

SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY IN PERSPECTIVE

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1. INTRODUCTION (Background)

Education in South Africa is used as an instrument to control social change by the white ruling class. This is because no ruling class can hold power for any length of time simply by the use of force. Ideological control provides a far more effective means of maintaining class rule. If members of the subject class accept their position as normal, natural and inevitable, and fail to realize the true nature of their situation, then they will be unlikely to challenge ruling class dominance (Haralambos; 1988:180).

In case some people may misconstrue this system as Marxist, it should be interesting to note that the Americans applied the same paradigm in the Philippines. When the Americans had liberated the Philippines from Japanese imperialism, they introduced an education system that would indoctrinate the Filipinos with Americanism. Education was used as a weapon to domesticate and colonise the Filipinos. The moulding of Filipino minds was seen as the best means of conquest (Journal of Contemporary Asia 1.1; 1970:21).

History teaching forms part of the curriculum offered in Black education from the primary school through to the university. In line with the paradigm of domesticating; colonising and conquering the Black mind, history teaching as part of education was designed and controlled to serve the aims and interests of the dominant white class. It was for this reason, that when the National Party introduced their own system of education for Blacks in 1953, embodied in the Bantu Education Act No 47 of 1953, one of the guiding principles was:

"We should not give the Natives an academic education, as some people are too prone to do. If we do this we shall later be burdened with a number of academically trained Europeans and

non-Europeans, and who is going to do the manual labour in the country? We should so conduct our schools that the native who attends schools will know that to a great extent he must be the labourer in the country" (Eiselen Report, 1951: 60).

This guiding principle was confirmed by Verwoerd by reminding:

"... the honourable members that if the Native in South Africa today, in any kind of school in existence is being taught he will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake when I have control of native education I will reform it so that natives will be taught from childhood to realize that equality with Europeans is not for them People who believe in equality are not desirable teachers for Natives" (Brookes, 1968: 51).

This paradigm, as enunciated by Verwoerd and to be embodied in the Bantu Education Act, has always been part of the education of Blacks in South Africa. As far back as 1889, the Cape Superintendent-General of Education reported that the government's first duty in education was:

"... to recognise the position of the European colonists as holding the paramount influence, social and political; and to see that the sons and daughters of the colonists should have at least such an education as their peers in Europe enjoy, with such local modifications as will fit them to maintain their unquestioned superiority and supremacy" (Wilson & Thompson, eds. 1969: 222).

In this presentation, the intention is to show how history, as part of education, was manipulated by white, especially Afrikaner historians to perpetuate their dominating position, domesticate the Black mind and maintain it in a colonised state, and so indoctrinate Blacks with a sense of inferiority.

2. THE NATURE OF SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY

Perhaps something about the nature of the history of South Africa will explain why it is meant for social control and indoctrination. The nature of the history of South Africa to which reference is made here is the tradition that has been created by white South African historians, Afrikaner and some English. What is the nature or tradition of South African history?

The first tradition that has been created in the historiography of South Africa is that it is political. It is political because it is predominantly a product of the climate of the region. Present day South African society has developed from the interaction of two broad cultural streams, namely the indigenous African peoples and the immigrant white groups. The result has been that for years historical research has been conducted upon the assumption that the indigenous African groups had no past worth studying since their culture remained static (Kekana; 1980: 16).

The second tradition created by white historians in South African historiography is that it is racist. South Africa has a rigidly stratified society. Therefore historical writing is not merely a reflection of social inequality. It is also a powerful instrument for the maintenance of inequality. Such historical writing perpetuates language and race barriers (Wilson and Thompson, Vol. 1; 1971; vi).

The third tradition is that it is biased; prejudiced and one-sided. It portrays the conquered Black people of South Africa as wicked and the conquerors, the triumphant whites, as being righteous. This type of frontier history is also to be found in America; New Zealand and Australia. It is the history of the good settler and the bad native. What Thompson called an old fashioned, pigmentocratic history syllabus. (Naidoo; 1989: 9)

The fourth tradition it has created are myths to justify; promote and perpetuate the dominant position of the white ruling class. Myths like that there were no Blacks when whites settled in South Africa; and that Hintsa, the Xhosa king, was killed while trying to escape.

The fifth tradition such a history has created, is that Blacks had no history before the arrival of whites in South Africa. This point was succinctly stated by Trevor-Roper as follows:

"I do not deny that men existed even in dark countries and dark centuries, nor that they had political life and culture, interesting to sociologists and anthropologists; but history, I believe is essentially a form of movement The positive content of history, to all these writers ... [of the eighteenth century] consisted not in the meaningless fermentation of passive or barbarous societies but in the movement of society, the process, conscious or unconscious, by which certain societies, at certain times, had risen out of barbarism once common to all and, by their efforts and example, by the interchange and diffusion of arts and sciences, gradually drawn or driven other societies along with them to 'the full light and freedom of the eighteenth century'. (Wilson & Thompson; Vol. 1; 1975: viii).

