

PERPETUAL POISONING OF THE MIND: A CONSIDERATION OF THE TREATMENT OF THE SAN HUNTER-GATHERERS AND THE ORIGINS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S BLACK POPULATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL HISTORY TEXTBOOKS SINCE 1972 FOR STANDARDS EIGHT, NINE AND TEN AND 1974 FOR STANDARDS FIVE, SIX AND SEVEN

A.D. Mazel
Natal Museum Pietermaritzburg
P.M. Stewart
University of Natal Pietermaritzburg

ABSTRACT

Examination of a sample of 25 South African school history textbooks published since 1972 shows that there has been an inadequate response to allegations of bias and inaccuracies in the treatment of San hunter-gatherers and the origins of South Africa's Black population. Although some attempt has been made to avoid overly racist statements, almost no effort has been made to include recent research conclusions and there remains a noticeable lack of sensitivity in the treatment of the subject matter.

INTRODUCTION

Over recent years considerable attention has been given to the distortion of history in South African school textbooks. Published research on this issue includes Auerbach's *The Power of Prejudice in South African Education* (1965), Cornevin's *Apartheid: Power and Historical Falsification* (1980), Dean *et al. History in Black and White* (1983), as well as several articles by Smith (1983, 1985). This paper makes no pretence at replacing or challenging the conclusions of the the abovementioned authors but, rather aims to complement their work by means of a highly specific investigation. Indeed, for the purposes of this paper their conclusion that history teaching in South Africa tends to reflect "Apartheid ideology" has been accepted.

This investigation is specific for two reasons, firstly, it is exclusively concerned with the depiction in school textbooks of two aspects of South African history, namely the attention given to the San hunter-gatherers and the arrival and settlement of Black South Africans. Secondly, it is confined to the period since the implementation of the 1972 syllabus for standards eight, nine and ten, and the 1974 syllabus for standards five, six and seven. This period includes the introduction of the most recent syllabus, for all these standards in 1984. Indeed, the intention of this paper is to examine the extent to which the history syllabus and history textbooks illustrate responses to evidence of bias and inaccuracies in the treatment of the San hunter-gatherers and the origins of South Africa's Black population in school history teaching.

THE ORIGINS OF THE BLACK POPULATION

In the period under consideration this issue was initially considered in standard eight. This was in accordance with the syllabus which was implemented in 1972 and replaced in 1984. During this period the South African section of the standard eight history course dealt with the "Expansion and Division in Southern Africa 1806 - 1854". Part two of this section deals with "The Southward Expansion of the Southern Bantu". "Bantu" history, then, was only considered when appropriate to White history rather than on the basis of historical continuity.

By arranging a sample of standard eight texts for the 1972 syllabus chronologically (Table 1), we attempted to see if any trend in their depiction of this southward expansion was revealed. With the exception of Boyce (1973) and Van Rensburg *et al.* (1976), all the books considered are, on the whole, consistent in their treatment of this event. The migrant nature of the "Bantu" is stressed and in many cases it is ex-

plicitly stated that South Africa is not the original home of the "Bantu".

Like the Whites and other population groups, the "Bantu" are immigrants to South Africa. Further, there is a common emphasis on the slowness of the southward migration. Theal, whose works date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, is often cited as evidence that the "Bantu" lived north of an imaginary line from Walvis Bay through the upper reaches of the Vaal River to the Umtamvuna River on the east coast in the sixteenth century. Even when Theal is not mentioned the conclusions are similar. For instance Joubert (1977) maintains that the Nguni were still north of the Zambezi in AD 1400. These texts proceed to give the impression that the migrating "Bantu" arrived at the Fish River at the same time as, or shortly before, the Europeans. Lategan *et al.* (1979), is a slight exception in that the arrival of the Black farming communities at the Zambezi is said to date to the eleventh century. No date is given for the crossing of the Zambezi but it is claimed that in 1770 the Blacks reached the Fish River. It is worth noticing that by 1979, as illustrated by Lategan *et al.* (1979) the term "Bantu" was replaced by "Blacks".

Boyce (1973:136) disagrees with the above scenario. "It is one of the legends in South African history", he writes, "that these Bantu people were newcomers to South Africa, in fact there are school history books which still give the impression that the Bantu arrived in South Africa about the same time as the white colonist were moving towards the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony. Recent research, however, shows that the earliest Bantu invaders from the north may have reached Southern Africa as early as the eleventh or twelfth centuries AD."

