



## HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE HISTORIAN: TOWARDS A CREDIBLE HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP

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### Abstract

*The goal of achieving objectivity in historiography is a lofty and noble one. Objectivity is the heartbeat and spine of history. It distinguishes history from propaganda, journalistic pieces and fiction. Regrettably, most extant historical scholarship are documented without undiluted commitment to the truth, making historical objectivity a wild goose chase. This is attributable to a multitude of daunting challenges. Against this backdrop, this study, relying on secondary sources of historical research, interrogates the nexus between historiography and the historian and project possible and actionable solutions to achieve historical objectivity. This work finds that the major cause of the impossibility of error-proof history is due to the personality of the historian, complex nature of man's actions in the past and the attitude of the government to research, to mention but a few. Given that a credible historiography is very critical in the pursuit of any scientific knowledge, the paper recommends, among other things, that the historian must painstakingly investigate his/her raw materials as no source is perfect and complete, adopt complex problem-solving approaches like the interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary, cross-disciplinary and transdisciplinarity, and be totally committed to truth. Only then can "true history" be attained.*

**Keywords:** *Historiography, The Historian, History, Objectivity, Evidence.*

### Introduction

History is ubiquitous and everyone and everything possesses a history. In point of fact, there is absolutely nothing, past or present, without its history. Making specific reference to Africa, Hampate BA (1981, pp. 179-180) declares that "in Africa, everything is history. The grand history of life includes the history of lands, lakes and rivers (geography), the history of plants (botany

and pharmaceuticals), the history of the sons of the womb of the earth (mineralogy, metals), the history of the stars (astronomy, astrology), the history of water and so on... of all the histories, the greatest and most meaningful is that of man itself, the symbiosis of all of them..." The exact date of the existence of history on earth is certainly unknown and unpredictable. History seems to be as old as man on earth, dating back to

the beginning of human's settled life (Obiegbu, 1997, Odey, 2021).

Basically, history is concerned with accounts of whatever is deemed to be worthy of being put on record. Singh (2008, p. 25) sees history as a significant record of events of the past. It is meaningful story of mankind, depicting the details of what happened to man and why it happened". In its simplest form, history can be seen as the record of man's actions from facts provided by available historical information. With the advent of western education, African history is now increasingly preserved and transmitted through the art of writing.

In historical craft, it is the ethical responsibility of the historian to evaluate, investigate interpret, select and analyse his/her raw data while recreating the past. This implies that history does not exist until the trained historian uses his/her craft to reconstruct it. Indeed, the basic truth is that man's landmark achievements and historic failures cannot be fully or partially recovered without the expertise of the historian. Historical writing is anchored on evidence (i.e. truth) and not manipulation (i.e. falsehood) as it is with propaganda. Thus, a historian who reconstructs the past and neglects the truth has written a "propagandists history" or what Alagoa (1979, p. 13) chooses to call "drum and trumpet" history. There is no gainsaying the fact that an accurate history will help us not to repeat the mistakes of our forebears, appreciate the present and plan effectively for the future. We shall reverse to the usefulness of historiography later.

We commence our historical enquiry on the subject matter by setting out our *modus operandi*. We begin with the introduction and conceptual explication and analysis. We later proceed to the approaches to historical writing, relevance of historiography, challenges of African

historiography and the way forward for objective historiography. The chapter will be capped up with conclusion.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

There has been no universally accepted definitions of most concepts, like objectively historiography and African historiography in history. This is because many practitioners of history have defined these concepts from their own perspectives. In this segment of the chapter, the concepts of objectivity, historiography and African historiography will be defined for clarity purpose.

### **Objectivity**

Sorgwe (2000, p. 58) says that objectivity in history refers to "the idea that historical account should be presented impartially. The historian should be detached from the object of study. He should not allow his own emotion to influence the interpretation of events". Similarly, he insists that the term "history should be written without bias or prejudice", noting that "any historical text must be the truth and nothing but the truth" (Sorgwe, 2016, p. 104). Wash (1960, p. 102) sees it as "a body of propositions that can be investigated and accepted by anyone who desires to do so". He further contends that "objective knowledge should be the result of a method that does not depend on the personal idiosyncrasies and private personal feelings of those who engaged in the production of such knowledge". In his work, objectivity is seen as the production of historical narrative without personal feelings and judgement, beliefs, biases or preconceived ideas. It means in historical writing, the historian must balance the views of the different documents and interpret the facts or information available to him/her correctly without sentiments, biases and prejudice.

