

TRANSCONTINENTAL REFLECTIONS IN THE REVISED SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY CURRICULUM ON GLOBALISM AND NATIONAL NARRATIVES (AND ITS REFLECTION IN GRADE 12 TEXTBOOKS)

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Abstract

The early twenty-first century evidenced a worldwide change in History teaching through the means of several revised History curricula in the further education and training (FET) phase (high schools) and the developments of textbooks as a result of this. In South Africa, these trends have coincided with a period of educational transformation since the African National Congress took over as the leading political party in 1994. After close to 15 years, the transformational outcome also marked a change in the approach to History in the school curriculum and textbooks. This paper is structured to concisely debate globalisation and national narratives as foci in South Africa's revised History curriculum within current transcontinental reflections in history teaching. The implementation of these aspects in the revised South African History curriculum in the FET phase for specifically the Grade 12 level regarding textbook writing is only shortly discussed, accentuated, and critically analysed.

Curriculum transformations in History in South Africa

Transcontinental trends as highlighted by LaSpina (2003:667-696) very well fit the South African shoe. The multicultural, global-like model of representation in History signals its visibility in the History curriculum statement of South Africa, as approved in 2003. Educational trends, in many ways, were also fed by the ideological trends of the day and started having an impact on debates regarding the representation of the history of South Africa (compare Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008:195-205; *Yesterday&Today*, 2008; 2007; Dryden-Peterson & Siebörger, 2006:394-403; *Yesterday&Today*, 2006; Chisholm, 2003:1-20; Van Eeden & Van der Walt, 2000:85-95; Christie,

1996:407-416).

The period 1994-2008

Curriculum development in South Africa after 1994 (as also before 1994) was part of the national political process. In 2003, Professor Linda Chisholm (2003:2), a leading role player in the curriculum transformations in South Africa, remarked the following to an international academic community:

Curriculum revision was undertaken in three main stages of waves: the first involved the ‘cleansing’ of the curriculum of its racist and sexist elements in the immediate aftermath of the election. The second involved the implementation of outcomes-based education through C[urriculum] 2005. And the third involved the review and revision of C[urriculum] 2005 in the light of recommendations made by a Ministerial Review Committee appointed in 2000.

This Review Committee suggested a major revision to the curriculum with the major function of making the curriculum more digestible with an all-inclusive user-friendly approach. In the process, ordinary interest groups within a Babel of role player or stakeholder voices were able to make proposals, but not all were able to eventually impact on the Revised National Curriculum Statement, featuring an orientation to rights and outcomes (Chisholm, 2003: 1-5). It was mainly those few voices with social power that, as in Chisholm’s words, “constructed the overall score” (2003: 4). In this regard, the African National Congress (ANC) and several bodies or associations within education as well as individual intellectuals (for example, Jansen, 1999: 1-17) are typified by Chisholm as the dominant power behind the eventual changes.

In the transformation progress approach to History, for example, the emphasis was on historical skills, and the diversity of voices in the making of the South African history was somehow underscored, probably not to follow the path of the past, namely, a dominant narrative of white progress (compare Chisholm, 2003: 1-5).

In South Africa, education was made universal and compulsory in 1994, followed by a new programme (called Outcomes-based Education, Curriculum 2005) in 1998 (compare Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2007: 1-14; Jansen, 2002: 1-2; Asmal & Wilmot, 2001: 189-190). Since then, educational experts have been tasked with transforming, among others, the pre-1994 History curriculum of South Africa into a more inclusive History. This includes alternative interpretations to the so-called Afrikaner-nationalist

perspective of South Africa's past (compare Van Eeden & Vermeulen, 2005), as well as an inclusion of a dimension of social history. Concerns were then raised that developments in History teaching methodology internationally may pass the South African educational scene for many years to come (compare Van Eeden, 1998; Van Eeden & Van der Walt, 2001) because of the key emphasis on establishing a non-racial approach and content. The value of world history and the influence of global trends on the history of South Africa were given some serious attention at national history conferences and in publications (compare Van Eeden, 1999; 2000). This trend has received some consideration in the revised History curriculum for South Africa.

According to Gail Weldon (2006: 1-2), a leading role player in the revision of the History curriculum in South Africa, the revision of the History curriculum was driven by top-down, politically motivated and human rights forces, which were not discussed and debated at the levels of curriculum construction. Also, a key drive in the revision of the History curriculum was to “redress ‘the visibility of the formerly marginalized and subjugated voices’” (in Weldon, 2008, p. 7, as quoted from the DoE 2002 National Curriculum Statement) and to engage with a typical post-conflict society such as South Africa (compare Weldon, 2008: 7-14).

Lawson (2003: 1-170), on the other hand, argues that black educators at least had an opportunity to engage in the revision of the History curriculum. So serious was the focus on a change of the History curriculum to the satisfaction of the Government and Ministry of Education that any offerings of assistance from history educators, who were – as a result of perceptions – labelled as Afrikaner nationalists, were ignored or “politely” turned down after 1994 (compare Warnich, 2008: 187, 212-221). By the late nineties, historians and historical associations also raised their concerns regarding the content and future status of History as subject within the History curriculum transformation approach (Warnich, 2008:107-108).