Van Rensburg *et al.* (1976) is an interesting case in that it is admitted that the lateness of the arrival of the "Bantu" has been exaggerated. This text then attempts, however, to reconcile this observation with the prevailing thesis by claiming that the "Bantu" were not south of the Limpopo in great numbers before the twelfth century. It continues to state that by the eighteenth century the "Bantu" were established in much of South Africa, but the expansion was continuing. Van Rensburg *et al.* (1976) then, do not significantly contradict the view that the "Bantu" became established in South Africa at the same time as the Europeans.

This investigation would thus indicate that throughout this period little cognizance was taken of the mounting evidence, from the early 1970s onwards, that the occupation of South Africa was earlier and far more extensive than these textbooks suggest (cf Cornevin 1980). By 1975 it was already clear that Black farming communities had occupied parts of the Transvaal from the third and fourth centuries AD (Klapwijk 1974; Mason 1974; Prinsloo 1974; Evers 1975).

With the implementation of the new syllabus in 1984 the "Southward Expansion of the Southern Bantu" has been relegated to the standard six course, although the term "Bantu" has been replaced by "Blacks". Whatever the reasons for this shift it has had the effect of reducing the im-

portance of this section. As before, the history of the Black people is dealt with when appropriate to European history.

An analysis of recent standard six texts reveals three approaches to the origins of the Blacks. The first approach, identified by Mocke and Wallis (1986a) and Joubert and Britz (1985), is consistent with the approach taken in the standard eight course. Indeed Mocke & Wallis (1986a) and Joubert & Britz (1985), is consistent with the approach taken in the standard eight course. Indeed Mocke & Wallis (1986a) treat the issue in precisely the same way as they did in their standard eight text published in 1973. Joubert & Britz (1985) note that the first "tribes" reached present-day Zimbabwe between the eighth and ninth centuries but then cite Theal as claiming that the ancestors of the Nguni were still north of the Zambezi river in AD 1400.

The second approach was identified in Lambrechts *et al.* (1985) and Graves & Consul (1985a). Both texts mention the early history of the Blacks but do not develop it. For instance, Lambrechts *et al.* (1985) write that the Blacks were along the east coast of South Africa by AD 200. Three sentences later they jump to the encounter between the Xhosa and the trekboers at the Fish River. Graves & Consul (1985a) have a rather inaccurate section on the methods of discovering about the history of Blacks but their statements about this history are few and tentative. Early Iron Age people are described as being of negroid appearance as opposed to simply negroid. Strangely, this appears adjacent to a block in which it is stated, "We have no knowledge in the case of early Iron Age sites (± AD 1400 to AD 1500) of the language or appearance of these peoples" (Graves & Consul 1985a: 152). The only way to make sense of this statement is to replace AD with BP. Even so this block contradicts the text where the people are described as being of negroid appearance.

The third approach is exclusive to Nisbet *et al.* (1985). This text is up to date with recent archaeological information and has an extensive section on the early history of the Black population. This text notes that the South African Iron Age began in about AD 250 and that the Iron Age people were the Black or Negro people. It then deals with the lifestyle of these people under the headings Cultivation of crops, Settled village life, Metal production, Pottery and Domestic animals. Other sections deal with Iron Age settlements from AD 250 to 800 and include considerations of trade, religion and contact with hunter-gatherers. The text then deals with the grassland settlement in South Africa which began in about AD 1200. In all, Nisbet *et al.* (1985) devote 17 pages to the early history of Black settlement in South Africa, an issue which is either ignored or treated inadequately in all the other texts.

It would thus appear that with the exception of Nisbet *et al.* (1985) no textbooks in the period since 1972 have responded, in a significant way, to allegations of bias and inaccuracies in the treatment of the origins of South Africa's Black population in the teaching of history in South African schools, nor to the results of archaeological research.

SAN HUNTER-GATHERERS

Smith (1983:44) has noted that in the 1980s many of the more negative descriptions of the San hunter-gatherers which occurred in early school history text books are being downplayed. In order to test this hypothesis we examined the sections on the San in Standard Five textbooks written for the new syllabus which was implemented in 1984.

Under the new syllabus the term "Bushmen" has been replaced by San. An example of this is Oosthuizen *et al.* (1982) using "Bushmen" while the 1985 edition by the same authors use "San". While the derogatory term "Bushmen" is no longer used, there is still an obsession with the physical appearance of these people which is given an inflated importance in comparison to other aspects of their existence. These descriptions are Eurocentric and make reference to small hands and feet, short yellow people, etc.

In the syllabus the San are dealt with in conjunction with the arrival of the Dutch. This gives the impression that these people only have importance when they share the stage of Southern Africa with the Dutch immigrants. In the texts themselves, three approaches to the origins of the San are evident.