This tradition was further confirmed by Van Rooyen (Cronje (ed.); 1967: 134-135) when he said Blacks had no historical consciousness as a result of the fact that they had no written sources and led static lives.

The sixth tradition, which is also a myth, created by such a history, was that when whites settled in South Africa, they settled in an empty land. This actually reflected present values of the ruling group, and not a demographic fact.

There are many other aberrant traditions to be found in South African historiography. It is not possible to encompass them all in this paper.

The next step is to illustrate the one-sidedness; bias; prejudice and indoctrinating tendencies in South African history.

3. THE PRESENTATION OF HISTORY IN BOOKS

For purposes of clarity, this section shall be divided into two sections. The first section shall deal with the indoctrination of pupils through history on the secondary school level, and the second section shall deal with the distortions; bias and prejudices found in books generally used on the tertiary level.

3.1 History as presented in Secondary School Textbooks: Distortion, bias and prejudice

The assertion has been made that history in South Africa is used for political ends. It is also used to dominate and suppress the history of the indigenous Black population. Can evidence to support such assertions be produced? Herewith a random sample of the racist; prejudiced and indoctrinating history found at the secondary school level.

Van Jaarsveld and Van der Walt (1959: 112) wrote as follows:

"Die Boesmans was jagters wat op die laagste trap van 'n primitiewe beskawing gestaan het. Die Hottentotte was veeboere wat op 'n trappie hoër as die Boesmans gestaan het. Die Bantoes was landbouers. Hulle was op die hoogste trap van 'n primitiewe beskawing."

The mind boggles at such blatant racism and indoctrination.

Hooper (1952: 42) insensitively continued as follows:

"We have read in the last chapter how Tshaka, ruler of the Zulus, was a cruel and bloodthirsty chief who killed his own people and other tribes so that his name was feared far and wide. Like most tyrants, he was himself murdered by treachery in September, 1828."

The two quotations provide an illustration of how a prejudiced history leads to a distorted perception in school children. Van Rensburg et al (1976: 62) wrote as follows:

"As a result of the protection of the service contracts a great number of Hottentots were prepared to work for white employers."

The truth of the matter is that this was not so. Van Rensburg et al do not mention the fact that if the Khoikhoi did not seek employment, they would be arrested and jailed. Therefore, this was some kind of sophisticated slavery.

Muller and De Bruin (1969: 216) wrote as follows:

"Die veetroppe van die blanke veeboere is met begeerlike oë deur hierdie onbeskaafde veeboere aanskou."

Such history writing accounts for why successive regimes applied the policy of domination in South Africa.

Writing about the conflict between the Xhosa and the Trekboers, Dodd et al (n.d.: 299-303) referred to it as "The First Bantu War". The impression created is that the "Bantus" were responsible for the war.

Kgoale (1986: 116) summarised the implications and falsifications of school history textbooks in South Africa as follows:

"As a means of control by indoctrination, history is falsified. Pupils are taught that when the whites arrived they found an "empty land". Blacks are depicted as dishonest bargainers, foolish farmers, or Homeland citizens. More insulting is the frequent reference by White historians to Blacks as a 'problem'. At a cursory level this white-centred perspective is evident in reference to Blacks as a 'problem' to the Whites. In his standard 6 textbook, Paynter (undated) has the subheading: 'Grey looks for new approach to the Bantu problem' (p. 157). Joubert and Jooste (1977: 135) have 'Waarom Grey die swartprobleem toegeskryf het' ... Nowhere, however, is there any reference to a 'white problem', though it is obvious that the Whites must have been at least as much of a 'problem' to the Blacks as the Blacks were to the Whites".

Most textbooks prescribed for children in secondary schools are prejudiced; biased and indoctrinating. They are intended to control social change and maintain and prolong the rule of the white minority.

The textbook by C J Joubert: History for Standard 10 (1980) deserves mention as one propagating an apartheid history of domination. The following quotations from the textbook show bias and prejudice:

"... the generally possessionless Non-white looked up to the White with his possessions. The Non-white did not, therefore, regard it as strange to find himself in an inferior position" (219).

"The Bantu differ from the Whites socially and economically. Because the Bantu's level of achievement is lower than the Whites in several fields (education, economy, social life) it would be unreasonable to administer him in the same way as a White person is administered" (226).