For a selected group of experts, the process of transforming History curricula undoubtedly was a great challenge. One requirement was to compile content for all grades that would, in a so-called post-conflict society (Weldon, 2006: 2; 2008: 7-14), reflect historical moments of positively and negatively perceived national events in order to support the development of an acceptable human identity. With this approach, the ideal eventually is to reflect a multi-diverse understanding and “higher levels of tolerance amongst users, learners and the public, as well as to envisage a collective healthiness among learners” (compare

Asmal & Wilmot, 2001: 186). This move towards a multi-diverse approach and an inclusion of expanding voices (also related to genres) from a variety of sources and views is not new and is well debated, for example, in historical literature all over the world (compare Coffin, 2006: 3, 44, 47, 66, 72, 130, 158-159, 169-170; Van Eeden, 1999: Ch. 9-10).

Roughly four to six years after education in South Africa had been made compulsory for all, it was recorded (by the Minister of Education himself, as an expert in law, and his co-writer, as an expert in diversity studies, in Asmal and Wilmot, 2001: 194-195, 200) that “learners should receive more education in global challenges and ethical values in order to rebuild social cohesion in a democratic South Africa”. The strengthening of History teaching and the training of teachers in History were also mentioned as key factors in establishing change (also compare Van Eeden, 1998; Asmal and Wilmot, 2000: 200).

Other aspects regarding the revised History curriculum

South Africa is regarded as one of several countries that had to change their History curriculum to be more multi-perspective and multi-diverse (compare Coffin, 2006: 139-140). The views and contributions of academics from a variety of disciplines including History – a selection of historians labelled or known as revisionists – were utilised because their approach to, and/or additional views of, the South African past were welcomed as a refreshing “other” compared to the History curriculum content before 1994 (known as the apartheid era). As mentioned earlier, the focus on a far more “inclusive and nuanced view of the world” was also another aspect to consider in developing the History curriculum. Eventually, it impacted on the national History curriculum, but with some concern (see textbook discussion later).

In 2003, the development of the History curriculum framework reached its final stage of implementation when the National Curriculum Statement was adopted (Asmal, 2007: 7-14). Textbooks for Grades 8 to 11 followed. In December 2007, the last of a textbook series by four publishers operating in South Africa was introduced for Grade 12 learners. In many ways, these products reflect the curriculum content of what developers and the Department of Education (DoE) would like to present – content-wise and within broader Curriculum 2005 parameters – to further education and training phase (FET) learners (compare Weldon, 2008: 1-14). To historians

and experts of history didactics, the textbook efficiency is not only reflected in covering the curriculum content, but also in utilising accepted history teaching methodologies in such a way that learners are always exposed to diverse voices within balanced themes of content – an efficient teaching approach and a balanced meaningful assessment. Some aspects of globalisation and national narratives in the History curriculum, and how it is represented in the Grade 12 textbooks, are debated.

Transcontinental reflections in History teaching and the South African scenario – some impressions

During the recent conference of the International Society of History Didactics in Tuzing, Germany, from 8 to 10 September 2008, the key focus of the conference was the status and trends of empirical research in the teaching of History and how “results” – as obtained from research – do find their way into the teaching of History (which includes the curriculum and textbook development). In virtually all key plenary papers, the one concern shared by all was that empirical findings in History teaching did not necessarily find their way into the teaching of History and into the training process of History educators. Training as focus, therefore, has received some substantial attention, but likewise the teaching methodological qualities such as assessment and concerns in ways of dealing with assessment, the utilising of the museum and visual literacy aspects, advanced placement,¹ historical consciousness, utilising of primary sources, and the progress towards textbook research in some countries. The usual questioning of learners to enquire regarding their attitude towards History was also a topic of discussion (compare IGG Conference Program, and compare Lindmark, 2008; Ecker, 2008; Mork, 2008; Haydn et al, 2008; Hasberg, 2008; Tutiaux-Guillon, 2008) .

What we as History educators can observe from the current transcontinental trends in History teaching as observed in their debates, actions, and discussions – and as recorded only a few years ago by LaSpina (2003) – also traceable in the South African debate (but not necessarily in an efficient way yet), are the following:

- Visions of a national identity that will be appreciated and recognised by a pluralistic society

1 The concept of advanced placement in the context of the USA is a description of the curriculum and assessment procedure of secondary school students/learners to obtain university-level credits for courses typically given at the introductory level.

- Research on the interpretation of the curriculum by publishers of textbooks
- The urgent requirement for basic facts to move from surface to depth in historical presentations
- Globalisation and its liaison with national history

The following transcontinental issues in History teaching are indirectly urged in South Africa, but not fiercely/efficiently given some sufficient thought yet:

- The imposing of a dominant myth of modernity named “progress” (Lockard, 2000: 230-241) that conforms to a national framework, which is designed for diversity in a symbolic and logical story line (LaSpina, 2003: 283)
- The ongoing vision of nation building by focusing on collective contributions and heritages of groups
- A question such as how a nation accommodates the minority to let them speak and relate their own story

If educational ‘progress’ implies a “forward moving” (to the benefit and not to the detriment of ...) “of both the teaching and learning process of knowledge, proper conduct and technical competency through a focus on the cultivation of skills, trades or professions as well as mental, moral & aesthetic development”, we still have a long way to go to ensure that these traits of ‘progress’ are reflected in the curriculum, in the teacher training, and in the textbooks as the ultimate outlet for what History teaching principles present.

Aspects of uniqueness in the research and discussions of trends in History teaching and didactical research in South Africa of which the transcontinental academic world can take cognisance as far as teaching methodology and educator training are concerned are:

- teachers’ identities, training, and training for the disadvantaged educator;
- outcomes-based education in History and teacher training;
- the indigenous knowledge system focus;
- assessment in History teaching;
- globalising as methodology in teaching history; and
- textbook research and textbook developments.