As it is the main aim of history to get the truth, it is compellingly necessary for historians to be exact, impartial, sincere, and open minded to enable him/her present what actually took place in the past. A credible and error-proof history will ultimately serve as a reference material for budding historians and researchers. What is more, “true history”, which is the hall mark of history, will enable us to chart the future course of development with utmost certainty.

### **Historiography**

Etymologically, historiography is derived from the English word “history” which literally means the writing of history. Herodotus (C. 484-424 B.C.) is said to be the father of historiography and Leopold Von Ranke is widely regarded as the propounder of modern methods of historiography. It is historically refreshing to reiterate here that Leopold Von Ranke was the first modern historian to emphasize the use of primary sources, objectivity and systematic research methods in historical writing.

Historiography, according to Carr (1961, p. 30) is “a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past”. For Marwick (1970, p. 15) it means “man’s attempt to describe and interpret the past... A systematic study of the past”. Gottschalk (1969, p. 205) simply sees historiography as “the writings of history”. To Odey (2021, p. 21), historiography is “an attempt to recover or reclaim what had happened in the past and represented in written form in the present”. Similarly, Sorgwe (2000, p. 4) conceives historiography as “the methods of historical writing and the stages which historical writings have passed through over the years”. He further maintains that it is “the study of the ways and means by which historians write history.

It deals with the nature and purpose of history, the object of writing and the methodology adopted by the author”. Alagoa (2006, pp. 1-2) posits that historiography is seen as:

Embracing both the practice of the discipline of history as well as the experience and consciousness of historical processes by individuals and communities. It includes awareness of and or the formal or informal formulation of ideas concerning the shape of the past. *It includes techniques and methods within a culture for recovering information concerning the past, and thoughts and speculation on the nature and consequences of past events and actions* (Emphasis added).

From the foregoing, historiography has to do with the study of how historical events and periods have been written about, interpreted, and understood throughout history. It also refers to the methods and theories adopted by the historian to effectively investigate and document past significant events overtime. Historiography is basically concerned with the examination, appraisal, editing and criticism of the data collected from diverse sources. As a result, historians have continuously altered their methodologies to reflect the dynamics of time and space. These are clearly seen in the types of thought provoking questions asked, the adoption of new methods and fresh perspectives from other cognate disciplines.

### **African Historiography**

African historiography refers to “the major development of historical tradition throughout the ages with respect to the

entire continent” (Agboola (Ed.), 1999, p. 2). Oshadare (2007, p. 55) defines the concept as “all about African history as seen and written in the context of the African perspective which may include not only Africans but Africanists views from Europe, America and other parts of the world”, emphasizing that:

It involves the writing of African history incorporating oral sources and of late the addition of interdisciplinary approach, which has now been recognized as valid and indispensable in unveiling the African past, including those parts that preceded the advent of the Europeans.

In a nutshell, African historiography is the use of African methods, thoughts and sources to document the past of Africa. It is the writing of African history from the African perspective. The history of African historiography is inextricably connected with colonialism, oral tradition and post-independence intellectual rebirth that desired to reclaim African past glories.

The major objective of African historiography is to challenge the false, fabulours and unfounded claims made by Eurocentric writers about African to justify colonialism and gain promotion from their principal. These writings, which contained monumental European prejudice towards Africans and the African personality, actually relegated African to the bottom rung of humanity. Within his context, modern African and non-African historians rose to the occasion to refute and deflate the Eurocentric perspectives and the overdependence upon written documents as the only acceptable source for historical reconstruction. Credit must be given to Jan

Vansina, K.O. Dike, J.F. Ade Ajayi. S. Biobaku, E.J. Alagoa and others for this phenomenal break through.

With a well-established and accepted methodology, oral tradition lends African history a marked originality. It is, therefore, proper for budding historians and researchers in African history to use Afrocentric approach to research into local history in the continent. This can be pursued through the systematic and analytical use of oral sources to complement other historical sources, like written, archival, archaeological, linguistic, inter-disciplinary multidisciplinary, cross disciplinary, trans-disciplinary, inter-net and other sources to reclaim the local histories of their communities.

