

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE NATURE OF BIAS. EXAMPLES PROVIDED FROM VARIOUS JOURNALS AND TEXTBOOKS.

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Prejudice can be defined as "opinion, bias or judgement formed without due consideration of facts or arguments." (Boyce, 1968 : 169). In South Africa ethnic prejudice is particularly common, as a form of hostility directed towards certain groups of people with a different physical appearance, culture and language.

A group of people can often be prejudged incorrectly because of a lack of accurate evidence and acquaintance. Biased attitudes can develop because of ignorance, incorrect information and irrational, mistaken beliefs. For example, it is widely held that non-European people are intellectually inferior to Europeans. Nieuhof (In Raven - Hart, 1971 : 19), states, regarding the Khoi that : "they are foolish folk, without knowledge."

Historians themselves are responsible for the creation of some prejudice, for much of history has been interpreted and written from a European's point of view. In the writing of South African history, non-whites are often presented as a threat to and a problem of the whites. They are not presented as a part of history in their own right. One must accept that there can never really be a completely objective account of history, for historical accounts are merely records of the past and the historian's own views and prejudices will colour his interpretation of these past events.

It seems that the historian's work will always be subjective for he, "selects from his evidence those aspects which are important in terms of his frame of reference." (Chisholm, 1978 : 137.) He could make use of emotive language to support his point of view. The arrangement of his material and his whole interpretation is likely to be the result of his own personality, beliefs and philosophy. One has to accept that no historian is completely free of prejudice and is affected by the limitations of his time. Therefore one can never obtain the absolute truth. Nevertheless, the historian can still produce a well substantiated interpretation by making full use of all the evidence available to him.

In the writing of history, historians obviously have to be involved in the selection of and omission of facts. However, if this process is not controlled by an intellectual discipline, it could be used to distort the truth, therefore being an important form of bias. This could also result in a lack of balance, where the author fails to provide different points of view over a controversial issue. In Jan van Riebeeck's Journal, in discussion on the Khoi, the author states: "These rogues were not at all keen to part with their cattle and sheep, although they had an abundance of fine stock." (Thom, 1952 : 270.) Only his frustration in not receiving the cattle is noted. The reasons as to why the Khoi did not want to part with more of their livestock is not mentioned, i.e. with the loss of their

wealth their whole lifestyle was endangered. Another example of selection and omission of data is found in , (Lategan, 1961 : 40). Again, about the Khoi, he states : "Because they were badly organized, owned few possessions and had a lazy disposition, they slowly but surely became absorbed into other nations and became their servants."

Apart from being highly derogatory, this is a decidedly one-sided point of view. The lifestyle of the Khoi is being judged according to a European value system. Within their own culture, their lifestyle suited their needs, they were neither lazy nor needed many possessions. They also only became the servants of the colonists once the Europeans had destroyed their natural way of life and it was their only means of survival.

It must be emphasized that it is not the historian's place to attach moral judgements to historical events. His task should only be that of narrative and explanation of past events.

Chisholm found that in many S.A. textbooks, the ideology of white supremacy is fostered through the use of omission, misrepresentation, inaccuracies and in creating stereotypes. She referred particularly to a Std. VIII textbook used in coloured schools in S.A. The textbook opens with the arrival of the Europeans at the Cape. This Eurocentric approach implies that S.A. history only began when Europeans arrived in the country. The history of the people living in the area before the arrival of the Europeans is completely omitted. Pupils are then likely to assume that these people were of little consequence in the formation of S.A. history, which is totally inaccurate.

Within this same textbook, the Difaqane is dealt with very briefly, while the chapter dealing with the Great Trek and the settlement of the interior is particularly lengthy. The Difaqane is totally misrepresented, focussing on the blacks as murderous and destructive, rather than presenting this period as a complex process of nation building. The relationship between the Great Trek and the Difaqane is inaccurately presented, under-playing the part played by the blacks in the making of S.A. history.

In this account, a stereotype of black savagery is perpetuated. It is stated that the "Difaqane means forced migration through wars of extermination waged by the Bantu in the 1820's. "Also, "after 1820 the waves of terror spilt over the Drakensberg." (Chisholm, 1978 : 142). Although the destruction emphasized is based on truth, the more positive aspects of the Difaqane, as leading to the creation of new and powerful kingdoms, is simply omitted.