Though all the societies on the different continents represent different stages of its historical development, the focus of History teaching will always remain the same if the teaching methodology and a striving towards an all-inclusive history, with the intention to present a genuine multi-diverse view on some or all topics, are the non-negotiable focus. The curriculum developers – in

an effort to address South Africa as a post-conflict society – have, therefore, developed a curriculum to reflect just that. The constraint (or should I say problem) in doing so is that learners are more confronted with international history, and the remarkably lower percentage allocated to national history indeed reflects a “redressing of the visibility of the formerly marginalized and subjugated voices” (in Weldon, 2008, p.7), but alas in a distorted way in textbooks and similar like to pre-apartheid history textbook approaches.

Globalisation, national narratives, and textbooks

The selection of content in the revised History curriculum of South Africa lends itself to provoking some fierce debate with regard to, among others, the choices of themes that were selected, the chronology rationale, the sometimes inefficient liaisons between themes on the global and local/national, etc. These and other issues on the curriculum are vital concerns to address on another day. The focus selected for this discussion is narrowed to the curriculum’s reflection of global and national narratives and a concise discussion of how it has been negotiated within the Grade 12 textbooks available.

Though research on the content selection of History textbooks after 1994² in general is currently being done by some higher education institutions in South Africa, the ideal is actually to create opportunities in which an input can be made by a broader user group (for example, teachers, learners, critics, publishers, and writers) if we as South Africans are serious in listening to each other within a democratic dispensation. The following subsections should serve as motivation why South African history educators should brainstorm and improve textbook content and so provide direction to even fellow History educators abroad of the *how* and even to writers/publishers before they start with the writing process of textbooks.

The Grade 12 textbooks (published 2007)

The nine Grade 12 History textbooks that were approved and made available in December 2007 are:

- *Focus on History: Looking into the Past* (Maskew Miller Longman)
(also available in Afrikaans as *Verken die Verlede*);

2 It is accepted that, though not much is available in research, there are certain publications available that suggest a methodology of how to assess History textbooks. Chernis (in his Chapter 2) and Nicholls in his article on “Methods in School Textbook Research” have touched on criteria for assessing textbooks.

- *History for all* (Macmillan SA);
- *Making History* (Heinemann Publishers);
- *Moments in History* (Juta Gariep);
- *New Africa History* (New Africa Books)
(also available in Afrikaans as *New Africa Geskiedenis*);
- *New Generation History* (New Generation Publishers)
(also available in Afrikaans as *Geskiedenis vir 'n Nuwe Geslag*);
- *Oxford in Search of History* (Oxford University Press Southern Africa);
- *Shuter's History* (Shuter & Shooter); and
- *Viva History* (Vivlia Publishers).

These textbooks cover seven broad themes as prescribed in the History curriculum. Parts of the South African history are interwoven with international events and trends. For South African learners and educators, this approach is new. From 2008, examinations at the Grade 12 level will also not accommodate papers that distinguish between South African history and “general” history.

The concise curriculum themes for the Grade 12 level are: “The impact of the Cold War in forming the world as it was in the 1960s”; “The realisation of *uhuru* in Africa, 1960s-1970s”; “Forms of civil society, 1960s-1990s”; “The impact of the collapse of the USSR in 1989”; “The emerging of South Africa as a democracy from the crises of the 1990s”; “Globalisation: meaning and trends”; and “Ideologies and debates around the constructed heritage icons from the period and today” (the use of “period” in this context probably implies the time frame as it is covered by the other themes, meaning at least 1960-2004).

In essence, the curriculum appears impressive, especially in theory, but it is open to criticism concerning everyday practicality and its textbook applications.

Globalism as section (and globalisation as approach) in the curriculum and in History textbooks

Recently, Rob Siebörger (Siebörger, 2008:9; 2008:19), an expert in South Africa in History teaching, remarked the following in a local newspaper:

Finally, the Grade 12 curriculum contains an innovative and extensive section on globalisation which is designed to give school leavers a critical understanding of the forces that shape today's world within an historical

perspective.

Indeed so if the “forces that shape today’s world”, with South Africa and Southern Africa as part of the influenced world or making a contribution as the “influential”, had been covered efficiently in the Grade 12 History textbooks. In this regard, Macmillan’s *History for all* has produced a workable chapter to utilise for debate, whereas the *New Africa History* devotes an extraordinary number of pages to globalisation (38 pages) and the *Shuter’s History* a solid 70 pages. With more space available, it was possible for Shuter’s to cover in-depth content and an exciting variety of usable sources, though the publication generally appears to be very “busy” and scary. In most of the textbooks, however, a substantial amount of in-depth content is lacking with regard to specifically the topic of globalisation, and therefore, History teachers will have to invest more energy in creativity to ensure that learners do have a reasonable idea regarding globalism and the effects of globalisation.

Apart from globalism as a refreshing new theme, the focus on world history in the curriculum and its connections with the national history (and vice versa) should also not be overlooked. In basically all of the revised curriculum themes, the world, African, and South African connection could have been made. Only a few of the Grade 12 textbooks were creative and expansive in their thinking in this regard through all the sections/chapters. The developers of the revised curriculum could also have been more supportive (thematically and in historical chronology) by combining issues with the potential to be dealt with, in broader sense, more efficiently (see, for example, the distinctive making of the collapse of the USSR in 1989 one separate discussion instead of categorising it as part of the influences on Cold War strategies of the past and how it has affected South Africa in the process). In this regard, South Africa then could have formed part of the “Cold War discussion”. The Maskew Miller Longman publication *Looking into the Past* did well in this regard. Some other textbooks have indeed tried to create innovative linkages between themes and South Africa, but this is mainly accentuated in the sources and sometimes does not even feature in the basic or fundamental content that is supposed to guide the History educator and learner towards using the sources to follow.

