

EDITORIAL

SPECIAL EDITION ON HISTORY TEXTBOOKS IN AFRICA

History textbooks are powerful media used to transmit to the learners what they are supposed to know about the past. However, textbooks by dint of their nature are not only educational material but, as Apple and Christian-Smith (1991:1) reminded us “the results of political, economic and cultural activities, battles and compromises”. As a result textbooks tend to be complex in nature as they are influenced by many conflicting pressures in the process of their production. This in turn has an impact on what is included and/ or excluded from the available subject matter. Whose knowledge gets selected for inclusion in the textbook, why and how, are thus major political and educational questions. Apple and Christian-Smith (1991) refer to the “official” or “legitimate” knowledge which is included in the textbook as the product of complex power relations and struggles among different competing social groups based on class, race, gender, religion and so forth. Resulting from these encounters the knowledge of the most powerful or dominant group is generally included in the textbook and thus textbook content changes as do powerful groups. This is even more visible in countries which experienced a fundamental political transition like South Africa.

Textbooks also serve a critical role in achieving the educational goals of many countries as they are vehicles through which the legitimate knowledge in the curriculum infiltrates schools. Accordingly, textbooks can dominate what learners learn and teachers teach. Moreover, learners possibly spend a large proportion of their time interacting with textbooks regardless if they are in the classroom or at home. In fact, for most learners textbooks provide their first exposure to books and are their most readily accessible and trusted source of knowledge (Kalmus, 2004).

History textbooks, as with all other textbooks, play a vital role in education and their use to support teaching and learning is an almost universally accepted practice. They are widely used in classrooms to fulfil a range of purposes ranging from transmitting knowledge to legitimising dominant historical narratives, from encouraging critical engagement with multiple perspectives to creating patriotic citizens. This elevates History textbooks as a powerful medium of mass communication which can be employed by dominant groups in society

to establish, amongst other uses, cultural and political hegemony. Very few members of society experience school without being exposed to the power of History textbooks. As such History textbooks are the one form of the printed media which probably has the widest societal reach. Yet, empirically, there is little evidence on how textbooks are used by teachers in the classroom and how they are received by learners. In which way historical thinking of youngsters is influenced by textbook knowledge is, for example, not yet comprehensively investigated. More empirical studies on the “enacted curriculum” in the classroom, analysing the complex relationship between teacher, textbook and learners are therefore needed. The aforementioned forms the rationale for this special edition on History textbooks in Africa.

This edition of *Yesterday & Today*¹ consists of three sections, a Festschrift, the academic articles and the History teachers’ voice segment.

The first section, which serves to encapsulate the edition as a whole, is a Festschrift dedicated to Professor Rob Siebörger. Robert Frederick Siebörger was born in Port Elizabeth, South Africa and studied at Rhodes University and the University of Exeter. He first taught at Hoërskool PJ Olivier, Grahamstown and then at the Port Elizabeth Teachers’ College. From October 1986, until his retirement in December 2014, Rob has been attached to the School of Education at the University of Cape Town. As a History educator, Rob experienced History Education under apartheid, the high hopes, with apologies to Aldous Huxley, of a “brave new post-apartheid History Education world” of the early to mid-1990s. This included workshops initiated by the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in which Rob played a key role. This initiative was followed by subsequent frustrations of outcomes and the learning area “Human and Social Science”, the slow but steady return of the subject to a recognisable discipline, to the current flirtations of making History compulsory in one form or another up to Grade 12. Throughout all of this, Rob kept his eye in an unwavering manner on History Education be it as a textbook author, conference organiser, editor, curriculum developer, lecturer, supervisor, consultant, mentor, teacher, advisor, member of the South African Society for History Teaching and other international organisations and in other ways too numerous to mention. A man for all History education seasons indeed but definitely not a fair weather to History Education. This Festschrift edition with its focus on History textbooks, a key area in the work

¹ *Yesterday & Today* is an accredited open-access South African academic journal focusing on History Education. The journal appears twice a year, both electronically and in print. Back issues can be accessed at: <http://www.scielo.org.za/>

of Rob, is hopefully a fitting tribute to a doyen of History Education in South Africa. Although the edition in its entirety is a tribute to Rob we will in the special Festschrift section encounter the homage from colleagues from across the globe as they reminisce about Rob the mentor, critical thinker, rugby supporter, unflappable colleague and most of all mensch.

This edition of *Yesterday & Today* contains nine academic articles, including a contribution by Rob, on History textbooks. The nine articles contained in this edition are those that stood the test of academic rigour in our call for submission on History textbooks in Africa. These are laid out in a sequence that begins with articles on the provision and selection of textbooks in South Africa, then engages with methodology. This is followed with the practice of historical thinking, then an overview of textbook studies in South Africa, before finally ending with two articles that focus on other countries in Africa.

In the first article Ryota Nishino places the provision of textbooks in apartheid South Africa (1948-1994), under the microscope. He takes a historical perspective and makes particular reference to History textbook production. In the process, the apartheid bureaucratic strictures and commercial imperatives which gave rise to a conformist ethos that stifled innovation, encouraged conformity which resulted in commercial and political kowtowing are laid bare. Nishino's article is followed by a contribution from Rob Siebörger in which he analyses his own experiences of serving on the 2007 selection panel for Grade 12 History textbooks. His description of the persistence of a blended commercial and political practice from the Apartheid era is very similar to that described by Nishino. Siebörger draws on Pingel (2010:54) to remind us that "... the text itself is the result of a negotiated societal process." A global truism when it comes to textbook production.

