewitness account, since Thucydides could not travel to all parts of the battle arena, and especially since his exile prevented him from getting the direct facts, particularly from the camp of Athens, he, to a large extent, depended on those who witnessed the events of the war in both Spartan and Athenian camps. For Austin (1969), Thucydides recorded many events at which he had not been present at all. Thus, he relied on other witnesses, some of whom may have been leaders who played decisive roles, others probably ordinary hoplites who hardly even understood the events Thucydides asked them to recall for him (Austin, 1969: 46-7). In many instances, apart

from Thucydides saying that he gathered some of the information from his informants, he presented his accounts as if he was a direct witness to all the events (typically akin to the omniscient narrator). In such a situation, we do not know which account was observed under his own eyes or his informants since he did not explicitly tell us from which source(s) he used in a particular event. Examples can be found in his military account of the affair at Pylos between the Athenians and the Spartans and his account of the Athenians' disastrous expedition to Syracuse.

Thucydides presented the account like a writer who was at the scene and also on a high enough level of command to see the pattern of the whole event. It has been noticed, for example, that Thucydides described the combat at Pylos as a sea battle fought from the land and a land battle fought on the sea and that this kind of observation strikes us as one made by Thucydides to himself as he listened to various accounts and visualised the scene for himself. Thus, some of the events narrated in his history were just reports from secondary observers who may have reported the events in a manner that matched their preferences. What can be credited to Thucydides on this issue is that, after hearing from his reporters, whom he never mentions by name for a reason only known to him, he tried to create the whole scene down to its last details in his own mind and then tried to project that same visual accuracy into his narrative (see also Usher, 1969, p. 26; Austin, 1969, p. 47; Sears, 2011, pp. 157-168). However, we can still spot weaknesses in this attempt, such as omissions, additions, and probable exaggerations and imaginations.

In the view of Usher (1969), Thucydides gave his readers virtually no access to his workshop and no insight into his methods of research or the criteria on which he chose his final version of any particular episode, overlooking that he had earlier criticised his predecessors' oral methods of historiography. No informant is named in his *Peloponnesian War*, and no reasons were given for choosing one version of a story rather than the other. Moreover, up to the time of his exile, as Usher reiterates, we may assume autopsy of much that Thucydides narrated, but he never told us when he was an eyewitness

and when he was not. Even in the narrative of an event in which he is known to have participated, as we read his work, the sack of Amphipolis, there is no perceptible increase in vividness or detail. Nonetheless, we can say that this style of Thucydidean presentation is akin to an omniscient narrator, whereby Thucydides presented the events that he had witnessed all by himself and had known everything that happened in every zone of the conflict.

With the use of his vicarious eyewitness account, Thucydides leaves us in suspense. After his exile (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, V.26.5; see also Tsakmakis, 2006, p. 162; Grant, 2008), as he informs us, Thucydides had enough time and access to a wider selection of sources, but while admitting he obtained information from the Peloponnesians, he completely remains silent as to their individual identity. It could be assumed that Thucydides did not want to endanger himself and his informants by revealing their true identity and decided to employ what is termed as *Thucydidean censorship*. If this was the case, what did he care about? After all, he had been exiled and had devoted himself to writing an account different from his predecessors. Also, since his work was not to serve the immediate and popular taste of the readers of his own time but for future generations, he should have been clearer about his sources and evidence. If this had been done, and in line with his criticisms, Thucydides would have gotten an additional point for the credibility of the account source.

Besides, Thucydides' discussion of the size of the Spartan army in the Battle of Mantinea (Book V, 68.2) raises doubt about his account. Thucydides stated that he could not record the actual number of soldiers, but he had provided a formula according to which one can make a reasonable estimate (Bakker, 2006: 117). What formula do we seek? There is no formula here since any historian can say the same or make an estimated number of war casualties. Hence, estimation becomes part of the methods used in recording events and is not limited to a historian or culture. By extension, estimated accuracy and inaccuracy, appropriate and inappropriate approaches, and what is considered historical is the historian himself since his beliefs and biases influence his judgment and analysis.