In academic treatises, others supported this curriculum innovation of globalism and the utilising of the global/world history teaching approach even before and also after the final curriculum revision (compare Van Eeden, 1998; 1999; Beukes et al., 2008:1-32). However, experts of the History

methodology also warned against a possible imbalance in the curriculum and its eventual reflection in textbooks, as they stated that a decreasing of European content in history textbooks would lead to the elimination of valuable cultural content (De Wet, 2001; Reuter & Döbert, 2002), as the South African nation is as much the product of European intervention as of African tradition (Bundy, 1993; Pretorius, 2006; Van der Steinen, 1997).

In *circa* 2004, the University of Cape Town even hosted colloquium sessions on writing and teaching national history in Africa in an era of global history. Based on the feedback by Howard Phillips (2004:215-221) then they were picking up the vibes from historians abroad (with specific reference to Professor Toyin Falola of the University of Texas and Patrick Harries of the University of Basle, France) that the concept of “nation” and national history from the bottom up is meaningful and vital in a current era of globalisation.

Though it can probably not be ignored that global history is an important means to seriously understand modern processes and events, Falola accentuated that national history was a “means of survival against the dominant brand of global history in the contemporary world”, which Falola viewed as “a narrative of western power and expansion” that tended to turn national history into a metanarrative of global history. Then, easily, the experiences of the “so-called local identities” are erased and the “dust of ethnic under the carpet of the national, and the national itself under the table of the universal”. To specifically guard against this kind of out-of-balance approach, sufficient articles were published and structures proposed as guidelines (compare Van Eeden, 1998). Phillips (ca 2004:216) also quotes Falola’s words, with which many historians who attended this colloquium agreed:

National history could and should not ignore global history, but it should not be superseded by it either ...

It is interesting to note that Dr June Bam, as representative of the Department of Education and leading the South African History Project, assured the historians concerned at this UCT colloquium that the “national curriculum for schools sought to avoid such narrow conceptions of the past by stressing South Africa’s position in wider regional, continental and global contexts”. With the revised History curriculum, this may have been the intention, but the product to be utilised in practice, namely, the History textbooks, voices a different tone because the curriculum is too open and vague in this regard.

Against the empirical debate, in South Africa and elsewhere, the educational didactical guidance, and the key features of the revised History curriculum,

the international history appears to be remarkably dominant in the Grade 12 textbooks, with the South African history clearly to partially visible in three of the seven themes and not always efficiently linked to these international and African scenarios and within “globalism” as theme. Indications of how South Africa was influenced are sometimes visible, but this option as focus could be expanded much more on how world history has influenced South Africa and even how South Africa perhaps has influenced continental and world histories. After all, we are dealing with the highest-level learners – Grade 12 – so they should be exposed to this multidimensional methodology of teaching (and content-wise) in History.

Currently, in textbooks, Grade 12 learners will know *how* the Cold War transformed the world of the sixties and also *how* it affected the outcome of African history in a period of aspiring *uhuru* or freedom after an era of colonial transgression. After the first two themes, another two follow that also reflect world events that hold promises of gradually working their way towards South African history. They are forms of civil society protest that emerged from the 1960s up to the 1990s, and the impact of the collapse of the USSR in 1989 and South Africa as an emerging democracy from the crises of the 1990s (see more about this discussion in national narratives further down).

The last two sections of the Grade 12 curriculum are new further education and training themes focused on providing an interesting scope on globalising on a wide community front and on exchanging reflections on ideologies and debates regarding the heritage of the country. South Africa, in most textbooks in Grade 12 (apart from those mentioned earlier), does not really feature in the globalisation theme. In only one subsection, some discussion is devoted to how South Africa has made a contribution in Africa after 1994. The *Shuter's History* textbook has made a reasonable effort to accentuate Africa in the global context with themes on Aids and environmental problems. Why the writers of the textbooks have shied away from themes such as post-colonial theft in Africa's biodiverse heritage is debatable.

National narratives in the curriculum and in textbooks

Teaching History ...to promote whom and what ...?

An ironical part, however, is that it appears as if textbook development and the results from empirical research on textbooks of the past (as well as guidance on how it should be approached and pitfalls to be avoided) are

not being utilised efficiently in the marketplace. Publishers do have their focus (compare Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991:1-22). In South Africa, that focus at the moment appears to be (as in the pre-1994 period) to keep the Government's Ministry of Education happy by not stepping too much on political toes and by ensuring that textbook activities reflect the political majority of the day, regardless of whether they do not efficiently present the (open, vague) History curriculum, which appears, though, to want to reflect multiple voices, etc.

Because History will probably always have some controversial attachment to content selection when it involves different cultures and a racial sensitivity in cosmopolitan environments, it is a necessity for researchers of History Didactics to address issues of this nature. In this way, History educators are supported in the best possible way to deal with controversial concerns. However, personally, I am not convinced that it should be the assignment of History Didactics and its educators of History in the teaching process to be forced to utilise topics in history teaching for external purposes beyond its methodological scope. The actual methodological scope of teaching in History is, among others, to – as scrupulously and objectively as possible – present a balanced multiple-voice approach to teaching history content and to focus on a reasonably fair analytical response. In this way, dealing with human issues such as tolerance of differences, understanding human rights, and avoiding racism could and should spontaneously be exposed and not enforced in a compulsory way as if it should be an assignment of History being a “social agent” for whomever. History can also not act as a social agent to teach learners about the ultimate moral way to live. It can only present ways in which people lived and cherished certain moral values.

