

THE DEPICTION OF WOMEN IN THE VERBAL TEXT OF A JUNIOR SECONDARY MALAWIAN HISTORY TEXTBOOK – AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This article analyses the depiction of women in the verbal text of a history textbook used at junior secondary school level in Malawi. The focus falls on how women are depicted in the textbook and why they are depicted the way they are. The article is based on empirical research and utilised a feminist theoretical perspective. The verbal text was analysed quantitatively using open coding. Based on the analysis we argue that women, as historical characters, are generally subordinated and oppressed in a number of ways. This includes under-representation, marginalisation and omission. Since what is written in textbooks is regarded as authoritative depictions like these can send a negative message to learners and teachers as users of the textbooks about women as historical characters. We also argue that our findings from the Malawi context resonate with similar research done globally which for the most part can be attributed to the patriarchal societies women find themselves in. To change this situation we recommended that the junior secondary history syllabus and textbooks be updated and aligned to the Malawian constitution and gender equality policies.

Keywords: Feminism; History textbooks; Malawi; Patriarchy; Marginalisation; Omission; Under-representation; Verbal text; Women.

Introduction

Malawi is a land-locked country located in Sub-Saharan Africa, south of the equator, in the south-eastern region of the continent. The country has a total area of 118 484 square kilometres which includes both the land area and Lake Malawi, the third largest lake in Africa. Malawi is one of the most densely populated countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with a population of 13.6 million. Women make up 51% of the population (National Statistical Office (NSO) of Malawi, 2009). The country was formerly, during the period of British

colonial rule between 1891 and 1964, known as Nyasaland. Its name was changed to Malawi when it became independent in July 1964. For a period of 30 years after its independence Malawi was under a one-party dictatorship. This was only replaced by a multiparty democracy in 1994. As a democratic country, Malawi has a liberal constitution which recognises many human rights, including women's rights. The constitution also emphasises gender equality, women's empowerment and non-discrimination based on gender.

The school curriculum that is offered in Malawi was developed by the Ministry of Education through its curriculum development centre, the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE). With reference to this article, the history curriculum is composed of two syllabi, the junior secondary and the senior. The junior secondary school history syllabus was published by the Ministry of Education in December 1998 and introduced in the schools in January 1999. The senior syllabus, was published in February 2001 and implementation thereof began in the same year (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2001; Ministry of Education Sports and Culture, 1998). In this article, we will focus on the history textbooks that were produced to implement the junior secondary school history syllabus.

According to LaSpina (1998) textbooks contain both verbal (words) and visual (images) text. Although in recent decades the world has taken a visual turn (Harrison, 2003), verbal text maintains its supremacy in textbooks as it is what is predominantly used in school to narrate past events. As such, history textbooks are the "central medium of information" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996:38) and are also an "important mode of communication" (Harrison, 2003:46). Learners could, therefore, in the context of this article, develop an understanding of the depiction of women as historical characters through engaging with the verbal text of the junior secondary Malawian history textbooks. Consequently, in the light of the aforementioned, this article seeks to answer two research questions: firstly, how are women depicted in the verbal text of a selected junior secondary Malawian history textbook and secondly, why are women depicted the way they are in the verbal text of the selected history textbook. Succinctly put, the focus of this article is on the depiction of women in Malawian junior secondary textbook.

This article is structured into six broad sections. In the first we introduce and provide an outline of the article. In the second we review the literature related to the topic. This is followed by a description of the research methodology employed and the presentation and discussion of the findings. In the conclusion, the argument proposed in the article is drawn together.

Literature review – depiction of women in the verbal text of history textbooks

Besides being important instructional materials, textbooks also signify particular constructions of reality and reflect the values and aspirations of the society they serve (Apple, 1991; Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991; Foster & Crawford, 2006). In the light of this, much has been written globally in the recent past about the depiction of women in textbooks in general and in history textbooks specifically (Cains & Inglis, 1989; Sleeter & Grant, 1991; Ruthsdotter, 1996; Commeyras & Alvermann, 1996; Frederickson, 2004; Chick, 2006; Muravyeva, 2006; Su, 2007; Schoeman, 2009; Fardon & Schoeman, 2010; Schrader & Wotipka, 2011).