2.3. Field Trips (Travelling)

Like some early writers such as Hecataeus, Charon of Lampsacus, Scylax of Caryanda, and Herodotus, Thucydides engaged extensively in field trips to gather facts from the Spartan and Athenian camps. Since the war did not occur at only one battle arena, and since he decided to write a contemporary account of his time, Thucydides had to include travelling as part of his historiographical methods (Finley, 1959, p. 10). Thus, it could be said that curiosity, a desire to know about current events, of “eyewitnesses” must necessarily involve field trip(s). By this, one’s curiosity, the combination of eyewitness and travelling as methods, will lead to understanding and reporting of factual events as they happen. Not only in eyewitness or contemporary accounts must travelling be featured. Exploratory research could be done to find the facts of the distant past. We become aware of how Thucydides travelled to read inscriptions of Peisistratus (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian. War*, VI. 54) to prove a point, the *stèle* – standing stone slab – of the injustice of the tyrants, and the private inscription of Pausanias on the tripod dedicated from the spoils of the Battle of Plataea (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian. War*, I.55.1 & VI.54), which, according to Bakker (2006, pp. 116-7) did not even exist at the moment of writing since the Spartans erased it (see also Smarczyk, 2006, p. 518; Jowett, 1900, p. X). Whatever the case may be, Thucydides, at this point, made a concerted effort to verify historical events from the actual source by engaging in travel. As a result, we can only praise Thucydides for the attempt and method used.

2.4. Archaeological and Primary (Accounts) Methods

Directly linked to field trips as methods of historiography are archaeological and primary accounts. As part of Thucydides’ travelling activities, he used archaeological evidence – burial remains on Delos that were dug up during the Peloponnesian War (see Rood, 2006, p. 233), constituting a primary account. In his narrative on piracy, naval power of the past, and King Minos of Crete in the *Archaeologia*, Thucydides states:

Piracy was just as prevalent in the islands among the Carians and Phoenicians, who in fact colonized most of them. This was proved during this present war, when Delos was officially purified by the Athenians and all the graves in the island were opened up. More than half of these graves were Carian, as could be seen from the type of weapons buried with the bodies and from the method of burial, which was the same as that still used in Caria (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, I.8.1-9).

The quote suggests or presupposes that Thucydides travelled to see what was excavated at the burial site at Delos. However, Thucydides leads us into anonymity. He says nothing about whose report he depended on. Whether it was based on his eyewitness, vicarious, or even oral tradition, we do not know. It could be the case that he never travelled to those sites, or even if he did, he got his source not from the site but oral tradition, especially when he linked the issues in Book.I.8 to King Minos of Crete whose account is heavily known to Thucydides by hearsays or oral account. Grounded in what Thucydides says in Book.I.4.1 (Minos, according to tradition, was the first person to organise a navy), we can say that, even though Thucydides engaged in contemporary history and censured oral traditions of historiography, he may perhaps have depended on oral accounts in narrating the issues at Delos. If this was so, then the weakness that accompanies oral tradition can be identified in this sort of account given by Thucydides.

Nonetheless, Thucydides' use of archaeological evidence and other inscriptions represents the use of a primary method of writing history. According to Bakker (2006, pp. 116-7), Thucydides cites the inscription of Peisistratus in his analysis to prove a point. However, we cannot see clearly how Thucydides provided evidence to support his version of the account apart from stating his version of the story as seen in Book I.20:

... People are inclined to accept all stories of ancient times in an uncritical way – even when these stories concern their own native countries. Most people in Athens, for instance, are under the impression that

Hipparchus, who was killed by Harmodius and Aristogiton, was tyrant at the time, not realizing that it was Hippias who was the eldest and the chief of the sons of Pisistratus, and that Hipparchus and Thessalus were his younger brothers. What happened was this: on the very day that had been fixed for their attempt, indeed at the very last moment, Harmodius and Aristogeiton had reason to believe that Hippias had been informed of the plot by some of the conspirators. Believing him to have been forewarned, they kept away from him, but, as they wanted to perform some daring exploit before they were arrested themselves, they killed Hipparchus when they found him by the Leocorium organizing the Panathenaic procession (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, I.20).