Teaching History in a diverse, non-prejudiced, balanced, and methodologically passionate way already requires from the educator an implementing of scientific and professional morals to the discipline/subject that should always be respected.

Some research, proper teaching methods, and diverse expertise cooperation is lacking in ...

Though oral history is recognised as an upcoming and thriving branch of practicing and teaching History in South Africa, some empirical research in how to accommodate this branch and its methodology in History teaching in schools is clearly lacking. Also, debates on developing indigenous knowledge

systems within the African context of living in the History teaching focus are valuable, but should be approached with more seriousness in theory and in practice. With regard to both of these foci of teaching, it is, therefore, not at all strange currently to find that – though much is made of heritage as a compulsory section of the revised History curriculum – educators most of the time battle in putting theory into practice. With such an overemphasis on assessment that especially should, as some might say, “for heaven’s sake not require too much learning from the learners”, other equally important methodological aspects of teaching History have, in many ways, been overlooked, and even efficient assessment has, in many ways, thus far been utterly distorted.

Among others, there are silences and ignorant trends in dealing with global content in an efficient way to accentuate the role of local history in it. As far as the effective utilisation of instructional media and sources is concerned, there appears to be an improvement in methodology, but not necessarily an improvement in depth, variety, and diversity. In all of this, it can be stated that empirical and/or observational research in higher education institutions has provided some solid methodological guidelines since 1994, but not enough of these suggestions as outcomes have been absorbed into the revised History curriculum and textbooks that have followed from 2003. A simple solution to this unfortunate event is that a closer cooperation among all who regard themselves as role players and custodians of teaching History in the school phases is required. If South Africa’s History teaching custodians so dearly want to be certain that they present South Africa’s revised History curriculum in a global context (an approach I have fully supported since 1992 when my academic career started), DoE leaders in History should listen to educators of History Didactics regarding how it could best be done. They should also get a wake-up call from teaching trends regarding History from a transcontinental perspective, though other countries equally can learn from the trends in South Africa and the ways in which the teaching and training of History educators are done.

Lastly, as far as the academic contribution analysis is concerned, the training of History educators in South Africa for the twenty-first century definitely requires some brainstorming shifts to accommodate valuable and reasonable methodological teaching trend shifts (as developed from outside local needs and borrowed from transcontinental spheres). An efficient selection of the content of History teaching courses in higher education and the practical

aspects of training History teachers as well as regular efficient in-training workshops to address needs most certainly will be the most important investments to ensure wisdom among educational forces in effectively utilising the revised History curriculum.

Inclusivity?³

Whatever historical thinking (in “my” and “we” histories), methodologies, or personal ideas and a reasoning for inclusiveness may ultimately give rise to a curriculum, it is the textbook developers who are eventually responsible for providing substance and direction to curriculum content in the form of a variety of historical enquiry genres and voices (compare Coffin, 2006:44-65). Although a genre and a voice in history are not tightly bound, a key distinction is that a genre is the style or way in which a historical text is written, whereas a voice can be either the group or person that was involved in making a piece of history in a specific history context. On the other hand, a voice can also be defined as the learner in the process of arguing a genre as adjudicator (compare Coffin, 2006:158). An application of this knowledge should also be put to use in the textbook interpretation of the revised South African History curriculum.

Cole and Barsalou (2006:3) argue that it remains difficult to decide what history content should be taught in a post-conflict society. Questions such as who decides what version(s) should be taught and what impact choices may have on promoting stable, cohesive, and tolerant societies are indeed key issues. The relationship between the (re)writing of history by academic historians and the development of secondary school history textbooks can also be debated.

Former Minister of Education of South Africa, Prof. K. Asmal (2007:11-12), at the South African Society for History Teaching (SASHT) Conference in 2007, remarked as follows about textbook writing in the FET phase:

One of the pleasing aspects of the new FET curriculum is that we now have what we never had before: a generous selection of school History textbooks that have been carefully screened and approved nationally ... Less pleasing ... is that there has been slow progress in transforming the writing of History books. While it is essential to use the best expertise available ... there is an

3 Inclusivity in the context of this discussion implies the aim of ensuring that a multi-diverse range of genres, events, and/or voices represents the outcome of a specific topic in history. If the discussion involves more than one group of people claiming to represent different cultures, then it requires sensitive thinking and writing to involve all the “my” histories to achieve an ultimate “we” representation 1.

urgent need to develop a new generation of black writers to ensure not only a balanced representation, but to ensure that the rich diversity of backgrounds and opinions that characterises our nation informs the History being studied at school ...

As elsewhere (compare LaSpina, 2003), newly developed History textbooks in South Africa were also submitted to state-appointed review panels to be evaluated (compare De Villiers, 2008). However, the South African approach differed in the sense that the public sector was not given an opportunity for any input, and no votes were cast for one textbook or another. In many ways, the publishers did not even know much about one another and the sensitive loopholes all of them should avoid. In this regard, a representative of one of the publishers (De Villiers, 2008) recalls:

We do not know what comments other publishers receive – this is not common knowledge. The comments are often almost illiterate, the evaluators do not read the texts thoroughly and assume content is missing if it doesn't have a heading of its own, and the feedback is often contradictory – for example they tell us to delete a section but then [afterwards] complain that those very outcomes are [were] not sufficiently covered.