Drawing on the literature outlined above differences were noted in the way women were represented in relation to men in the verbal texts of history textbooks. In this regard Cains and Inglis (1989), in a study conducted in Scotland, noted the scanty representation of women in the verbal text. Their study revealed that of the ten textbooks analysed only three paid special attention to women's history and only one showed a marked emphasis on the history of women. In explaining the under-representation of women Cains and Inglis (1989) argued that early historians did not consider topics related to women as important subject matter and as a result matters which related to or involved women was downplayed. For instance, economic activities of women were almost completely ignored in nine of the ten textbooks analysed. Cains and Inglis (1989) deny the lack of historical sources as an excuse for the under-representation of women and attribute it to negligence on the part of writers and publishers who are overtly influence by the male dominated society they live in.

Other studies conducted showed similar results to that of Cains and Inglis (1989). For instance, Ruthsdotter (1996) paints a vivid picture of the marginalisation and under-representation of women in United States history textbooks. She cited two examples, *A History of the United States* (1992) published by Prentice-Hall and authored by Boorsten, Boorsten and Brookes which contained less than 3% of content about women and *World history: Traditions and New Directions* (1991) published by Addison-Wesley and edited by Stearns which allocated about 2% of its subject matter to women. Similarly, in a study conducted 15-years later Clark *et al.*, (2005) noted that only 853 names of females against 10 958 male names were included in the textbooks they had analysed. This represents a rough ratio of eight women

for every 100 men named as historical characters. A similar trend was found in the Grade 2 textbooks analysed by Chick (2006). She identified 58 female historical characters as opposed to 190 male ones. In a Grade 7-9 textbook 103 women and 483 men were identified while a Grade 9-12 textbook contained 113 female versus 726 male historical characters.

In the light of the above, based on the United States social studies textbooks they had analysed, Sleeter and Grant (1991), could report that women were both invisible and marginalised as their roles and contributions were not covered in sufficient detail. Women were also not usually discussed in sections related to major economic and political decisions. Commeyras and Alvermann (1996) referred to this as an androcentric view of history. That is a view that presents the past from a male perspective. In an attempt to remedy the situation, they found ghettoised attempts to include females by means of subsections on famous women, paragraphs about women's status and rights and sentences about their contributions as wives and mothers of famous men. Their results are not very different from that of Frederickson's (2004) who studied high school history textbooks and found that they hardly reflected women in the tables of contents. Where they did they were included in chapter sub-headings and not chapter titles. Likewise, Schrader and Wotipka (2011), noted that history textbooks published before the 1970's largely omitted women. They also noted that although women were included in post-1970 textbooks, only a few were made reference to in a compensatory manner (Schrader & Wotipka, 2011).

In studies conducted outside of Europe and the United States, Su (2007) in Taiwan, Schoeman (2009) and Fardon and Schoeman (2010) in South Africa and Muravyeva (2006) in Russia, reported similar results. Su (2007) reported that no space was devoted to Taiwanese women's experiences and perspectives as well as their past contributions in Taiwanese social studies' textbooks. In an African context Schoeman (2009) argued that the content in the three South African textbooks she studied under-represented women to the point that they were almost invisible. Additionally, Fardon and Schoeman (2010) observed a comparable pattern of under-representation of women in the exemplar South African school history textbook they analysed. Equally, Muravyeva (2006) in her study of 28 Russian history textbooks concluded that the narrative of the verbal text dealt with topics such as economy, revolutions, wars and international relations which were all described exclusively from a male perspective.

In addition, the literature also revealed the variety of roles and activities in which women were depicted in the verbal text of history textbooks. In this regard, most roles and activities attributed to women were stereotypically feminine such as being mothers and housewives. A point in case is the work by Schoeman (2009) in South Africa found that women were almost exclusively cast in passive traditional feminine roles typical of a patriarchal society. In a follow-up study Fardon and Schoeman (2010) noted that no reference was made to women's occupations and activities in the verbal text. However, 64 incidences of male occupations and activities were mentioned. In the United States the trend was similar and in mainstream American history textbooks, most black women were depicted as slaves with only a few shown as leaders of anti-slavery movements. However, in a series of African American history textbooks analysed it was refreshingly found that women were not only depicted as slaves but also as in more stereotypically masculine roles and activities such as being artists, business owners and politicians (Schocker & Woysner, 2013). Showing women in stereotypically masculine roles and activities in the verbal text of history textbooks was a rare occurrence.