"The Bantu's traditional political system differs from that of the Whites. Such institutions as the authority of the chief or headman, communal ownership of land and Bantu law, are peculiar to the Bantu and demands appropriate administrative systems" (226).

After dominating Blacks and putting them in economically, socially and educationally inferior positions, whites go back to history to justify apartheid. Thus is history used to control social change and justify white minority rule. All this led Colin Bundy (The Star, April 19, 1990) to refer to the history of South Africa as "white supremacist history, or history by denial ... it proceeds essentially by denying that black South Africans have a history. The history of South Africa is the history of Dutch colonisers and English settlers, their treks, wars, politics and leaders. When Blacks do impinge on their history they do so largely as external irritants: like locusts, rinderpest and droughts. They are cattle-raiders, work-shy squatters, unruly frontier-crossers and uncivilised heathens.

What is the position of books used on the tertiary level?

3.2 History texts on the tertiary level

Much of the history studied in South Africa relies, directly and indirectly, on the writings and researches of George McCall Theal. In universities, many people cannot do without his writings.

Yet, although Theal is regarded as the father of South African history (S.A. Historiography Guide 3 Unisa; 1973: 12), he has been discredited by other historians for distortion and bias.

P.J. van der Merwe in his "Die Trekboer in die Geskiedenis van die Kaapkolonie", J.S. Marais in his "Maynier and the First Boer Republic"; N.S. Kekana in his licentiaat dissertation "A History of the Black People to 1795: A Critical Analysis of Nineteenth Century South African Historiography". and, to a limited extent, M. Babrow in her M.A. dissertation "A Critical Assessment of Dr George McCall Theal" all discredited Theal as being biased, racist and a distorter of evidence. It is against this background that an assessment of texts used at universities has to be made.

SFN Gie wrote "Geskiedenis van Suid Afrika of Ons Verlede in three volumes. In the preface to his first volume he has this to say about the history of South Africa:

"...die ongeletterde en barbaarse mensemassas van die wêreld is by uitstek die wetenskaplike arbeidsveld van etnografe en etnoloë, die historikus, daarenteen, bepaal hom veral by die beskaafde volke. Sy hoofveld is om die hedendagse beskaafing uit die verlede te verklaar, en daarom mag en moet hy hom grotendeels tot die draer van die beskaafing bepaal.... Ons kan dus sê dat onder Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika moet verstaan word die Geskiedenis van die Europese Beskawing van Suid Afrika (Deel I - 1795; 1942: i-ii).

This assertion falls within the paradigm of Trevor-Roper, and fits into the scheme of the whites that Blacks have no past worth studying. Further on, writing about the problems between Van Riebeeck and the Khoikhoi Gie continues:

"Harry en Gogaso was nie tevrede nie. Soos oral waar die witman met die barbaar in aanraking gekom het, het Jan van Riebeeck hier: (1) die Hottentots probeer gerusstel oor die verlies van hulle land; (2) hulle beskerming aangebied; (3) hulle bewys dat dit in hulle eie voordeel was om die land deur blankes te laat bewoon en bewerk; en, soos orals in die wêreld, was die naturel wel begerig om van die vrugte van die beskawing: brood en tabak en -brandewyn te geniet, maar met die intrek van die witman in sy land was hy tog nie versoen nie (Deel I - 1795; 1942: 73).

This type of superiority complex and a white-man-know-all attitude abounds in South African history. This is racist history. Gie continues in this trend throughout his three volumes. He speaks of the Xhosa as the greatest enemy of civilisation that the Trekboer ever came into contact with (Deel 1 - 1795; 1942: 215).

On the question of who arrived first in South Africa, Walker (1958: 8) said the white arrived before the Black man. Muller (ed.) (1971: 434) said that both the white and black man arrived at the same time in South Africa. Shillington (1987: 7-8) explained such distortions as follows:

"Until at least the 1960's South African historians and white politicians had a very distorted view of their regions early history. They believed that black, Bantu-speaking, iron-working farmers were fairly recent immigrants into Southern Africa. Blacks were said for have swept into the region from the north in successive, 'conquering waves of migration'. Furthermore, it was claimed, these 'Bantu migrations' first crossed the Limpopo between 1500 and 1600 AD, and certainly not earlier than 1000 AD. The idea that blacks had no very ancient root in the country conveniently suited South Africa's whites who used it to justify their own position of economic and political domination".

4. ALTERNATIVE HISTORICAL WRITING

As an alternative to the exclusive, racist, biased and prejudiced historical tradition which was used to dominate the black people in this country, several historians began to contradict such history writing. In South African historiography, they are classified as Liberals; neo-liberals; the Radicals and, from the Black population, what is known as the African Nationalist school.