A lack of sufficient time to carefully prepare Grade 12 textbooks and expose them to a broader academic community dealing with history was recorded. Evidently, it would have been the most feasible and long-term solution to ensure quality. Unfortunately, this did not happen in South Africa. Nevertheless, Asmal (2007:12-13) continued by saying the following:

... More than any other discipline, good History put to good use taught by imaginative teachers can promote reconciliation and reciprocal respect of a meaningful kind, because it encourages a knowledge of the other, the unknown and the different. It has the role of raising the awareness of learners to the issues of their own identity and the way that they interact with the multiple identities of South Africans around them ...

What Asmal probably meant by referring in his explanation to “good” History is a History supposed to be all-inclusive and focused on balance, variety, and sensitivity to promote a healthy attitude towards nation building. Sensitivity and all-inclusiveness as means towards creating a platform, for example, for nation building, are indeed explored in especially the fifth and seventh themes in the Grade 12 curriculum, as both of them cover South African history content. However, it appears far from “healthy” and still requires extensive refinement in bringing together the “my” histories in themes in balance and so contribute in presenting a reasonable “we” history.

A “healthy” identity presented in textbooks?

A healthy identity in a historical context can imply a hearty, active, or blooming passion for one’s country and its broader groups of people and having a sober knowledge of the role and achievements of the specific group the individual represents as “my” history.

As broad as the revised national curriculum content structure may be, among others to evoke a healthy identity, so intellectually thin does the fundamental core of some Grade 12 curriculum themes in the new textbooks appear to be. When this is the scenario, it simply means that it becomes impossible to balance diversities, multiple perspectives, inclusivity, and healthy identities all in one. Then Asmal’s concerns are shared, though the process he has suggested to address it, referred to in the previous section, does not necessarily guarantee success (for example, more black writers, a more balanced presentation, etc., as Asmal puts it). The basic historical method of ensuring multi-perspectivity and a diversity of genres and voices in any historical publication should apply.

Colour and culture diversity among academics and educators in the process of writing history textbooks does not guarantee a balanced perspective, but what is indeed required is ample knowledge regarding examples of a specific content theme and the simple but important application of the history methodology in a professional way. It may be (as a bonus, I should say) that a representative group of writers with all these skills may benefit from one another’s personal cultural, linguistic, and racial experience in the process of content development and designing assessment tasks. On its own, it is not enough to ensure depth, balance, cohesion, tolerance, and progress. In many ways, historians and skilled history educators should always be reminded of the way in which a magistrate as a law practitioner should manage, consider, and interpret the voices of evidence with which he/she is working, regardless of the typically human obstacles such as colour and race.

In the new Grade 12 textbooks, the trend in the nationally focused themes 3, 5 and 7 seems to be to present discussions that the majority of South Africans “will accept” instead of rather demonstrating multi-perspective modes in these themes and sub-themes that will allow progress towards a balanced representation and multi-diverse understanding that will eventually build up towards a collective identity that may reflect healthy attitudes and a sound historical consciousness. The absence, then, of a multi-diverse representation, as an inevitable requirement in the methodology of History and also accentuated in current transcontinental perspectives, leads to

products that are sadly no different from all the curriculum interpretations in textbook productions in South Africa prior to 1994. In fact, they can hardly be called a transformational approach towards creating a healthy, nation-building democracy.

Heritage as theme still a Cinderella

In the heritage theme, which is the seventh and last theme of the curriculum discussed in textbooks, the problem of historical amnesia in balancing all South Africa's diverse "my" histories in an informative and collective "we" theme on heritage is striking. Although the broader curriculum theme provides room for a broader historical perspective on heritage in its time frame allocation, the writers of all the textbooks have preferred to focus more on how the majority of black people in South Africa may perceive the ideologies and debates regarding the heritage theme. Although acts of denial regarding the rich heritage of all cultural groups by governing bodies before 1994 are a reality, an overindulged presentation of these events should not be the cause of a distorted diverse presentation or total lack of any multi-diverse presentation of people in South African heritage associations. This also concerns the interesting and valid archaeological findings that ought not to occupy all the content space.

Ironically, assessment assignments regarding heritage in all textbooks are more practically oriented and provide room for the "own experience" in the learner's own region or town. However, I am not convinced that the educators are sufficiently equipped (with little of an empirical nature to embark on) to address this section of the revised History curriculum sufficiently.

Other concerns

*** History or "his story"?**

The "struggle" towards creating a democracy for South Africa presented in the above-mentioned theme also covers the political trends of the nineties with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's role as a closure of the theme. The tragedies brought about during the National Party rule were new to all ordinary South African citizens. Nevertheless, the approach of "dealing with this past and facing the future" (as phrased in the curriculum) is an incomplete perspective and representation of the time before 1994. Examples that are ignored in textbooks are, among others, the voice outcome of the

white minority in both the 1982 and 1993 referendums and the political opinions of newspapers reporters of the time (for example, Max du Preez) and opinion formers such as Dr Frederick van Zyl Slabbert. Some of these people even voiced opinions under difficult circumstances. The only examples used in the Grade 12 textbooks (and then specifically in the textbook *In Search of History*) to portray the resistance of so-called Afrikaner whites against political transformation in South Africa (as if it represents the majority voice of white people) is that of a very small, white, and politically focused movement called the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging or AWB (Afrikaner Resistance Movement) and the Herstigte (Restored) National Party or HNP. Though the role of resistance movements such as mentioned undoubtedly forms part and parcel of the South African history, their presentation in textbooks – as if they represent all so-called Afrikaner whites – can be interpreted as a stereotypical and distorted historical presentation of the reality of the time. In the early 1990s and later, South Africans also had to witness conflicts among civilians, especially among black groups, that resulted in the brutal deaths of people. Although the government of the time is accused in textbooks of being the prime instigator of these events – and it certainly could be debated because these speculations were covered in academic articles – the actions of groups against civilians cannot be underscored in textbooks to portray only a seemingly innocent history of the majority against a white minority regime. Ironically, Grade 12 learners are only “introduced” to this brutality in the history of South Africa in some textbooks as an assignment where they are tasked to find out more. When this approach is followed, it simply means that it will always be a compulsory assignment and not part of the main content that reflects a distorted national narrative and a lack of multiple perspectives. Methodologically, all content in all the themes should link with assessment assignments and not rely on neutral, broadly covered assignments only. If the critical and learning outcomes (linked to the assessment standards) were critically followed, some distortions and imbalances perhaps would have been spotted in the writing process.