By comparing what Thucydides does with oral tradition criticisms and his own method, concerning the quotation above, Thucydides just criticised his predecessors as a mere rhetorical ploy. But on a more serious note, if we consider some of Thucydides' approaches to historiography and narrative style regarding the quote above, we see that Thucydides never provided any evidence to support his version of this "Hipparchus-Hippias" account. For this reason, it can be said that there are some inaccuracies to this effect and that there is no difference between what Thucydides said about his own methods and his predecessors' oral tradition methods and how he went about his account. On this note, it could be established that just like his predecessors, Thucydides mimicked rhetorical tactics to draw his readers' attention to how his account would surpass any other account.

2.5. Chronology

According to Norman Austin (1969), the chronology of events was not all that serious business for the ancient Greek writers, and chronological writing in the early periods, most probably in the classical age, had to be invented. In Austin's opinion, a chronological

approach and innovation were Thucydides' most serious concerns. We note that Thucydides' attempt to establish an accurate and systematic sequence of events out of the haphazard systems of his day must have seemed as obscure to most of his contemporaries as it seems essential to us today. Finley (1959, p. 13), on the other hand, after pointing out some flaws in Thucydides' assembly debates, also acknowledged that Thucydides indeed tried his best to put his narrative in a more refined chronological manner than his predecessors, whose chronology sometimes seems haphazard with a lot of digressions (see also Ober, 2007 & 2009, p. 155; Kagan, 2009, p. 14; Austin, 1969, p. 40).

For the benefit of the doubt, we must commend Thucydides for his insistence on chronology. Nonetheless, we must evaluate Thucydides' account accuracy by examining how he analysed and treated his sources. In terms of chronology, Thucydides did not even think of his predecessors coming close to it, except Hellanicus, whom Thucydides mentions with yet another criticism on chronology. Hellanicus is said to have included chronology as part of his historical techniques. But, according to Austin (1969, p. 48), Thucydides thinks of Hellanicus as a historian who was confused about dating systems. For Thucydides himself, it is suggested that he used the official archives of cities such as Athens to date his events. On occasion, he seemed to quote verbatim the text of important inscriptions, though he did not tell us that he was quoting (Corcella, 2006, p. 51; Austin, 1969, p. 49).

Besides, it is acknowledged that Thucydides' commitment to ascribe events to the period in which they happened was something quite overlooked by Herodotus but accepted by Hecataeus, whose concern with genealogy (Corcella, 2006, pp. 39-41) rendered some chronological framework essential, and later by Thucydides' contemporary Hellanicus. In Usher's view, Hellanicus was indeed more chronicler than a historian and, therefore, has no place in the study of Greek historians. This is so since Hellanicus used the year as his unit of time and identified each according to the name of the annual Athenian *archon eponymous* (Usher, 1969, pp. 25-6). The difference Thucydides created was that he chose to refer the reader to a fixed point in time – the beginning of the war – and to count the solar years from that point,

dividing them into seasons and referring to shorter periods with such descriptive phrases as 'when the corn was ripe' and 'when the summer was at its height' (see Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner: 1954, p. 22; Usher, 1969, p. 26). Thucydides' innovation and improvement of his predecessors' are within such chronological analysis and interpretation of events.