The first approach adopted by Broodryk (1984), Olivier & Horn (1984), Graves & Consul (1985b) and Van Niekerk *et al.* (1985) makes no mention of the origins of the San. A second approach, identified in Lambrechts *et al.* (1985), Van Zyl (1985), Mocke and Wallis (1986b), and Oosthuizen *et al.* (1985) indicates that the San came from the north but makes no mention of when they arrived in South Africa. The impression is given that they are immigrants. This verifies Smith's observation that an "important central thread which appears consistently is that none of the people of South Africa are really indigenous" (Smith 1983:41).

The third approach, identified Nisbet *et al.* (1986), in Sieborger *et al.* (1985), and Chengalroyen *et al.* (1986), treats the indigenous development of the San in South Africa. The Nisbet *et al.* book can be singled out as the only textbook which clearly deals with the pre AD 1500 history of the San. While the Chengalroyen *et al.* book attempts to paint some background, it is confused and inaccurate in places. A case in point is an illustration of what appears to be a Khoi pastoralist camp (with cattle and a milking scene) which is meant to depict the lifestyle of early San hunter-gatherers.

With regard to contacts between the San and the trekboers, all the texts mention that there was conflict. This conflict is seen as originating from the San attacks in response to Dutch encroachment on their hunting grounds. Examples of this conflict are usually limited to the Sneeuberg area, from 1786. In most textbooks, statistics of the number of herdsmen killed, stock stolen and attacks on farmers and farmhouses are mentioned. In response the Dutch formed commandos to solve 'the San problem'. It often emphasized that the commando system, which subsequently became the fighting unit of the Dutch/Afrikaner and has assumed such significance in Afrikaner volk-culture, has its origins in the retaliation against the San.

The textbooks differ in their description of the consequences of the "San wars". While many mention the wholesale killing of the San in the Sneeuberg region, only two textbooks (Oosthuizen *et al.*; Van Niekerk 1985) actually note that the San were almost exterminated. Some accounts even attempt to negate the scale of the killing by implying that the San retreated across the Orange River or into the interior (Sieborger *et al.* 1984; Lambrechts *et al.* 1985; Olivier & Horn 1985; Van Zyl 1985; Mocke and Wallis, 1986b). This reflects the popular myth that the Kalahari San are descendants of refugees that retreated into this area in the face of the Trekboer colonization of the interior. An explicit example of this is in Oosthuizen *et al.* (1985:159) where one finds, "They then had to flee from the cattle owners who chased them and killed many of them. The San fled to the Kalahari Desert. Elsewhere in the same text it is noted that "the San were nearly wiped out as a race". (ibid.: 174).

Further distortions and failure to take cognizance of research conclusions on the San since the 1960s, are evident in the way the San and San society have been portrayed. Some examples of these are presented.

To begin with, the view that the San were the most 'primitive' of the groups at the Cape is referred to in three textbooks (Broodryk 1984; Olivier & Horn 1984; Van Niekerk *et al.* 1985). For example, "The San had the most primitive (least developed) lifestyle of all the population groups in our country" (Broodryk, 1984:104).

In two textbooks (Broodryk 1984; Van Zyl 1985), the San are presented as being superstitious and practising witchcraft. For example, "The San were very superstitious. They believed in witchcraft and worshipped the sun, the moon, or the stars (Van Zyl 1985:99 our emphasis).

Broodryk (1984), Oosthuizen *et al.* (1985) and Mocke & Wallis

(1986b) comment that the San spent most of their time seeking food. Recent research among the Kalahari San illustrates that this was not the case, even in the Kalahari which is regarded as a marginal environment (Lee 1979). Although researchers disagree on how much time the San spent on subsistence activities, it is clear that to portray the San as spending most of their time searching for food is erroneous. While the assertion that hunter-gatherer people were 'the original affluent people' (Sahlins, 1972) cannot be easily justified, it is equally untrue to claim that they were almost wholly involved in procuring their subsistence.

The issue of 'land ownership' is another arena in which distortions, and even contradictions between texts, exist. Broodryk (1984:104) comments that "Each band of San had its own hunting ground which is defended against intruders", while Graves & Consul (1985b:212) maintain that "Like the Khoi, they also had *no idea of possessing the land*". Research among the Kalahari San indicates that land is collectively "owned" by groups of people, and that no member of this group has the right to withhold resources from newcomers or to demand a larger share of food.

Woodburn (1982:437) commented that "Among the !Kung (a major grouping of Kalahari San) the relative freedom of access operates in spite of the fact that people long associated with an area claim to be 'owners' (k'ausi) of it and in particular its plant and water resources".