The Liberals were the first to question the historical writings of the Afrikaners. They made a positive contribution towards the re-development and re-construction of a national non-racial history of South Africa. Whatever defects they may have had, that was a start.

The Neo-Liberals and the Radicals went to the root of the problems of South African history. They contributed significantly in de-mythologising the history of South Africa. Without their contribution, South African history would still be in the dark ages of Afrikaner historical writing. Blacks in South Africa would still be a "forgotten factor".?

The African Nationalist or Black school was influenced by the Liberals; the Neo-Liberals and the Radicals. These three schools awakened in the Blacks the desire to write their own history. The African Nationalist school also includes some Europeans. Mnguni (Hosea Joffe) who wrote Three Hundred Years: A History of South Africa and Nosipho Majeke (Dorah Taylor) who wrote The Role of the Missionary in Conquest, were white people.

Blacks have not yet written significantly on history in South Africa. Who would publish them and which education department would prescribe them? Among the significant writings to be found, can be mentioned B.M. Magubane's The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, and W.M. Tsotsi's From Chattel to Wage Slavery: A new Approach to South African history (1981).

5. THE FUTURE OF HISTORY IN SOUTH AFRICA

History in South Africa has an important role to play. Its role will be to cement and bring people of different races together. It will have to develop a non-racial South Africa with a common citizenship. If one of the purposes of history is to develop in its learners into citizens who are patriotic and have national pride, in South Africa it has failed dismally.

In South Africa it has developed racist whites who think that South Africa belongs to them alone. It has developed Black people who belong to homelands. As a result, some tribes in South Africa are already thinking about themselves as a nation. This can be detrimental to the formation of a non-racial unitary South Africa.

History in South Africa has been political, and was used to indoctrinate. The opposite will now have to be the case. History in a new non-racial South Africa will have to be didactic and moral.

Non-racial history should be developed i e history that takes into account the contributions of all races in South Africa. Such a history should not be ethnic, racial or cultural. It should be a history of South Africa.

Such a history should not revolve around a particular racial or cultural group. Van Jaarsveld (1963:28) had speculated that among Blacks a Black-centred historical image would develop. This would not be acceptable in a non-racial South Africa. However, the fact that Blacks are in the majority may mean that history writing may be more on them than any racial group. A purposeful exclusion of other races would not be acceptable.

Changes in the historiography of South Africa will depend on the type of political settlement that will be hammered out by the forthcoming negotiations. If the negotiations are successful and a new non-racial South Africa becomes the order of the day, that may well mean the end of apartheid history.

Future historians may concentrate their studies on apartheid South Africa. They may want to analyse the full implications of apartheid South Africa on all people.

An interpretation of South African history from a black point of view or a white point of view should be discouraged. This will lead to bias and prejudice, and a one-sided historiography. The belief of D.W. Krüger (1964:135) that it is incorrect to examine the history of South Africa and of the Boer people from "outside", should be discarded. The Boers did not make history alone in South Africa.

Just as much as a purely white or black history, should be discouraged, a tribal history among black people should never even be thought about. In this respect one is referring to the idea of Van Jaarsveld (1984: 201) that in future for example, there will be histories of KwaZulu, Bophuthatswana and other homelands. That further, there will be a Zulu historian who will write the history of South Africa from a Zulu perspective.

All that should be discouraged. It will still take us back to the apartheid history we are rejecting. Bias and prejudice will still be there in South African historical writing. However, such bias should be unconscious rather than purposeful.

The importance of culture in history should not be over-emphasised. Reference here is made to the following words of Van Jaarsveld: (1984:203) "Solank daar kultuurgroepe in Suid-Afrika bestaan, solank sal daar verskil in vertolking van die verlede wees, en sal algemene geskiedenis derhalwe van mekaar verskil en vir 'n sekere groep of groepe tydelik aanvaarbaar wees, maar nooit vir altyd of vir almal tegelyk nie". Generally in South Africa, culture is regarded as genetically inherited. This is not so. A new South Africa should develop a non-racial culture where-in all, irrespective of race, will be able to participate.

This is not to deny the fact that there will always be cultural enclaves in a non-racial South Africa. However, they should not be allowed to dominate the non-racial climate that shall be cultivated.

6. CONCLUSION

South African history today is a good example of what happens in oppressed societies. For it to change, there should first be political change. The present discussions that are attempts to create a new political dispensation in this country are more than welcome.

It is in such a new non-racial South Africa that we shall be able to say:

HISTORIA MAGISTRA VITAE

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