2.6. Set-speeches/Direct Quotations

Like his predecessors, Thucydides used set speeches as a technique of historical narratives (Thomas, 2006, p. 90; Usher, 1969, p. 45). Whereas some of the assemblies' debates in Thucydides' accounts are considered accurate, others are suspicious and considered fabrications, especially the Melian Dialogue and the Mytilene deliberation (see Usher, 1969, p. 45). According to Donald Kagan (2009, pp. 3 & 4ff.), what resulted in the debate was the attempted rebellion of some members of the city of Mytilene. Thucydides explains that in 428 B.C., Athens' situation worsened after the plague of 430/9 B.C. As a result, the major city on the island of Lesbos, Mytilene, rebelled against the Athenians, raising the fear of a general revolt in the empire. It took until the following summer to crush the rebellion. In their panic and fury, the Athenian assembly agreed to slay every man of Mitylene, after which the Athenians would trade the women and children of Mitylene into captivity (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian. War*, III.36.3-8). As we are told, the Athenians changed their minds overnight and decided to kill the men who were the instigators of the rebellion. The Spartans soon followed suit for such atrocities by killing all that was left at the garrison at Plataea upon their surrender.

Finley (1959, pp. 11-13) noticed that set speeches, often antithetical pairs, were Thucydides' favourite device and, at the same time, his most problematic one. We are left confused despite Thucydides' categorical proclamation of his use of set speeches and how he had made the speakers say what was appropriate for the occasion (see Finley, 1959, p. 12). One cannot tell which speech the true speakers delivered or which Thucydides delivered. It is obvious that, whereas

some of the speeches and remarks were Thucydides' own, others were possibly not his words, and he would not let his readers know which one was coming from his insights (Rood, 2006, p. 226).

In the Mitylene debate, for example, inaccuracies and fabrications of false speeches have been observed. The observation is that one cannot tell whether Cleon, the son of Cleaenetus or Eucrates' son Diodotus, accurately reported or delivered such speeches. The whole tone of the debate presented by the two speakers is likely to be what the author inserted and how he wanted to express his feelings for tyranny and democracy. It becomes quite surprising that Cleon will speak against Athenian democracy as weak than tyranny (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, III.38), and Diodotus expresses his liking for democracy and reproaching and suggests to the whole assembly that: "Haste and anger are, to my mind, the two greatest obstacles to wise counsel – haste, that usually goes with folly, anger, that is the mark of primitive and narrow minds" (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, III.42.4-7).

Thucydides' attempt to present only two speeches out of the many has distorted the real issues discussed in the meeting. We cannot accept that only two people met at the assembly to debate whether to kill the revolted Mitylenians (another instance of Thucydidean censorship) (see also McCullagh, 2000, p. 40). Historians sometimes ignore important facts but accept what they can justify as accurate and credible. It can be observed that Thucydides chose to present one aspect of the facts surrounding the Mitylene debate and the personalities of political figures but ignored other aspects, which makes the account unbalanced. In this manner, we can say Thucydides allowed his general ideas to prevail over historical or account accuracy.

Not only did Thucydides ignore facts of great significance for the histories of the wars as the epigraphical or literary evidence demonstrates, but he has also been identified for his usage of the dramatic device of the speeches which he composed for certain climatic points in the narrative (Austin, 1969, p. 63). Besides, it can be observed that Thucydides admitted that those speeches were not verbatim transcripts but assured that the speeches express the overall

logic of what the speakers said on a given occasion, as he himself recalled it or was told by others, or that they gave the kind of argument which was appropriate to the particular occasion which he has recorded (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian. War*, I.22.1ff). From his comment, we see the same but two different Thucydides – Thucydides, who says, “I heard the speeches myself”, and Thucydides, who says, “I did not hear it myself”. This is where we encounter the practical inconsistency of the historian. For Austin (1969, p. 64), despite Thucydides’ assurance that he has written no entirely fictional speech but has recreated, if somewhat freely, a speech uttered, his technique is open to much criticism. The technique is open to criticism since we are sometimes confronted with Thucydides, who says but does not do exactly what he says about appropriate approaches and account accuracy.