### **Methodologies of Historical Research and Writing**

In this segment of the paper, attempt will be made to take a bird’s eye view of the methods and techniques used by the historian to reconstruct the past. Sorgwe, (2016, p. 68) explains that historical methods:

Include all the adopted techniques or methods used in the behaviour of the author (historian) and the instruments used in selecting and constructing the historical scene. More specifically, the analysis and constructing the historical records *vis-à-vis* the documents in library research can be seen as the methods.

The approval of a research topic and allocation of supervisor(s) is followed in quick succession by the organization of the research. The paper discusses some of the approaches below:

#### **❖ The Single-Discipline/Mono-causal Approach**

This approach refers to the adoption of a single-discipline perspective, method and technique in historical research. To Sorgwe (2016, p. 71) it “has to do with the explanation of an event from a single perspective. It means examining the causes and effects of an action or event from a single view point”. Fwatshak (2007, p. 66) discusses that in the single-disciplinary approach, “the researcher relies on the tools of a single discipline – that of the researcher”. He further elucidates:

In this respect, the researcher does not concern himself/herself with generating data and tools used by other disciplines on the same subject. The researcher carries out the research solely or in conjunction with persons of the same discipline with him/her and does not involve persons from other disciplines.

This research tradition must have developed as a respond to the creation of disciplinary boundaries with their attendant distinct methodologies, theoretical frameworks, perspectives and techniques. This attitude, according to Fwatshak, 2007, p. 66, “may be guided by the fact that each discipline has formulated its research tools, which seem adequate enough to meet the basic research needs of that field of study”. In reality, mono-causal or single discipline approach can not provide real answers to complex historical research problems or provide essential data that would enable the researcher to reinterpret, recreate and explain the actions of man holistically and comprehensively. This is despite its meager advantages of time saving, and avoidance of conflict tendency associated with collaboration or team work.

#### ❖ **The Interdisciplinary Method**

Horn and Harry (1986, p. 44) define interdisciplinary approach as “inquires that critically rely upon two or more disciplinary ideas. Akoda (2017, p. 21) conceives the concept as “sources of information derived from other disciplines that are connected to and that enhance the researcher’s project”. According to Mombe (2025, pp. 9-10) interdisciplinary research has to do with a systematic mode of inquiry that integrates knowledge, methods, and perspectives from two or more academic disciplines to address questions, problems or topics that are too complex to be understood adequately from a single disciplinary perspective”.

To Fwatshak (2007, p. 67) inter-disciplinarity “uses data generated by other disciplines and also at times involves researchers from these other disciplines where collaboration is involved”. Sorgwe (2016, p. 71) views it as an approach that is “open to the use of sources from disciplines other than historical ones. It advocates the use of techniques and knowledge gained from other disciplines in the process of historical analysis”. Klein (1990, p. 196) believes that inter-disciplinarity refers to “a process of answering a question, solving a problem or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline and draw on discipline perspectives and integrate their insights”.

Arising from the foregoing, inter-disciplinarity approach refers to the integration or collaboration of methods, theories, concepts and insights from two or more academic disciplines to provide answer to research question and gain border understanding of a subject matter. In this approach, researchers are allowed or permitted to combine and integrate different perspectives and methods to solve complex problems. “It is done with the understanding

that differences in orientation, perspectives and specializations are recognizable factors in the study of human society” (Sorgwe, 2016, pp. 71-72).

#### ❖ **The Multidisciplinary Approach**

The multidisciplinary approach refers to “a mode of inquiry where researchers from different academic disciplines work together on a common problem or theme, but each does so from the perspective and methodological framework of their own disciplines” (Mombe, 2025, p. 11). This research approach enables researchers from different disciplines to work independently on a common problem or research question using his/her own peculiar perspectives, techniques, methods and strategies.

#### ❖ **The Cross-Disciplinarity Approach**

The concept of cross-disciplinarity approach in research refers to the “integration of multiple disciplines to tackle complex problems, create new knowledge, and develop innovative solutions” (Benibo, 2025, p. 88). This approach integrates researchers from different disciplines to solve complex problems to solve complex problems. It also involves the borrowing of theories, methods, insights and concepts from other disciplines. This means that it never integrates these borrowed concepts while inter-disciplinarity integrates them.

#### ❖ **The Trans-disciplinary Approach**

The transdisciplinary approach in research is a “collaborative and integrative form of inquiry that transcends disciplinary boundaries by incorporating academic researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and other stakeholders – including community members into the research process” (Mombe, 2025, p. 12).