The literature also exposed instances where women as historical characters were depicted negatively. A point in case are the studies conducted by Commeyras and Alvermann (1996) and Muravyeva (2006) where women were depicted as having risen to power and were maintaining their positions through wicked ways. For instance, Commeyras and Alvermann (1996) noted that renowned women such as Catherine de Medici and Wu Chao were depicted as skilled mediators who based their power on their Eve-like characteristics such as sensuality, wilfulness and cupidity. This they purportedly used to achieve what they desired.

In the case of Russia, Muravyeva (2009) noted that almost all the powerful women mentioned in the textbooks she studied were included because they did something wrong. For example, Catherine the First, the wife of Peter the Great, was labelled as a prostitute and Princess Olga was mentioned because she annihilated the whole nation in revenge for her husband's death. Such misrepresentations, according to Muravyeva (2006), would lead history learners to conclude that once women are in power the nation succumbs to problems. Muravyeva also found evidence of women being depicted as victims and of being powerless. This was done by means of the personification of the country as "mother Russia" whenever it was in bad state such as being "conquered, ravished, devastated, economically ruined..." (Muravyeva, 2006:59). Russia then needed to be defended by men.

Based on the literature reviewed it can thus be concluded that women are under-represented, marginalised and sometimes even omitted altogether from the verbal text of history textbooks. At the same time, they are at times wilfully misrepresented as bad and, with the odd exception, portrayed as largely passive while pursuing stereotypically feminine roles and activities. A general explanation for these depictions of women is the patriarchal societies they find themselves in. And since history textbooks mirror the society they serve, the manner in which women are depicted signifies the reality, values and aspirations of the society from which the textbooks emanate (Apple, 1991; Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991; Foster & Crawford, 2006).

Considering the aforementioned we argue that the depiction of women in the verbal text of Malawian junior secondary history textbooks warrants a deeper theoretical understanding. We therefore drew on feminist theory to conceptually understand this better. Feminism is based on a strong belief that women in society are oppressed, subordinated, and treated unequally in comparison to men and that this situation is not legitimate, natural or justified in any way (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007; Hannam, 2007). However, feminism does not only stop at explaining the subordination and oppression of women but questions and challenges the origins of the unjust and unequal power relations between women and men. As such, feminists strongly believe that the condition women find themselves in is socially constructed and can therefore be changed (Hannam, 2007). An important goal of feminism therefore is to end the subordination and oppression of women and bring about a change in society. Hence, by using feminist theory we will not only explain how women are depicted in the verbal text in the history textbook studied and why they are depicted that way, but we will also suggest strategies needed to alter this depiction. In this regard, like Weedon (1987) we argue that feminism is both theory and politics and sits at the intersection of race, class and gender. In the process, we will be filling a gap in the literature for studies on the depiction of women in the verbal text of history textbooks in Africa are very rare.

Research Methodology

The approach we adopted in this study was qualitative in nature while we adhered to the interpretivist paradigm that reality is socially constructed and that multiple truths exist (Creswell, 1998). The approach and paradigm adopted signals our intention namely to understand the depiction of women

in the selected Malawian junior secondary textbook.

The production of textbooks in Malawi is managed by the government through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST). The latter controls the content, quality, production and availability of textbooks. Secondary school textbooks are produced by private publishers who commission individuals or teams of writers to act as authors (MoEST, 2006). However, according to the Malawian government's policy on textbook production, any commercial publisher who provides publishing services is regarded as the author of the textbook. Publishers, however, have the choice of including the names of authors or not in their publications. Once the textbooks have been produced, they are subjected to the MoEST approval process. Gender sensitivity is one of the criteria a textbook need to adhere to so as to pass the approval process. The textbook we analysed for this article was approved by the Malawian government which implies that it must have adhered to all the expected criteria.