Professor J. Lauwerys stated that South Africa was the only country he was aware of that used its

education system to divide its people. The various population groups were divided in the past, but it is essential in the study of history to show that each side in a dispute had a case. If, for example, white children adopt the attitude that all the justice was on 'their side', prejudice against other groups will grow and develop, for they would be the descendants of the 'enemies' of the past. It is actually stated in Lindeque's Standard Six history textbook, (Lindeque, 1958 : 140), that "from the very beginning whites and blacks were sworn enemies." (Auerbach, 1965 : 2).

Social and economic developments can play a part in the creation of prejudice. People develop a certain set of beliefs to overcome appalling situations which they have no wish to be associated with or admit to. For example, with regard to slavery, many are of the opinion that slaves at the Cape were well treated, where in actual fact they lived under appalling conditions. Punishments were extremely severe, e.g. being broken on the wheel.

Within the historical context, facts cannot speak for themselves, they have to be presented in an appropriate fashion. In order to go beyond the factual statement, the historian will be called upon to generalize. Generalization need not make the account unreliable, however, it can be unacceptable if it is really bias being made to appear to be fact. Negative ethnic prejudice can grow because of faulty and inflexible generalizations, e.g. stating that all blacks are murderous savages. Also, Nieuhof (In Raven-Hart, 1970 : 22) in referring to the Khoi stated that : "They are lazier than the tortoises which they hunt and eat."

The potential for prejudice to be fostered in pupils is very real due to biased interpretations of South African history being found in both English and Afrikaans textbooks, and because of the way in which these textbooks are handled by the teachers. Informed, knowledgeable teachers would be able to point out distortions of truths found in textbooks to their pupils and present a different point of view. Less informed teachers would be uncritical of all information found in a textbook and so inaccurate, biased accounts would be accepted and retained. One has to be aware of the difference between truth and accuracy. The facts selected by the historian will no doubt be based on truth, but by selecting some facts and omitting others, a false impression could be fostered.

It seems that bias is particularly prevalent in primary school textbooks because of the need to simplify issues dramatically. Mulholland states that oversimplification can lead to distortion. African races are presented as "wild, unwashed and bellicose," (Mulholland, 1983 : 150), which would create negative feelings in pupils. Although, for example, the Khoi were unwashed, what is not explained, is the shortage of water due to the absence of large rivers and low rainfall. The hygiene of Europeans at that time is also not discussed.

A serious omission in textbooks is the total lack of reference to, or use of evidence of any kind. There are seldom direct quotes, mention of sources or references to any other readings. I found the tex-

tbook "History is About People", for Std. III, by I. Machin, J. Mathews and H. Garbharran, particularly useful for it provides references for extra reading for the teacher. For example, with reference to the Khoi, on pg 10, (1980), one finds:

"ADDITIONAL READING:

Hattersley A.F. An Illustrated Social History of South Africa, Balkema.

Inskeep R.R. The Peopling of Southern Africa, David Phillip.

Raven-Hart R. Before van Riebeeck, Struik.

Seligman C.G. Races of Africa, Oxford.

Thom H.B. (ed) Journal of Jan van Riebeeck, Vol. 1, Balkema of the van Riebeeck Society.

Thompson L. (ed), African Societies in Southern Africa, Heinemann.

Tobias P.V. The Meaning of Race, South African Institute of Race Relations.¹¹

For textbooks to be acceptable, in trying to overcome bias, it is necessary that all the facts given must be correct and up to date; facts must be presented within a context; a fair statement of the view of other races or countries involved must be given and no disparaging statements or words can be tolerated.

UNESCO agencies undertake a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of history textbooks. Quantitatively, they examine the amount of space allotted to various subjects in the textbooks. Allotment of space, they believed, would indicate the degree of importance which the historian attached to the different subjects. They felt that this difference in emphasis would have an impact on young readers. Space allotment, however, is not left entirely to the historian's discretion. Authorities who draw up the syllabuses demand a certain emphasis. Also, as Auerbach has stated, "one emotively charged sentence or illustration may remain in the mind of a child more vividly and permanently than a longer, factual paragraph." (Boyce, 1968 : 174).