The articles then take a methodological turn. In his contribution Marshall Maposa reflects on his choice to apply Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in a study in which he analysed South African History textbooks for their construction of African consciousness. An argument he concludes by pointing out that, though fraught with challenges, the application of CDA offers a worthwhile alternative methodology to more accepted ones, such as textual and content analysis, in the enquiry into History textbooks. In a similar methodological vein, Bharath and Bertram describe how progression in historical thinking manifests itself across seven South African textbooks, one each from Grade 3 to Grade 9. They argue that one way in which progression in historical thinking is signalled in textbooks is by the genre type of the texts

with which learners are required to engage. They conclude that using genre as a methodological tool can illuminate some aspects of progression of both first order and second order concepts in History.

The theme of historical thinking is pursued further by Daniel Ramaroka and Alta Engelbrecht. They use one element of a historical thinking framework, the analysis of primary sources, to evaluate History textbooks. This was achieved by using the three heuristics distilled by Wineburg (2001), sourcing, corroborating and contextualising, to evaluate the utilisation of primary sources. Their conclusion was that source work was influenced by authors' conventional epistemological beliefs about school History as a compendium of facts.

Also focusing on the practice of 'doing school history', Mackenzie and Steinberg explore the nature of History as a school-based discipline and how it is recontextualised in the South African History Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) and three Grade 10 History textbooks. Their particular focus is on what the assessment activities and questions required of learners. Their findings indicate that within the 'doing school history' construct, there is both an academic and a political dimension which may appear to be at odds with one another. However, in their view the study of History is strengthened when both dimensions are given their due respect.

Bertram and Wassermann provide a broad picture of the state of History textbook analysis studies in South Africa over the past 75 years. This was done by building up a database of completed academic studies on History textbooks so as to provide an overview of the nature of History textbook research in the country. The article firstly provides a broad overview of all the peer-reviewed studies, noting the trends since 1944. Secondly, it engages in a detailed analysis of the studies that did content analysis of textbooks. In so doing a broad picture of the state of History textbook analysis emerged which shows a huge increase in the number of textbook studies in the last 15 years, which are mostly small scale qualitative studies. They argue that the body of research into History textbooks would be strengthened if authors used methodological and analysis tools that have been used by others in order to make these tools more robust and trustworthy, as well as to make philosophical paradigms more explicit.

The final two articles provide perspectives on History textbook research from other parts of Africa. One hundred years after the outbreak of the First World War (WW1) Denise Bantrovato revisited the event. In a comparative

analysis of over 30 History and social studies textbooks from 15 different African countries she investigates the core questions around which lessons on WW1 are designed across the continent, and the specific knowledge conveyed and emphasised in the answers provided to these questions. In her article she demonstrates the efforts, found across African textbooks, to re-claim and re-centre local historical agency, experiences, and views related to WW1, while also pointing to the possibility to better valorise this part of national, African and world heritage to learn meaningful lessons for the present and the future.

In the final article Chiponda and Wassermann analyse the visual images of women contained in junior secondary school History textbooks used in Malawi. The purpose being to explore how women are portrayed visually and why they are portrayed the way they are. In the article it is argued that women are generally oppressed, under-represented and subordinated in their portrayal in the visual images in the textbooks analysed. They furthermore argue that their research findings in an African context speak to similar findings in other parts of the world and can for the most part be attributed to similar reasons – the powerful influences of patriarchy in society which is carried into both History and History textbooks.

The third section of this edition gives voice to those in History Education very close to the heart of Rob Siebörger – History teachers. This section, a unique developmental feature to *Yesterday & Today* gives a hands-on voice to History educators alongside the contributions by their academic peers as outlined earlier. In this edition, in line with the theme on History textbooks in Africa, we can read the perspectives of nine History educators from six different African countries on the topic of using textbooks in their classrooms. In their articles, they explain how they use History textbooks in their planning, preparation, teaching and assessment – be they as self-standing sources or in conjunction with other material. The selection and other production processes of History textbooks are also unpacked.

In the process Nancy Rushohora lays the workings of the “Desa” bare, George Muriira explains how History textbooks are used in a deep rural context in Kenya, Christine Kayeli Akidiva describes how they are used in a peri-urban context, Jean Pierre Tuyisenge provide understanding on how he uses History textbooks in a Rwandan university context, Annick Umugwaneza shares her ideas on how active learning can be achieved by using textbooks, Fortune Khumbulani unpacks the use of History textbooks in Swaziland, Pretty Kajal Domur and Debby Lee Joubert provided insights into how they educate

History learners in two all-girls' schools in different parts of Africa while Nyinchiah Godwin Gham unravels the intricate world of History textbooks in Cameroon. Intertwined with the uniqueness of these contributions from the various parts of Africa are to be found universal themes related to pedagogical, political and commercial challenges. These are stories of how outstanding History teachers, using textbooks and other resources in hand, rise to the challenge of teaching History in often difficult circumstances.

In conclusion, although the opinions expressed in the various sections of this edition of *Yesterday & Today* on History textbooks in Africa are those of the authors alone, we would like to thank them for entrusting their intellectual property to us. Finally, a word of thanks towards the editorial board of *Yesterday & Today* for allowing us to act as guest editors for the December 2015 issue.

Guest editors

Johan Wassermann, Carol Bertram & Inga Niehaus