The textbook we analysed, *New junior history course 1 & 2*, was published in 2000 by the Blantyre based Christian Literature Association in Malawi (CLAIM). As such it serves the junior secondary history syllabus implemented in 1999. Authorship was allocated to G. Chiunguzeni. Our decision to analyse the verbal text of this textbook for the depiction of women was based on multifarious reasons. The book was on the list as one of three approved history textbooks for the junior secondary phase, it is the most widely used junior secondary history book used in Malawian schools, and it was readily available in local bookstores. As such *New junior history course 1 & 2* can be viewed as a trustworthy example of the junior secondary history textbooks used in Malawi.

Textbooks are pre-existing data which we collected by purchasing the textbook from a bookshop. To concur with Nicholls (2003), we acknowledge that research in textbooks is not an easy task because methodologies for analysis are not always well described. Due to this we endeavoured to develop a workable qualitative research methodology for analysing the verbal text by means of open coding.

Analysing the textbooks by means of open coding meant initially reading the entire verbal text line by line. In this reading we focused on the table of content, topics and subtopics. This was done several times. In the process sections in which women appeared as historical characters were identified. We then proceeded to drill deeply into those sections of the verbal text which

included identifiable women. The aim was, as per the stated research questions, to discover how the women included in the verbal text were depicted and what it meant in terms of their depiction.

In coding, we used the first letters of the depictions as our codes - for example, q for queens and p for priestesses and so forth. After coding the verbal text in its entirety, we grouped all common codes together to form categories. Initially, these categories had names related to the depictions as found in the verbal text. This concurred with Leavy's (2007) argument that emergent categories can either be literal or specific before progressing to more conceptual groupings. For example, some of the categories identified based on their depictions were queens, priestesses and goddesses.

We then interpreted the meaning of each category in response to the first research question, "How are women depicted in a junior secondary school history textbook in Malawi?" After interpretation, we assigned new names to the categories. Thus, for example, the category of queens was renamed women as rulers, that of priestesses became women as religious leaders and the category of goddesses became known as women as spiritual leaders. Further interpretation led to the grouping of categories with similar traits or characteristics into themes which were broader and more encompassing. For example, all the categories that had a trait of leadership, such as religious leaders, spiritual leaders and rulers were grouped together into a theme known as women as leaders. We also elevated the interpretation of the emerging themes to a higher conceptual level whereby the themes with some similarities were further collated into a major theme. For example, themes such as women as leaders, women in traditional family roles and women depiction in domestic and reproductive roles were grouped under one general theme known as roles and activities in which women are depicted. This decision was made because all these themes dealt with roles and activities. We used these themes to present the findings of our study in the proceeding section.

Data presentation

The overall depiction of women as historical characters

Our analysis of *New junior history course 1 & 2* found that the book carried no topics or subtopics specifically dealing with women. In contrast the verbal text included topics and subtopics about men. In fact, coding the presence of men and women in the text revealed that 94% of the historical characters

in the verbal text were men. Furthermore, four out of the 17 chapters in this textbook did not include women in the verbal text at all. Those chapters that excluded any reference to women dealt with the following topics: the study of history; evolution of humans; the kingdoms of Western Sudan – Ghana and Mali and the partition of Africa.

When women did appear in the verbal text it was for the most part in passing by means of a single sentence as the following highlighted example form an exemplar paragraph illustrates:

*The people of the Nile valley conducted trade with people of the Middle East. They exchanged wheat, barley and cotton with jewels, metal objects, spices, copper, glassware and wine. They also traded with people in the south of Egypt such as Axum and Nubia. **Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt once sent ships to Axum to buy ivory and ebony (hard wood)** (p. 15).*

In all we identified 22 instances in the verbal text where women as historical characters had but one sentence allocated to them.

However, in two instances women were referred to in more than one sentence. The citation below exemplifies this observation:

*In Spain, Columbus persuaded the councillors of the deeply religious **Queen Isabella** to let him look for “lost Christians” believed to be living somewhere on an island of the Atlantic Ocean. After many delays, the **Queen** finally agreed to support Columbus in his voyage. Columbus was mandated to “discover and acquire islands and main lands (p. 148).*

Our analysis also revealed that only on three occasions (pp. 78, 79 and 116) women as historical characters were discussed in short paragraphs. Only in one instance in the entire book was a woman discussed in two paragraphs:

*However, conflict with the Roman Catholic Church developed when King Henry VIII wanted the Pope to annul his marriage to **his wife Catherine** of Aragon. For a long time, King Henry had been thinking of marrying **a new wife** since he wanted a son to succeed him after death.*

***His wife Catherine** had only one **surviving daughter, Mary**, and she was already past child-bearing age. This problem was made more urgent by King Henry’s deep love for **Anne Boleyn**. This love has important consequences for England. The Pope, Clement VII, refused to annul the marriage of King Henry to **Catherine**. King Henry defied the Pope and married **Anne Boleyn**. He also rules that the clergy in England should begin paying their allegiance to the king rather than the Pope (p. 88).*

It must, however, be pointed out that the subjects in these two paragraphs are not the three women mentioned, but rather King Henry VIII and

Pope Clement VII – in other words the men mentioned in the text were foregrounded. The three women are mentioned because of their submissive relationship to King Henry as husband and father. As such their voices are not heard and they appear in the text because of their relationship to the king and not because of their own agency. A similar trend was noticed in two of the single paragraphs (pp. 78 and 79) allocated to women. It was only in one instance, on page 116, where a woman was referred to in a paragraph because of her own agency. The woman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, was depicted as a leading abolitionist of slavery in the United States through the publication of her novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which compelled many people in to start campaigning against slavery.

The above analysis indicates that women as historical characters are not discussed in any real detail or depth in the verbal text of the textbook studied. They also do not feature in all chapters and in the chapters that do include women they appear in little historical depth and in a decontextualized manner. This clearly indicates that women as historical characters are depicted sparsely and in passing in the verbal text. Based on the fact that not all chapters feature women we argue that they are depicted as having no history in certain themes at all. In all of this, women are shunted to the margins of the content covered by the textbook under analysis. In so doing they were rendered practically invisible and generally voiceless.

What then, in this under-represented and marginalised state, were the roles attributed to women as historical characters? This will come under the lens in the next section.

Roles and activities in which women are depicted in the verbal text – wives and mothers

Despite being under-represented and marginalised our analysis of the verbal text revealed that women were depicted in different roles and activities. First and foremost, amongst these roles were traditional family roles as wives and mothers. At least nine such instances were identified and these are represented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Women depicted as wives

Name /Title of woman/ women depicted as wife/wives	Description of the husband
Isis (p. 15)	Wife of Osiris, Egyptian God of the underworld who judged the dead
The wife of Nebuchadnezzar (name not mentioned) (p. 47)	The King of Babylon
Khadija (p. 80)	Wife of Muhammad, the Prophet and founder of Islam
Laura (p. 84)	Wife of Petrarch, a well-known humanist writer and poet of the Renaissance period
Catherine of Aragon (p. 88)	Wife of King Henry VIII of England during the time of the Reformation
Anne Boleyn (p. 88)	Wife of King Henry VIII of England
Hera (p. 52)	Wife of Zeus, the father of all gods and people in Ancient Greece who was also referred to as the God of the Sky
Agrippina (p. 69)	Wife of Claudius, Emperor of Rome
The wives of the Kabaka (p. 29)	Wives of the King of Buganda kingdom. The Kabaka was the title of the Kings of the Buganda kingdom

The women listed as wives in Table 1 must, however, be viewed in relation to the social status of their husbands. The latter were either famous men or gods meaning that all the women who are depicted as wives in the verbal text are not ordinary women. They had power and importance bestowed on them by dint of the fact that they were associated by marriage to famous men or gods. In depicting women as wives of important men or gods they were portrayed as passive, with little agency and dependent on men for their fame, position and status. This is the case because the women listed in Table 1 are mentioned because of the achievements of their husbands and not based on their own successes. They are therefore depicted as not necessarily being capable of attaining important positions or recognition in society on their own. Furthermore, portraying women as wives of important men and gods gives the impression that the only notable achievement of these women in history was marriage.

Related to the above, the analysis of the verbal text also revealed five instances in which women were depicted as mothers (pp. 54, 55, 69, 88 and 85). The

following two quotations are suitable examples of women depicted as mothers responsible for caring and raising children:

*As a sculptor, he [Michelangelo] carved the figure of the **Virgin Mary with the baby Jesus Christ in her arms** (p. 54).*

And...