Examples of other misleading statements are that the San "could not distinguish between the wild animals and cattle and sheep of the herdsmen" (Broodryk 1984:104 our emphasis) and uncritical mention of the fact that "The Dutch referred to them as *Bosemannen* because they lived in the bushes" (Van Niekerk *et al.* 1985:105), which clearly paints them in a negative light. The first statement, along with others which claim that the San stole cattle because they thought of them as wild game that belonged to no-one (e.g. Oosthuizen *et al.* 1985; Van Zyl 1985) tends to give the impression that the San were somewhat simple and incapable of making basic distinctions between wild and domestic animals. Archaeological research has shown that the San would first have come into contact with pastoralists at least one thousand years before the arrival of the Dutch at the Cape (Smith 1986). Thus it is highly unlikely that the San hunter-gatherers would have been unable to distinguish between wild and domestic animals or fail to realise that domestic animals belonged to individuals or groups of people. The fact of the matter is that they probably deliberately chose to steal and kill the domestic animals knowing that they were owned by others. As it is pointed out in most textbooks, one of the reasons for this was the encroachment of the Dutch with their herds of domestic animals into San territory.

Another sphere in which San have been shown in a negative light is in drawings of them. In Broodryk (1984) there is an illustration of a group of San attacking a frontier farmer's house and some of the San are clearly portrayed as childlike.

One concept used in anthropological and archaeological research, which has been incorporated by Graves & Consul (1985b) into their section on the San hunter-gatherers is that of adaptation. In terms of this concept, the specific nature of people's social, economic and technological systems are viewed as products of their adaptation to a particular environment, and that changes in these spheres occur in response to environmental changes; in other words, parameters beyond their control. This essentially advocates the notion that people are docile and content to continue as before unless acted upon by external forces (Mazel 1987). The possibility of change being internally generated, and occurring through the emergence of tensions and conflicts within the social and economic spheres, is not considered.

In summary, besides two textbooks (Graves & Consul 1985b; Nisbet *et al.* 1985) there appears to be no attempt on the part of the authors to familiarize themselves with the research conclusions of the last 15 or so years, or, if they have, no attempt to incorporate them into their textbooks. This has not only

resulted in the distortion of the history of the San and characteristics of the San and San society, but also the omission of significant features of their ways of life. In particular, we can point to the egalitarian nature of San society, their strong emphasis on redistribution and sharing, the significant contribution of women to subsistence, and the complex nature of their social strategies.

CONCLUSION

It would appear then, that on the whole there has not been an adequate response to allegations of bias and inaccuracies in the treatment of the San and the origin of Black people in school history textbooks. While it is evident that some attempt has been made to avoid overtly racist statements, there remains a noticeable lack of sensitivity in the treatment of the subject matter. In addition, almost no effort has been made by all but two sets of textbook authors to incorporate recent research conclusions.

This investigation would thus indicate that it is essential to continually monitor school history textbooks. Professional historians and archaeologists should regard this task as part of their social responsibility.

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- 1973 Mooké & Wallis: Some anthropologists claim that migration lasted 2000 years. Cites Theal: "Bantu" north of a line from Walvis Bay to the Vaal River to the Umtamvuna River in 16th century. Around 1778 migrating Southern Nguni and Whites met at Fish River.
- 1973 Boyce It is a legend that "Bantu" are newcomers to South Africa. Research shows that earliest "Bantu" reached South Africa in 11th or 12th century A.D. Schapera concludes that the Sotho were settled on the eastern highveld by A.D. 1600.
- 1974 Van Schoor et al: South Africa not the original home of the "Bantu". Like Whites, the "Bantu" are immigrants . . . migration took hundreds of years. "Van" of migration arrived shortly before or during the 15th century.
- 1974 Paynter & Coetsee. South Africa not original home of the "Bantu". Immigrants like Whites. Cites Theal. "Bantu" arrived in or just before 15th century.
- 1974 Van der Merwe & Strydom. Impression given that the arrival of the "Bantu" was almost at the same time (1652) as the Whites.
- 1976 Van Rensburg, Schoeman & Vorster: Relatively recent "Bantu" arrival but lateness exaggerated. Not south of the Limpopo in great numbers before 12th century. Established by 18th century but expansion continuing.
- 1977 Joubert: Like Whites, Coloureds and Indians, the "Bantu" are migrants who settled in South Africa over a long period. Nguni still north of the Zambezi in 1400. 1686 the Xhosa reached the Kei.
- 1979 Lategan & De Kock: Migration began 2000 years ago. Blacks reached the Zambezi by 11th century. In 1770 they reached the Fish River.

Table 1: "Southward Migration of Southern Bantu" as considered in textbooks for the syllabus introduced in 1972.