Like the predecessors, it is noticed that most of the speeches seen in Thucydides were presented in pairs, stating opposite points of view. However, this arrangement satisfied the literary tastes of the day no less than historical reality, though the antithetical mode of expression was also a characteristic of the Greek language. According to Ober (2006, p. 133), even the Sophists, whose methods influenced Thucydides, also made it a central feature of their teaching, and that Thucydides had to adopt and adapt the sources of the language and his training to his special purpose and his advantage (see Kagan, 2009, pp. 56-68; Usher, 1969, p. 48). An example of such pairs of speech is seen in the assembly debate of Athens, between the Corcyraeans and the Corinthians, in Book I.24ff:

The representative of Corcyra spoke as follows: ‘Athenians, in a situation like this, it is proper that first of all certain points should be made clear... Now Corcyra has sent us to you in the conviction that in asking for your alliance we can also satisfy you on these points... (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian. War*, I.31ff).

Thucydides continues by stating: “After this speech from the Corcyraean side, the representative of Corinth spoke as follows: ‘These Corcyraeans have not confined their argument to the question of

whether or not you should accept their alliance...” (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian. War*, I.36ff).

In the first pair, the Corcyraeans urged the Athenians to accept their offered alliance and the Corinthians to reject it. For Usher (1969), both speeches obey the canons of contemporary deliberative oratory in their employment, the themes of justice and expediency. The Corcyraeans, as we read, lay the greater stress upon the proposed alliance by saying that the alliance would produce an invincible combined fleet. On the one hand, Kagan (2009) states that apart from the rare direct statements that Thucydides quoted, he put his own opinion into the mouths of his characters. This means that some of the speeches may have truly been given by the actual men who spoke them, or they were Thucydides’ imagination.

If the above was so, then Thucydides’ account is not free from inaccuracies as we deduce from what he says and does:

In this history, I have made use of set speeches some of which were delivered just before and others during the war. I have found it difficult to remember the precise words used in the speeches which I listened to myself, and my various informants have experienced the same difficulty... (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian. War*, I.22.1-5).

Undoubtedly, from the above quotation, either Thucydides, his informants, or both may have exaggerated or created some speeches themselves. Here, Thucydides was more or less an orator than a historian who wanted to persuade his readers to believe his account was accurate as opposed to his predecessors. On the contrary, Kagan (2009) would accept that, for the fact that Thucydides mentioned that he is “adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said” (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian. War*, I.22.5-8), we should acknowledge that it represents a claim to reporting speeches that were spoken, not invented by Thucydides, and to the attempt to record them as accurately as possible. But are we to accept that such a technique is free from errors?

Whatever the case, based on some utterances Thucydides gives about his use of set speeches, we note errors such as inaccuracy and misrepresentation of facts, which he or his reporters fabricated. Although Kagan (2009) somehow defends Thucydides on this issue of fabricated speeches as not by design, he [Kagan] however admits that “if Thucydides fabricated speeches or inserted his own ideas rather than trying to report the topics addressed by the speaker in the manner he expressed them, then Thucydides has lied to his readers” (Kagan, 2009, p. 17). Nonetheless, just like the ancient Greek writers had done, if Thucydides merely criticised his predecessors for rhetorical technique purposes, then one can say that Thucydides was both an astute orator and a historian. He tried to persuade his readers that he was giving an accurate account. Some speeches and events should be accepted as historically accurate without any other version of the Peloponnesian War.

Notwithstanding, when we assess what Thucydides says and does concerning his Corcyraean and Corinthian assembly debate in Athens, his use of set speeches as a technique of historical narration gives us no clue as to how some conclusions and or decisions were made, as we read in the *Dispute Over Epidamnus* (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, I.24-30), and in the *Dispute Over Corcyra* (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, I.31-61ff.). In these debates, Thucydides informs us that the assembly decided to send only ten *triremes* (warships) as reinforcement to operate as a defensive strategy against the enemies (the Corinthians, to be specific) in Corcyra (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, I.43, paragraph 4.1-4). Per Thucydides’ account, we understand that the decision was taken at the Assembly meeting, as Thucydides happened to be there and narrated it to us. However, as Hornblower (2010, p. 70) observed, Athens had inclined to favour the Corinthians at the meeting, but the pro-Corcyraeans’ decision was the last decision we were told about. We were also told that this modest commitment of forces resulted from a conscientious desire not to break the Thirty Years’ Peace. But then again, in the ensuing battle narrative, we are suddenly confronted with a fresh Athenian squadron of twenty ships approaching up over the horizon, which, according to Thucydides, the

Athenians had sent out in addition to the first ten, fearing that the ten ships would not be sufficient.