*His [Raphael] most famous portrait is that of the **'Madonna and Child'** (p. 85).*

The other three women who were mentioned as mothers were Agrippina, mother of Emperor Nero (p.69); Catherine, wife of King Henry who was also depicted as the mother of Princess Mary (p.88) and ancient Greek girls who were expected to become strong mothers and bear healthy babies through playing tough games (p.54).

A close scrutiny of these women, and in the case of Catherine also her child, shows that all, except for the Greek girls, are mothers of important and famous people, particularly men. For example, Jesus Christ was the Messiah, Nero was the emperor of Rome and Mary was the princess, daughter of King Henry VIII and his wife Catherine. Therefore, almost all the women depicted in the verbal text as mothers are not only portrayed in traditional roles of motherhood, but also as mothers of people who were famous in either a religious or political sense.

Through the depiction of women as mothers of important people they were elevated to the status of significance. However, we argue that such a depiction renders women dependent on the achievements of their famous children for historical recognition. This is the case because none of the women were mentioned for achievements other than giving birth. Furthermore, since all the women bar one were mothers to boys, we would conclude that this portrays these women as being dependent on men for their fame.

Leadership positions

What the analysis also revealed was that many of the women referred to in the verbal text were depicted as leaders in various spheres of life. Some were depicted as political leaders while others were religious leaders.

The analysis of the verbal text revealed that seven women were depicted as queens. Some of the queens were mentioned by name while others were referred to only by title. Those mentioned by name were: Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt (p. 15), Queen Isabella of Spain (p. 104) and Queen Elizabeth I of

England (p. 108). However, on four occasions, women were merely referred to as queens without their names being mentioned or any historical detail being provided. The following quote illustrates this reduction to historical anonymity:

*The federation brought together the three Central African British territories of Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia under one central government which was referred to as the Federal Government. This was headed by a Governor General who represented the **Queen** (p. 134).*

In all instances in the verbal text where women were referred to as queens, they were depicted in their capacity as rulers of their kingdoms and subjects as can be gleaned from the following example:

*On 6th July 1964, Nyasaland attained its independence and took the name Malawi. Dr Banda continued to be Prime Minister. The Governor became Governor General, representing the **Queen** (p. 138).*

What emerged from the verbal text was that queens were depicted as powerful women with agency, power and authority. Furthermore, none of them were depicted as being a queen because of being married to a king. In short, queens as hereditary leaders were revered and portrayed as active individuals that functioned independently of men.

Other than being state leaders as queens some women were also depicted as political leaders. For instance, Rose Chibambo was shown as one of the leaders of the Malawi Congress Party (M.C.P) during the struggle for independence:

*The Malawi Congress Party (M.C.P) was formed to replace the banned Nyasaland African Congress ... When Dr Banda was released from prison, he assumed leadership of the party. Other notable leaders were Henry Masauko Chipembere, Dunduzu Chisiza, Willie Chokani, Augustine Bwanausi, **Rose Chibambo** and Kanyama Chiume (p. 137).*

Likewise, Gertrude Mongella was also mentioned as the President of the Pan-African Parliament. (p. 148) Both Chibambo and Mongella were depicted not as mere participants but as important political leaders.

The analysis of the verbal text also revealed that nine women were shown as goddesses or divine historical beings each with a different responsibility. Table 2 below lists these goddesses, their responsibilities, as well as their countries.

Table 2: Goddesses and their responsibilities

Name of goddess	Responsibility	Country of origin
Nanna (p. 46)	The moon goddess	Ancient Sumeria
Ishtar (p. 47)	The goddess of love	Ancient Assyria
Assar (p. 47)	The goddess of war	Ancient Assyria
Hera (p. 52)	Wife of Zeus and goddess of marriage	Ancient Greece
Demeter (p. 52)	The goddess of earth and harvests	Ancient Greece
Athena (p. 52)	The goddess of wisdom and peace and special protector of Athens	Ancient Greece
Aphrodite (p. 52)	The goddess of love and beauty	Ancient Greece
Artemis (p. 52)	The goddess of the moon and hunting	Ancient Greece
Isis (p. 15)	The moon goddess and wife of Osiris and goddess of fertility	Ancient Egypt

As can be gleaned from Table 2, women as goddesses were religious leaders with different obligations. However, according to their duties, the goddesses, except for two, were also depicted in traditional roles with domestic feminine attributes such as being wives, carriers of fertility, nurturers, peacekeepers, overseers of beauty and love and being responsible for food. Assar and Nanna are the only deities not depicted with such dual roles.