The curriculum is drawn up under the control of the state. It is the body of "organized, structured and selected knowledge." (Mulholland, 1981 :50). Prejudice can begin right from this stage where selectors choose knowledge to be passed onto the children according to their own value systems. One cannot deny that political interests played a part in the development of syllabi for it was considered of prime importance that teachers form 'correct' political attitudes and opinions in their pupils. This would necessitate blatant national bias. Although teachers as socializers need to re-inforce the norms and attitudes of their society, they should also create a "vision of reality," (Mulholland, 1983 : 153), within which children can work, grow and develop.

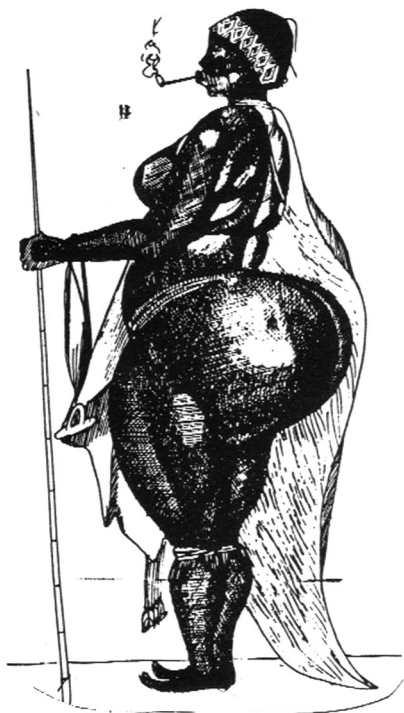
Their qualitative study involved an analysis of the manner of presentation, e.g. whether biased phraseology was used; whether the facts presented were accurate according to the most up to date historical findings; also whether an appreciation of the culture of other groups or countries had been revealed.

Language can be used emotively to enlist the pupils'

support to one particular side, without providing arguments upon which logical conclusions could be reached. Many words can be used emotively to imply moral judgements, e.g. murder; primitive; backward. Some terminology used to refer to a race could be insulting, e.g. Nigger; Kaffir. These must be avoided, obviously. A sense of superiority and inferiority can be implied through the use of descriptive phrases, e.g. "The White race" as opposed to "The Black race." With reference to the Khoi, the following three derogatory statements were found: "We found the old chief Ruiter, who has the Gonaquas and other half-breed Caffers under him." (Gordan's Second Journey, 9 January 1778, in Malherbe, 1984). Though the use of this word was acceptable at that time, it certainly has derogatory connotations today. In Jan van Riebeeck's Journal — (Thom, 1952 : 22), we find: "Only one head of cattle and one sheep were brought to us by the savages." (Nieuhof in Raven-Hart, 1971 : 17), states that, "They stutter mightily in speaking and sound like turkeys."

Bias can be created through the translation of a textbook into another language. Words and phrases can be substituted by others which could lend a different tone to the statement. Also, sometimes entire sentences or paragraphs could be omitted or added, e.g. In referring to the mother of Simon van der Stel, the English version states: "His mother was Monica da Costa." The Afrikaans version adds: "His mother was Monica da Costa, probably an Indian woman." (Lindeque, 1954 ; *Algemene en S.A. Geskiedenis vir Tvl. Juniorsert. Std. VII.*)

Illustrations can be decidedly biased, therefore, in choosing them, one should take care not to select those which would "enlist the sympathy of the readers without giving an accurate account of events." (Boyce, 1968 : 184). Pictures can also be mocking in their exaggeration and destructive to a particular group of people. For example, an illustration of a supposedly beautiful Khoi woman as found in, (Lategan, 1961 : 14).



Emotional reactions help to foster bias and prejudice, e.g. Fear due to being vastly outnumbered by another group. One often finds reference to the "yellow peril" and the "Black menace".

Teachers themselves have to be careful not to pass on personal prejudices to their pupils which could occur quite unconsciously. Attitudes can be implied through tone of voice, expression or movement. It seems that though content learnt by pupils for exams can easily be forgotten, an attitude of mind developed in the discussion of a subject is likely to be more permanently fixed.