The sending of an additional twenty ships implies that there had been another debate in the assembly, a debate “totally and biasedly unrecorded by Thucydides”, at which the decision was taken. For Hornblower (2010, p. 72), it cannot be conceived that some executive authority like the *boule* or the *strategoí* (or Pericles alone) daringly took the sole decision without the Assembly’s authorisation. We can, therefore, believe and say that there are some important things Thucydides did not tell us as he employed set speeches as a method of historiographical narration and that some of the narrations may be a mere guess, exaggeration, inaccurate, and perhaps anachronous, just like his predecessors (especially of Homer’s and Herodotus’). For Hornblower (2010, p. 72), some apparent anachronism in Thucydides perhaps attempts to solve the linearisation problem, like the important scene-switch..., though perhaps the better analogy for the understanding of the Thucydidean passage is with the archaic use of delay as an effective narrative device. It is factual that Thucydides was faced with a problem of presentation. Thus, having got the Athenians to Corcyra, he was reluctant to go back to Athens to describe the assembly meeting at which the decision to add twenty ships to the ten was taken.

The forgoing historiographical criticisms of Thucydides, especially on his censorship of oral traditions, found a space in Eurocentric historiographical criticisms about African oral tradition to narrate Africa’s past. This draws attention to the Thucydidean archetype in debates surrounding African historiography, as examined below.

3. Eurocentric Censure of African Historiography: A Thucydidean Archetype

Before 1950, Eurocentric scholarship projected Africans as having no history (Andindilile, 2016, pp. 127–8; Obeya, 2019, p. 34). Like Thucydidean criticism of what constitutes inaccurate historical records,

some European scholars such as David Hume, George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper, and others have indicated that Africa lacks a history due to the lack of written documentation and reliance on oral history (Andindilile, 2016, pp. 128–9; Chike & Ifenna, pp. 1–6; Obeya, 2019, pp. 34 & 36–7). By projecting that the only source of Africa's history is oral tradition, there is the implication that African historians, like historians who preceded Thucydides, have struggled to document the continent's accurate past because of the absence of written documentation or a scarcity of written sources. However, those who held and still believe that only written documents or eyewitnesses constitute factual history resonate with Thucydidean criticism of historiography, where reliable sources like oral traditions used by Herodotus are censored.

Ironically, those who criticised oral tradition before the 1950s began to write down much of what was known as African history based on narratives published by European explorers, missionaries, and entrepreneurs. These stories frequently depicted Africans in ways that reinforced colonial racist views (Andindilile, 2016, pp. 127–8). This is why Cordell (2003) argued that apart from serving as a source and resource for inquiry into Africa's past, oral tradition, which Herodotus had equally heavily relied on, has a long history in the continent's historiography (Cordell, 2003, p. 239).

The argument of European historians and their Thucydidean archetypal perspectives on African historians, as well as the replies and critique of colonial policy by African nationalists and writers, became identified with African historiography in her endeavour to correct those incorrect notions about Africa's past and what constitutes accurate historiographical sources and resources (Obeya, 2019, p. 34). There is an acknowledgement that African scholars use multifaceted methodology in historiography(see also Cordell, 2003). Thus, like Herodotean oral source of history, and not necessarily the Thucydidean methods discussed earlier, the collaborative efforts of these intellectual researchers were based on the importance of oral traditions or oral history as a reliable method for reconstructing the African past (Andindilile, 2016, p. 132; Obeya, 2019, p. 34). As