The goddesses listed are also depicted with less power when compared to male gods. A point in case is goddess of the moon as opposed to the sun and goddess of the earth as opposed to heaven. The goddess Assar is again the only exception. Therefore, the goddesses, despite being powerful religious leaders, are for the most part also stereotyped in terms of their leadership roles and attributes. We therefore argue that although the goddesses are depicted as divine leaders, their positions are less powerful than those of male gods and they are stereotyped in a feminine manner in the roles and responsibilities they hold.

The verbal text also revealed other women who were depicted in religious roles. For instance, in the history of the Maravi kingdom Makewana was presented as a priestess in charge of a shrine at Msinja (p. 42), Sibyl, the priestess of the god Apollo in Ancient Greece had the duty of interpreting his oracles (p. 52) and nuns were portrayed as serving Christianity (p. 79). In all three instances the women associated with the diverse religions mentioned were portrayed as leaders in their own rights in their respective societies. However, both Sibyl and the nuns were still subservient in their roles to men.

Women in economically productive roles

Our analysis of the verbal text also identified women who were depicted as partaking in economic activities – both in a self-employ capacity and under wage employment. For instance, Khadija was depicted as a business woman. She was a successful trader who managed to employ other people, including the Prophet Muhammad, to help run her business:

*Muhammad was an orphan ... brought up by a grandfather and later on by his uncle ... When he was twenty-five years old, he began working for a rich noble, twice widowed, forty-year-old **business lady, Khadija** and carried her caravans laden with goods to Syria and other distant places and returned with much profit (p. 80).*

The fact that Khadija managed her own business and employed people portrays her as a successful entrepreneur and as a woman who is economically self-reliant. However, she was still powerfully linked to the Prophet Muhammad.

Our analysis of the verbal text of *New junior history course 1 & 2* also recognised women as employed workers in the manufacturing industry in Britain before the advent of the Industrial Revolution. They were depicted as spinners in the textile industry who spun cotton by hand in their homes (p. 92) while being in the employment of big businessmen. However, the women were performing manual labour while the men worked as weavers using handlooms. In this, women were portrayed as technologically backward while men acted as the rightful users of technology.

A woman as an accomplice to a murder

Considering the variety roles and activities in which women were represented in the verbal text one woman stood out. Agrippina was shown as the one who organised the assassination of her husband: “Claudius was assassinated in AD 54 under the order of his wife Agrippina who wanted Nero, a son by her first husband, to become emperor” (p. 69). As such she is depicted as an evil woman. However, **Agrippina** clearly also had other virtues for she was also an innovative, powerful and authoritative individual who was able to influence the course of politics and history. In fact, she was so powerful that she could successfully give orders to have the emperor killed and replaced with her son.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the analysis of the data on the depiction of women in the verbal text of the textbook analysed several findings emerged. Foremost was the fact that women were seriously under-represented as only 6% of the historical characters in the book were female. As a result they were excluded from the table of contents, topics and subtopics and appeared mostly in single sentences in the text. Consequently, women were under-represented and shunted to the margins of history which rendered them less visible which in turn created the impression that as people they did not contribute much in the past. At the same time the women who did make it into the text had their historical experiences discussed in little depth.

Who then were the women who made it into the verbal text? Almost without concession they can be described as exceptional and influential. Goddesses which are not real human beings, queens, political leaders and mothers and wives to famous and powerful men were the norm. Furthermore, apart from generally being from the upper class most of these women were also white. This meant that ordinary women, and especially ordinary Malawian and black women, were completely absent from the verbal text. However, most of these famous women had one thing in common - they were in some way or another subordinate to men for their position in history and not their own successes. Although portraying women in this way to a certain extent elevated their social status it also depicted them as incapable and lacking in agency. This gave the impression that women in history were dependent on the achievements of their husbands and male children.

The exception to the rule was a handful of women who were hereditary queens, a business person, political leaders, goddesses or an organiser of a murder. Their leadership roles in especially politics and religion meant that they were appreciated for their own virtues.