* **Sources utilised?**

Most of the textbooks display an extraordinary wide and creative variety. Some just go the extra mile further with sources and source creativity than others. The problematic issue in utilising sources is the ways of approaching them as assessment activities. Just to refer to a specific example that made

news early this year, namely, the Buthelezi cartoon in the publication of Oxford University Press. Rob Siebörger's (Siebörger, 2008:9; 2008:19) response recently was as follows:

News of another kind was that the IFP had taken exception to what was contained in an Oxford University Press history (Grade 12) textbook, in particular the use of a cartoon by Zapiro, which depicted Mangosuthu Buthelezi's pen dripping with blood at the time of the pre-election violence in 1994. The cartoon, however, was not an illustration. It was used in an exercise to analyse bias, set out in a sophisticated and thorough way. Ironically, in the light of the criticisms made, the most likely conclusion of the exercise is that the media in 1994 was biased in its treatment of Buthelezi and that history ought to reflect that. It is, thus, again a reflection of a lack of good history teaching in school that gives rise to an inability to see that the intention of the textbook was sympathetic to Buthelezi.

I beg to differ on this argument of Siebörger, though the merits of reflecting a wrong approach to a cartoon as a "lack of good History teaching" perhaps should not be overlooked. The writers of the textbook may have certainly been sympathetic to the personality in the cartoon, but they have, because of a lack of creativity in the assessment questions and possible options for debate, failed in guiding the learners towards identifying bias efficiently. Only one activity question is asked with no guidance whatsoever of additional facts to assist learners and educators to contradict or to support the views of the cartoonist Zapiro.

* **Distorted foci?**

Publishers of the aforementioned textbooks have made admirable efforts to produce a variety of useful and interesting sources, but not all will be that efficient in the teaching process. It is always worthwhile if a variety of sources on a specific theme cover multiple voices (a variety of sources) and perspectives (thoughts of people at the time). The lack of an in-depth content presentation can also distort the actual value of exploring source activities. Grade 12 textbooks, with distinctions here and there, fail in providing solid basic content.

In the second theme on how uhuru was realised in Africa, the History curriculum requires a discussion of mainly the 1960s and 1970s. The textbook *Looking into the Past* covers health as an issue mainly by requesting assessment tasks from contemporary examples. Thus, a solid foundation for a history in diseases and illnesses is basically ignored. An example is the learner

activity on page 94, in which Aids (a health problem much later) is used under the heading “Health and Education” (meaning health and education in especially the 1960s and 1970s). Assignments given to learners, such as “Do some research to find out more about the possible impact of the AIDS virus on Africa’s population, economy and social structure” should be categorised under the theme of globalisation. Furthermore, the question/assignment phrased “How can the spread of AIDS be prevented?” does not lie within the boundaries of History to be debated at all.

*** Snippets on language usage and stereotyping in Grade 12 textbooks**

The use of the word “regime” as a random replacement for “government” in contexts in *Looking into the Past* could confuse learners. Normally, a regime in politics is a form of government in both the formal (rules) and informal (common law, cultural, and social norms) contexts that regulates the operation of government and its interactions with society (compare the definition with www.Wikipedia.org, 2008). In the context of *Looking into the Past*, the word “regime” appears to refer mainly to governments where white minorities abused their position of power. Consequently, learners may develop a distorted impression of when it is advisable to refer to a government as a “regime” (for example, compare p. 82 in the publication where Zimbabwe is referred to as “Mugabe’s government”).

Although a lack of space has prevented me from writing about the teacher’s guides of these publications, the following example should be shared for all to take note: in *Looking into the Past* and *Shuter’s History*, the answers to activity questions are referred to as “suggested answers”. In *In Search of History*, these answers are simply referred to as “answers”, whereas in *Moments in History*, the words “Guidelines for answering the questions” are used. Although debatable, the last option is a personal choice because history can provide “answers”, but they are not necessarily shared by all. Textbook publishers should be more careful of still getting stuck in traditional forms of writing if their vision for history publications is to accentuate a multi-diverse focus.

Apparently, the aspect of “answering” and “phrasing” assessment activities is also regularly debated in other countries. LaSpina (2003:682) critically reviews the way in which the New Zealand History textbook *Talking about the Treaty* (published in 1994) approaches History assessment assignments based on letter fragments and interviews (which also require a regular testing

of their “feelings” about certain issues) as follows:

... the lesson [namely to understand the Maori] engages students in a typical social studies enquiry strategy. In therapeutic tones, they [the learners] are asked how they ‘feel about the Treaty of Waitangi [1975] now!’ ... but the deeper social paradox embedded in these interviews eludes this simplistic instrument. Wholly subjective, these opinions reflect a complex range of ambivalence, misunderstanding and ignorance. In fact, even the more insightful interviews are hard to interpret as pro or con. And, as with generic social studies exercises, intractable complex issues tend to get flattened out and reduced to the terms of a high school debate, resolved with a formulaic feel-good consensus. The stories of actual history, the competing version of rights and obligations which sparked a bitter and brutal war and have produced simmering racial divisions in present day New Zealand [based on a publication in 1986], are nowhere in evidence.