It has to be noted that none of these methods is sacrosanct, they all have

limitations. They must complement and cross-check each other as far possible by the researcher.

#### **Styles of Presentation in Historical Writings**

Historical writings can be presented in different styles depending on the one adopted by the author(s) It could also be a combination of different styles. They may include qualitative, descriptive, narrative, analytical and prose techniques.

❖ **The Quantitative Method:** A historian uses numbers and statistical data to explain or support his/her historical writing. The tables, charts, records, figures, graphs or other measurable evidence help to explain how much, how many, how often and how strong the past event is. These statistical data are later interpreted by the research to show what they really mean or stand for. The quantitative style of presenting historical write-ups is not just opinions or descriptions.

Relying on statistical data, economic historians can estimate the impact of the slave trade, the Structural Adjustment Programme, (SAP), Deregulation Programme, the COVID 19 Pandemic and so on. A classic example of a quantitative work on slave trade is P.D. Curtin’s *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A census* published in 1969. The work tries to determine the total numbers of Africans that were shipped overseas during the Trans Atlantic slave trade period.

The quantitative technique has “the advantage of giving in a graphic, pictorial or tabular form the facts in issue. Another otherwise voluminous work is thus reduced to a few pages, which state the same thing” (Fwatshak, 2007, p. 78). It has also had a significant impact on historical studies as “the historian has stopped using vague terms like “the majority of historians believe in

quantitative methods”, “many people died during the peak period of the COVID 19 Pandemic”, and has instead begun quoting exact figures and percentages” (Aghalino, 2023, p. 59). A major limitation of this method in historical research and writing is that figures, tables and charts do not speak for themselves. They are only meaningful and relevant when they are properly explained.

- ❖ **The Narrative Technique:** This method of historical writing tries to present events in a clear sequence. That is in a chronological order. Sorgwe (2016, p. 72) declares that the facts, by this approach, are usually arranged sequentially. The stages or phases of the occurrences. The stages or phases of the occurrences are narrated one after the other in a chronological order”. It answers the question “what happened?” without subjecting it to critical review or examination. This technique does not also answer paint a picture of what an event looks like. The advantage is that it provides a straight forward account of a historical event without embellishment of any kind.
- ❖ **The Descriptive Method:** As the name implies, this technique of historical writing and presentation tries to describe or paint a clear picture of an event or experience. It mostly focuses on what the event looks like and not why the event occurred. According to Sorgwe (2016, pp. 72-73):  
It is an attempt to re-create the scene of the events without an emotional attachment. All the details are normally provided or supplied by the author to enable the reader form an

independent opinion of the event or events in question.

It is proper to describe before analyzing an event or events. However, this style is out of date, lacking analytical content.

- ❖ **The Analytical Style:** In this technique the historian tries to explain, examine, and evaluate the data, and not just narrate or describe the event under investigation. With a critical mind, the historian provides answers to question like why?, how?, when? etc. In short, this method shows clear reasoning, explaining the cause and effects. In the words of Sorgwe (2016, p. 73) “by this approach the facts leading to the events are critically examined by the author who projects a view point. In other to respond to the question posed, the author transposes the underlying narratives into reasons or causes leading to the events under reference”. It also breaks a topic into parts rather than presenting it in bulk.

The strengths of analytical technique are that it provides answers to the why?, How?, when? etc. of an event in history, it breaks a topic into manageable units or parts for easy assimilation and creates avenue for collaboration. In fact, “under this method sources are regarded as equal and complementary and none superior or interior to the other(s)” (Fwatshak, 2007, p. 79).

- ❖ **The Prose Method:** The historian adopts the prose style to send his/her historical message across. It is an ordinary writing that uses full sentence and paragraphs. It is not presented to his/her readers in lines, rhyme, rhythm, stanzans, and verses like poetry. “This method has the advantage of making literary minds

get to the essence of a historical message faster. For non-literary minds, however, this method seems journalistic or some would say un-academic" (Fwatshak, 2007, p. 79).

What is to note and note strongly is that historians can use different styles of presentation and writing of historical events. The quantitative, descriptive, narrative, analytical and prose techniques should not be subjected to a watertight separation. A historical work can include all the styles discussed above for a comprehensive and objective account to be attained.