What also emerged from the data is that the very small percentage of women mentioned in the verbal text was subjected to stereotyping into traditional feminine roles. The roles attribute to them included that of wives and mothers who cared for children and families, preparers of food, passive peacemakers and users of female wiles, including wicked ones, to get their way. This stereotypical portrayal of women could be explained as a reflection of the patriarchal expectation of women in society, not only in Malawi, but also in other countries as was illustrated by the findings of other studies similar to ours. As Lerner (1993) argues, in a patriarchal society, women are expected

to marry and bear children as they are the nurturers and this is regarded as their primary role of all women regardless of race, class, nationality or continent. These are the roles in which women have primarily participated most historically and still continue to do so in the present.

Pitting the above findings against the literature reviewed revealed that the depiction of women in the Malawian junior secondary history textbook analysed was not unique or different from other parts of the world. Studies from other parts of the world, including the United Kingdom (Cain & Inglis, 1989), the United States (Chick, 2006; Schrader & Wotipka 2011), Taiwan (Su, 2007) and South Africa (Schoeman, 2009; Schoeman & Fardon, 2010), spoke of similar under-representation and marginalisation. Equally, the portrayal of women in traditional feminine roles and attributes concurred with studies conducted elsewhere (Cains & Inglis, 1989; Sleeter & Grant, 1991; Commeyras & Alvermann, 1996; Su, 2007; Fardon and Schoeman, 2010; Schrader & Wotipka, 2011). Likewise, the general stereotyping of women as incapable of significant historical acts other than being mothers or wives of famous men resonate with the work done by Commeyras and Alvermann (1996). Even the depiction of Agrippina as being evil echoes a form of stereotyping observed elsewhere (Muravyeva, 2006). All-in-all the research from different geographical contexts as captured in the literature review, which showed similar results in terms of the depiction of women to our study, clearly indicate that women are marginalised, under-representation, and stereotyped in history textbooks on a global level.

This phenomenon must be understood in light of the feminist argument that pervasive patriarchal customs and traditions that exist in society generally prevent women from participating equally with men in the public sphere beyond the home environment (Beasley, 1999; Bryson, 1999). Consequently, women could be marginalised or omitted from the verbal text in history textbooks as the latter tend to be reflections of the society they serve (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991; Foster & Crawford, 2006). In the case of this article the patriarchal nature and general culture of Malawian society, coupled with a junior secondary syllabus and textbook that originated 16-years ago that are still in use provides much of the answer. Like in other parts of world the Malawian textbook studied is a reflection of society. And this is the major contribution of this article - it served to confirm that the depiction of women in history textbooks in Malawi, a poor densely populated country in central Africa, ties in with the global research on this topic. As such Malawi is part of

the global village still battling the subordination, oppression and stereotyping of women.

In terms of the Malawian context we would recommend that the junior secondary history syllabus, which stems for 1999, and the supporting textbooks which were published in 2000, be revised. This is necessary to bring it in line in with the constitution and other policies related to gender equality that is already in place. Since history textbooks are such powerful purveyors of societal norms and historical knowledge such a step would serve to strengthen attempts at gender equality and go some way to challenge the patriarchal nature of Malawian society and serve to present a fairer and more just version of history.

Conclusion

We have shown in this article that women in the verbal text of the textbook studied, as well as other history textbooks worldwide, are under-represented, marginalised, subordinated, oppressed and stereotyped variously in the way they are depicted as historical characters. The most common form of marginalisation was under-representation while stereotyping largely happened through the portrayal of women in traditional feminine roles and activities. As textbooks are considered authoritative and accurate teachers and learners, who are the users thereof, can labour under the misconception that women did not contributed much to history and merely partook in stereotypically passive traditional feminine activities. We argue that this is not a true reflection of women in history as they have contributed much and variously in history beyond the traditional feminine sphere. However, this varied contribution by women has been subjugated by the pervasive nature of patriarchy. What this article did was to expose the way women are depicted in the history textbook studied as a manifestation of the enduring patriarchy present in Malawian society. Part of the solution is to develop a new junior secondary history syllabus and textbooks that are aligned to the constitution and the existing legal policies aimed at promoting gender equality.

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