Several similar examples appear in some sections of the aforementioned textbooks. See the question about Aids commented on earlier.

A remark Tully made in 1995 (quoted by LaSpina 2003:682-683), which most historians will endorse, is that learners “must listen to voices past in order truly to engage the ‘strange multiplicity’ of incommensurable cultures. Therefore, the ideal of accentuating a ‘history of progress’ of a nation is not negative, but to act ‘tone-deaf to deep-seated conflict’” (LaSpina, 2003:682; also compare Coffin, 2006). Underplaying the diversity in the South African heritage may only set the table for another kind of conflict.

Analysis and conclusion

When looking at South Africa from a transcontinental perspective, the trends abroad will appear very familiar, though with a different look. Constraints on developing and interpreting the revised South African History curriculum in especially the 12th grade have been discussed. Another recent external constraint to be mentioned regarding teaching History in general in South Africa, but that does not form part of this discussion, is the 2006 introduction of a new curriculum for the final three years of schooling. This change impacted on the subject choices schools make in the further education and training (FET) phase (Siebörger, 2008:9; 2008:19).

From transcontinental discussions of curriculum revisions, it is clear that educators of History in South Africa do not fight a lonely battle in curriculum development and its textbook interpretation with regard to ensuring that

multi-diverse perspectives are covered (compare Coffin, 2006; Cole and Barsalou, 2006:1-16; LaSpina, 2003:683; IGGD Conference, 2008).

It is more than a fact, so to speak, that different views of history affect ways of writing about the past (Coffin, 2006:3). The same applies to assembling and presenting content within the structures of History curricula that eventually find their way to textbooks and supporting materials. Another complexity that goes hand in hand with especially the writing process of History textbooks is the use of different styles (for example, a gripping story-telling narrative style or a detached logical argumentative analysis). In using supporting materials, the idea is also to allow learners not to rely on the interpretation of the textbook writer/historian, but to use primary material and, based on the assessment focus, come to their own conclusions.

However, to be able to approach primary source material in the above-mentioned way, the perceived basic secondary source content – related to a specific theme as utilised in a textbook and written by History educators or historians – should be multi-diverse and moulded in a discourse analysis. If not, it implies that the selection of source material may also not reflect a multi-diverse approach and a richer understanding of the range of texts that operate within a specific linguistic make-up, different dimensions of context, and with perhaps different cultural dimensions, for example, the historical discourse of History for Grade 12. It is also then likely that an effective utilisation of a supposedly “arguing genre” style (as discussed by Coffin) in Grade 12 will be absent because secondary and primary basics are not representative (compare Coffin, 2006:18, 27-28, 42, 47).

Difficulties in the evaluation of historical interpretation are a matter of concern abroad and in South Africa. History educators and learners still have to use different interpersonal strategies and new ways of organising text in the process of utilising the arguing genre. According to Coffin (2006:77-87, 130-131, 138), this genre mainly unfolds into an *exposition* (arguing for a particular interpretation), *discussion* (considering different interpretations before reaching a position), and *challenge* (arguing against a particular interpretation).

Because Grade 12's should primarily be occupied with the arguing genre, the key argument of this article is that recently published Grade 12 textbooks in South Africa, as based on the revised History curriculum, do not sufficiently live up to this requirement in their content, their language style, and their assessment tasks. Furthermore, the content of the approach to globalism

and globalising trends that have impacted on the history of South Africa is insufficiently organised and equipped to be able to provide a multi-diverse setting.

Cole and Barsalou (2006:9) accentuate the requirement of a social consensus that must be reached to ensure approval and adoption of History textbooks that break old myths that glorify one group and demonise others. Cole and Barsalou (2006:9) continue by saying the following:

... much of history depends on the viewpoint of those writing it. Although post-conflict societies could benefit from accounts of history that play down the differences between former enemies, some truths do exist: ... Denying them results in dangerous moral relativism ...

It must be admitted that the Grade 12 publications are the first within the revised History curriculum of South Africa and admirable efforts, but efforts that will certainly require revision in especially structure, in-depth content, and efficient history methodology practices. Although textbooks are not produced every year, publishers and the DoE and the broader educator community should take cognisance of the key ideal in a presentation of History, namely, to search for multiple narrative views and voices to present the broader nation's historical development in a balanced, healthy, and nation-building way within the global environment. This is not a request from minority voices, but a serious requirement in History as a discipline. The transcontinental perspectives highlighted earlier also boil down to these basics for efficient textbook writing and teaching History.

A drawback in writing one's national history within a global context to cover an inclusive diversity is that breadth tends to cancel out depth. Content then becomes fragmented and skimpy. LaSpina (2003:685) refers to it as "self-contained as a graphic advertisement. Potentially, the 'story' becomes as thin as the page it is printed on". He continues by reflecting other authors on this:

... as long as textbooks tend to re-inscribe thematically the path of progress and its apogee ... its 'mythmaking' apparatus remains obscure, and in doing so the large historical processes which structure the local history of nations will remain safely at the margins of an emerging global context ... (LaSpina, 2003:686).

The question is not whether the nation's story should be reflected from a broader context of world systems or not, but *how* it should be done. The reality is that constraints still tend to dispose people to think and act locally in terms of modernity. All nations are caught up in a "rapidly developing

and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences”. Therefore, to get “inside” a particular “my” history in the broader “us” and “them” context, a global and comparative look at it from past to present is required.

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