### **The Relevance of Historiography**

The "history of history" is beneficial to the historian, student researchers, communities and the entire country. Some of its major relevance are:

- **It enables the living to learn from the past.** Historiography enables its gain valuable insights into the processes of social change and the evolution of different perspectives on man's past activities and make informed decisions. Written history serves as a store house where human beings can research and learn not to repeat the misdeeds, failures, and mistakes of their predecessors. This underscores the caveat "do not take the lesson of history for granted". As Marwick (1970, p. 10) succinctly put it: Seeing where our predecessors were entrapped by the fallacies of their own age, we are that little better equipped to avert the failures of our own age. Only the ignorant or the very lazy among historians refuse to read the work of their illustrious predecessors.
- **The promotion/advancement of knowledge.** Given that every well researched work provides fresh and deeper perspectives, historiography has added to the existing body of knowledge, expanding the frontiers of knowledge. Odey (2021, p. 36) points out that:  
The frontiers of knowledge are limitless, inexhaustible and can never end as long as knowledge is driven by research. And as it is already well known, research work is an ongoing activity which is why the frontiers of the existing knowledge are ever always shifting and, on the move, when new research results are turned in.
- **Historiography provides direction for the future.** With the knowledge provided by historical writing, both the professional and budding historians will be able to chart future direction and consequently make progress. As expected, a good research should provide new layers of knowledge to the existing body of literature. Also, a research through its recommendations should provide a veritable launch pad for future investigations. Odey (2012, p. 36) notes:  
For every perspective intellectual, there is still something new to be discovered or yet unknown about the existing knowledge that has to be unraveled or improved upon by way of further research. That is knowledge is inexhaustible and

not everything that ought to be known or said about whatever has yet been said finally and comprehensibly.

- **The promotion of fundamental Skills.** The promotion of certain essential skills is one of the most important benefits of historical studies. As the writing of history involves frequent reading (and re-reading), writing (and writing again and again), and drawing (and re-drawing), it encourages the researcher/historian to cultivate, imbibe and sustain the skills of reading, listening, writing, articulating, critical thinking and analytical skills. For practitioners of history to effectively carry out their craft, they must think more critically and ask deeper questions so that their accounts will not be accepted based on their face value. Sorgwe (2000, p. 6) affirms that “the knowledge (of historiography) provides the skills needed for accurate analysis of available data”.
  - **It connects People of Diverse Cultural Backgrounds Together:** A foremost benefit of historiography is that it unconsciously connects people of different historical, cultural and religious backgrounds together in many unique ways. As credible research forces the researcher/historian to visit different resource centres, like archives, museums, libraries, and so forth, there is the chance that people from different climes come together as friends, colleagues and scholars. This further developed across ethnic boundaries and fostered inter-ethnic relations. Odey (2012, p. 44) declares
- “in one way or the other, it connects people of different lands and climes together and brings about intimacy”.
- **Historiography Creates Opportunity for Grants.** Scholarship and Funding of Researches. Historical writings are of great importance as they create uncommon opportunities for grants/scholarships, employment and funding of projects, dissertations, and theses. For instance, the Nigerian government through the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) supports research and publications. By so doing, the academic staff did not only enhance his/her training and development but also get money.
  - **It Assists Researchers to Contribute to the Existing Knowledge.** Researches, especially the academic based ones, enable a researcher to contribute his/her quota to the existing body of literature on the subject matter by filling the gap in literature. In the words of Odey (2021, pp. 36-37):  
Every academic research provides an opportunity for researcher to express his or her own ideas in a way and style that no other researcher can do precisely. In other words, academic research affords the researcher to contribute uniquely to the existing body of knowledge, as a new thesis, or a new idea and proven discovery as the scientific and technological discoveries have always done in the past with new suggestions towards the improvement of society, which

no genuine researcher can afford to waster.

- **It Exposes Bias and Perspective.** The historian analyses events according to his/her perception. No two or more historians write in the same way and manner. This is based on the fact that they have their own cultural, political, and personal lenses perhaps, this is what Charles Beard (quoted in Sorgwe, 2000, p. 58) means when he posits that “no historian can bring to his work a neutral mind “and Carl Becker’s position that “the historian cannot eliminate the personal equation” (as cited in Sorgwe, 2000, p. 58).