observed by Obeya (2019), on the soil of Africa and Diaspora, scholars such as Professor Ali Mazrui, Walter Rodney, Kenneth Dike, Jacob Ajayi, Emmanuel Ayandele, Ian Vansina, and Adebayo Adesanya, amongst others, through the use of oral traditions or what Roberts (1976, p. 41) calls “oral evidence” and other methods, have managed to reconstruct Africa’s glorious past and creativities (Andindilile, 2016, pp. 133; Fálolá & Fleming, 2011; Obeya, 2019, p. 34; Parker & Rathbone, 2007, pp. 56–65; Roberts, 1976, p. 41–2).

From the above, we note that oral tradition, which Hume, Hegel, and others disregarded as constituting accurate historical sources, just like Thucydidean criticism, has remained a transcendent historiographical method that influenced African and European historians. Roberts (1976) emphasised this by indicating that Roland Oliver (Professor of African History at London University) investigated Ugandan dynastic customs through oral sources after studying European missions in East Africa. Likewise, John Fage (Professor of African History at Birmingham) started researching oral traditions in northern Ghana, in the old Dagomba state. Similarly, Jan Vansina, a Belgian scholar with degrees in medieval history and social anthropology, recorded Kuba oral traditions in the Belgian Congo. In 1957, he relocated to Rwanda and began another large-scale oral tradition collection operation. Vansina produced a methodological essay in 1961, arguing that oral tradition might be criticised using the same canons of judgment that historians should use for any historical source (Roberts, 1976, p. 44). It can, therefore, be concluded that, based on the facts given, historiographical criticisms are primarily intended to show power relations, suppressions of adequate accounts and sources of the “other” (the subaltern), intellectual suppression of the other, and projecting one’s account and methods of historiography as superior, as Thucydides did.

4. Conclusion

It can be observed from the above discussions that Thucydides made a concerted effort to employ systematic, empirical, or scientific approaches in writing his history, and his methods seem to be a

Thucydidean innovation and contribution to historiographical methods. Nonetheless, that could not entirely render all his accounts accurate, just as his criticism about his predecessors' historiographical methods, which heavily depended on oral sources. It is so apparent from the analysis that there are many instances where we can point out some loopholes in Thucydides' sources, just like he observed in his predecessors' accounts. This observation was not confined to Greek historiographical contentions but transcended to 19th-century African historiography and beyond. However, in these cultural spaces and historiographical criticisms raised by Thucydides and contemporary European and African scholars, there are some key issues we note. We found out that, in dealing with criticisms of Greek or African historiographical methods, whether past or contemporary history, historiographical accuracy should be examined not solely on the approaches but based on critical analysis, interpretation, and the provision of evidence. As we note, Thucydidean criticisms of historiography manifested themselves in Eurocentric criticism of African historiography.

But, at the same time, just like Thucydides, who criticised his predecessors and covertly and overtly used some of the methods he had criticised, we note that most astute European and African scholars have relied on oral sources, which have suffered intense criticism, and others to reconstruct Africa's past. Given these facts and juxtaposition, we can establish that (1) the type of history highly influences a historian's choice of a method against the other and that the approaches remain subjective, (2) an "appropriate" method does not mean the accuracy of an account, (3) historiographical methods are just a means, tool, or passageway to get close to the past events, and (4) in dealing with accuracy, the focus should be on the historian, his date collection methods, what he does and not what he says, his analysis, interpretation, preconceived notions and biases, and most importantly, evidence that supports his account or claim. Based on this Thucydidean and Eurocentric criticism of African oral traditions, the paper concludes that methods and techniques alone are not the yardsticks for arriving at an acceptable or factual historical account

because there are no historiographical methods without challenges. This is so since such criticisms are often made to discredit and suppress the “other”. Hence, emphasis should be placed on carefully analysing people’s experiences, narrations, and recordings of events, which can be preserved as cultural heritage.

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