For the history teacher, it is essential to remain up to date with new explanations and approaches to different people and events and so with an open mind re-define his/her own interpretation of controversial events. The lifestyle of the Khoi and the changes that occurred need in depth study to present an accurate account. For example, textbooks often imply that the Khoi farm labourers were well treated by their European masters, however, later evidence, e.g. studies of Marais, indicate that they were actually badly treated.

It seems that most teachers are unaware of the prejudices they might transmit to their pupils. They simply faithfully relate what they were taught. Teachers need to constantly examine their attitudes and beliefs and seek the truth as far as possible. Therefore in order to make the study of history worthwhile, the history teacher should try to examine some primary source material of the period. Also, the subjective emotions of the writer should be taken into account and his assumptions compared with other sources.

Most especially, teachers should strive against developing the bias of inertia. This would occur where they would be simply too lazy to update information and continue to make use of old schemes of work and roneoed notes whether they were accurate according to recent findings or not.

Above all, in history, one needs to avoid any form of indoctrination. Moore believes that this involves instruction which is, "designed to determine a specific outcome for a predetermined point of view." Teaching can become indoctrination when "opinions are foisted off in the guise of facts and when the system is not prepared to tolerate challenge and a reasonable amount of conflict." (Mulholland, 1981 : 44). Controversial issues can simply be avoided and pupils are robbed of their right to form their own opinions and decisions. Indoctrination can be used to vindicate the power of the dominant group. Race theories, religion and nationalism are prime areas where indoctrination could take place. To foster negative relationships between different races, indoctrination would stress the differences between the different racial groups, without referring to the similarities, e.g. During the period of slave trade at the Cape, the whites totally segregated themselves from the slaves due to race and religion. Slaves were black heathens and were regarded as economic commodities, not people. It must be noted, however, that though indoctrination is often deliberate, it can be unintentional as well.

Teachers need to strive to develop in pupils the historical skills of enquiry. They should be introduced to primary evidence, e.g. documents, and be trained to critically evaluate the authenticity of the evidence presented. History, therefore, should become a "mode of enquiry." (Boyce, 1981: 5).

In the process of trying to develop in pupils rational arguments, the teacher may only be partially successful, for the child brings into the classroom powerful and socially accepted attitudes and beliefs. There are many social pressures. Some pupils could become quite hostile to new ideas, for they need to uphold formed prejudices to remain acceptable to the people amongst whom they live. The teacher needs to be aware and accept these hostile prejudices rather than be shocked by them. He can then only proceed by presenting new evidence and different points of view and provide the opportunity for discussion and comparison of this evidence.

To avoid the problem of bias in textbooks, it is essential to encourage the children to critically compare different interpretations of the same historical event. They could overcome bias of judgement by developing the skills of recognizing emotive language, detecting errors in statements and illogical arguments, and through this the pupils may even become aware of their own preconceptions and prejudices.

When presenting children with different viewpoints, it is not enough to simply replace one oversimplified, biased account with another. Children must develop the skills of recognizing bias, questioning the evidence and become aware of how history is constructed, how there can be a variety of interpretations and how to distinguish between them.

Although this enquiry approach is essential, it is interesting to note that only in Natal in S.A. do we find a section in the Std. III syllabus called, "How the historian goes to work." (Mulholland, 1981 : 278). This, if handled properly, could enable pupils to develop a more critical and knowledgeable approach to history.

Particularly in S.A. children need to develop an appreciation of the contribution of other races to our civilization and not assume a position of inherent superiority. The overall impression that white children seem to gain of the past is that the country was discovered and developed by whites alone, with black people only interfering and obstructing the

path of exploration of the whites. Their social system and lifestyle remains ignored. South Africa has up to now seemed to use history to stress the differences, separation and superiority of whites in comparison to African races.

Pupils should be encouraged to examine not only their own national world, but to learn to appreciate other cultures. Through questioning the source of the information, pupils will become aware that values are socially determined and that there are at least two sides to every story. Through a mode of enquiry, it is hoped that different viewpoints could be considered and so encourage harmony among the different groups within our country.

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