This is very typical of historians writing about the Nigerian civil war who are yet to arrive at the same conclusion. While others see it as a patriotic attempt to keep the unity of the country – Nigeria – intact, others view it as a struggle for liberation, emancipation and freedom from “domestic colonialism”. This importance of historiography lies in the fact that it helps us recognize and respect the differences in their various historical accounts.

### **The Challenges of African Historiography**

The benefits discussed above notwithstanding, the ability of a historian to engage in scientific historical enquiry is seriously affected by many problems. In other words, the historian efforts to record the past events as they really happened have a lot of draw backs. They include:

The personality of the historian is one of the major problems of African history. A historian is someone who is trained to recreate the past since the evidence cannot interpret themselves. Also, he has the mandate to consult various available sources for materials, select from the hybrids of

sources that are available to him/her analyse and interpret them. As Carr (1961, p. 23) articulates:

The facts are really not at all like fish on the fish monger’s slab. They are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tactics he chooses to use, these two factors being of course determined by the kind of fish he wants to catch. History means interpretation.

In other words, the historian recreates the past based majorly on the facts at his/her disposal. The nature and sources of the data influence hugely the documentation of this evidence by the historian. Ogbogbo (2023, p. 47) opines that “since the quality of the history historians write is largely determined by their sources, it follows that the saliency of sources is central to historical scholarship”.

Closely related to the above is the challenge of diverse sources of historical data. As discussed earlier, the historian obtained his/her information from different available sources. For this reason, he/she selects from the multiple sources at his/her disposal. In this situation he/her may not be able to deal with all the evidence that are available. He/she, therefore, selects based on time and place. By making choice of the evidence that are considered worth recording, his/her interpretation and judgement is inherently liable to a high degree of relative subjectivity.

To the above must be added ignorance of evidence. The historian’s inability to gather enough information for the

research and study the relevant materials are likely to keep the historian ignorant of most significant historical development that took place in the past. As if that is not enough, historical documents are many, varied and straddled in diverse sources. Indeed, the past of a man can never be recovered from a single document. When a historian is not abreast of the historical development of a community, it is bound to affect his/her account.

Besides, the source(s) consulted by the historian greatly affect his/her writing. Majority of those who posed as informants or interviewees do not possess the wealth of historical knowledge. They are often driven by material gains, societal influence, greed, jealousy, political interest, and so on to dole out data that are mostly not correct or accurate. Such misinformation makes the evidence questionable and doubtful.

Again, the historian belongs to the social and physical environment. In the words of Carr (1961, p. 97) "for the historian, being an individual, is also a product of history and society". He/she is moulded by the environment of the time. As a consequence, his/her thought is largely influenced by the environment. This is evident in his/her personal experiences, beliefs, interests, political groups, taste, education and expectations among others. Hence, the historian is interested in subjects that are of interest to class or group which he or she belongs. Indeed, "no historian can bring to his work a neutral mind" (Charles Beard quoted by Sorgwe, 2000 p. 58). Little surprise that Carr (1967, p. 97) instructs that, "before you study the historian, study his historical and social background".

The evidence of man that survives also posed a challenge to African historiography. In Africa and other places, historical documents are usually incomplete.

For instance, in oral tradition a lot of data are buried unknowingly or forgotten because of memory loss. This is very peculiar to Africa where the means of preserving events are not perfect. Even material evidence and objects also disappear in a short time. The non-availability of oral testimonies, archaeological finds and archival materials adversely affected the historical narrative. As Gottschalk (1969, p. 28) right observed:

Only a part of what was observed in the past was remembered; only a part of what was remembered was recorded; only a part of what was recorded has survived; only a part of what was survived has come to the historian's attention; only a part of what has come to their attention is credible has been grasped can be expounded or narrated by the historian.

Historian's motivation or lack of motivation is another major problem affecting African historiography. Most historians are prompted to reconstruct the past by the desire to acquire wealth or advance self-interest, promote one's community, ideology or religion. While others are driven by the zeal and zest to either promote a cause, or to gain power. Available evidence suggests that there are corpora of historical literature in our contemporary society that were undertaken to boost politicians' ego or to acquire relevance in the scheme of things. This means that history written by seekers of power or for seekers of powers by historians makes objectivity a non-realizable goal in historical scholarship. Afterall, "questionable motives impair objectivity" (Anade, 2008, p. 77).

Finally, generation also poses challenge to African historiography. It is often stated that each generation writes its history. Accordingly, an interpretation that is accepted as true by one generation is considered as out of date by another. This is because what is written is related to the tastes, prejudices, customs and commitment of the writer at that given time. More so, “fresh evidence on a particular event can also affect the objectivity of the author in that such evidence can lead to new perspective or the historical understanding of the event in question” (Sorgwe, 2000, pp. 58-59).

### **Towards Achieving a Credible Historiography**

Achieving objectivity in any historical writing is a noble goal but in practical terms, its attainment is a herculean task. Some simply believe that it is impossible in African historiography. To some extent, relative objective or near “error-proof” history is possible if the following grundnorms of historiography is religiously pursued:

- ❖ African historians should gather relevant data from all possible sources of history for proper interpretation and documentation of the past. According to Ukase (2023, p. 128) “in gathering data, the author should realize that primary sources are very critical in unearthing new information”.
- ❖ He/she should apply a critical spirit for a scientific analysis. The African historian should endeavour to master the details, careful inspection and thorough evaluation before interpretation. As Philips (2005, p. 501) succinctly put, “raw data must be evaluated and checked for reliability before they can be used as information in the historical

reconstruction of the past”. In deed, “all data collected must be subjected to thorough verification. In this connection, there is need for all data collected to be collated. Furthermore, to ensure that meaningful deduction is made from available data, the researcher should if need be, not ignore the importance of sifting, which ensures the removal of elements of falsehood from any given account” (Agaba, 2007, p. 99). Ukase’s (2023, p. 128) advice is compellingly relevant here:

Historians are usually very critical of their sources and cross-check them for reliability and authority. To achieve this, historians always adopt the principle of criticizing and cross-checking sources for veracity. Historians are trained to treat all sources with suspicion until proven otherwise. It should be noted that the more sources used, and the more varied they are, the more likely you are to make a sound historical judgement in your article or book chapter. You don’t need to be cynical as a historian, but you need to be very critical and skeptical.

- ❖ It also imperative for a historian to cultivate a historical sense, so that he/she can see a character, event or trend in its real setting.
- ❖ He/she must distance himself/herself from the historical account. He/she should strive towards objectivity by avoiding preconceived ideas, biases, personal emotion, judgment, ethnic,

political and religious sentiments. On other hand, an African historian by his training ought to be exact, impartial, sincere and open minded among others.

- ❖ The visit and revise of old interpretations through the acquisition of new data is capable of throwing fresh insights and perspectives on a subject matter. African historians must be open to revision because history is not static and new evidence can change interpretations.
- ❖ African historians must reconstruct the past of man in African using the African methods and perspective. They must do away with colonial idealism and recreate the past as they really happened. It is pertinent for historians and student-researchers to be committed to objectivity in their effort to recreate the past. As Sorgwe (2012, p. 105) instructed:  
Every professing historian is therefore expected to pursue historical objectivity. There must be a commitment to objective presentation in history. Every effort should be made to overcome the obstacles to objectivity. Every historian must abide by the tenets of his training to present objective history at all times.

### **Conclusion**

Attempt has been made to examine the synergy between historiography and the historian. It was uncovered that the goal of achieving objectivity in historical writing is a noble idea. This is given because objectivity is the heartbeat of history. Objectivity separates history from propaganda,

journalistic works, and fiction. The study revealed that the impossibility of error-proof history is largely due to the historian couple with environmental factors, complex nature of his sources and the negative attitude of government to historical research.

The paper also revealed the methods or approaches use by historians in his/her research. These included the single-discipline or mono-causal, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches. The study maintained that historical writings can be presented in different styles such as qualitative, descriptive, narrative, analytical and prose techniques, noting that historians can use these different styles independently or combine one style with the other.

The work discussed that historiography is of immense value to the historian, researcher, community and the country at large. Its relevance included the promotion of historical knowledge, enabling citizens to learn from the past, the provision of direction for the future, the inculcation of critical skills and connecting people of diverse historical and cultural backgrounds together.

Given that a credible historiography is very essential and imperative in the pursuit of any scientific knowledge, the paper recommended that the author, scholar, and historian must painstakingly investigate his/her raw data as no source is perfect, complete and capable of proving a total picture of the event. It also called on the historian to be completely committed to the truth. It is only then can “true history”, “error-proof history” and “objective history” can be attained.

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