Teaching bias in history lessons: An example using Maltese history

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Teaching bias in history lessons: An example using Maltese history

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Abstract

Historians collect and verify evidence and then interpret it in an acceptable way. A general consensus is that history does not present us with an absolute truth – the most we can hope for is historians' reliable, evidentially based interpretations of the historical topic. History not viewed as interpretation has long raised alarm bells in history pedagogy circles. History educators are acutely aware that history taught as an uncontested body of positivistic knowledge with a canon of given factual information can promote prejudice, bias and bigotry – it can ultimately fuel civil and international conflict and violence. Alternatively, history teaching as a constructivist process with multiple interpretations can be used to promote positive values – history pedagogy can be a tool to support peace, reconciliation and conflict resolution. This places a major responsibility on a key objective of history teaching: addressing the concept of historical bias with effective methods of teaching on how to detect and analyse bias in historical sources for both primary and secondary schools. This paper reports an attempt at teaching secondary school students (aged 13 to 14 years) how to detect bias in primary written history sources while learning about a controversial topic in Maltese history – church–state relations in Malta in the 1960s. The method employed is qualitative research – specifically pedagogical research – which is research into the processes and practices of learning and teaching. In this case, the researcher tries new teaching methods with a small group of students, and their feedback regarding the exercise is examined. The students' ultimate answers after trying out the new scaffolding activities were quite encouraging, and show that breakdown of tasks is the key to helping understanding in history learning. The pedagogy employed is discussed in comparison to other approaches to teaching about bias. The paper also analyses student feedback on their learning about bias. Crucially, the paper addresses the impact of a specific intervention strategy to improve student understanding of, and ability to detect, bias in historical sources.

Keywords: bias; church–state relations; controversial issues; Maltese history; pedagogy

Introduction

Bias is an inclination or prejudice for or against a person or group. It is a positive or negative opinion that may or may not be based on facts and knowledge. All human beings are subject to biases, and we often live and act according to biases that have formed after years of observation of the society in which we live. Historians are no different, for they too are products of their own culture and society, and are subject to their own prejudices and values – who is writing, when and to whom often has a direct influence on the history being written. History is a highly subjective endeavour,

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and history sources (primary and secondary) are all to some extent biased. However, as Sean Lang (1993: 9) says, 'rather than being a disadvantage this is an important and useful attribute, and it is precisely what makes them valuable'.

Basic facts, substantive information, do exist in history. There are separate forms of evidence that support these facts so that the whole fits together – that is, is connected and builds a framework. However, 'It is only the framework of fact on which history can rest, it is not history. History to mean anything must be more than a rehearsal of facts, it must include an interpretation of facts' (Kitson Clark, 1967: 42).

History educators today know that history is all about interpretation, which is subject to the writer's biases, and because of this element of bias in history, history teaching is today often credited with far-reaching consequences. Most history educators today appear to take for granted (without endorsing) the fact that 'History can be taught in a way which promotes prejudice, stereotypes, biased thinking, xenophobia, nationalism and racism. It can ultimately fuel conflict and violence' (Education for Democracy, n.d.: 1). Conversely, they also assume that history teaching can be used to promote positive values, with one European Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation going so far as to state that 'history teaching can be a tool to support peace and reconciliation in conflict and post-conflict areas as well as tolerance and understanding' (PACE, 2009: 1).

Can students' attitudes be altered?

Not everyone agrees with these assumptions. Two of the earliest pioneers in history teaching, Rosalyn Ashby and Peter Lee, had serious reservations regarding the positive 'magical' powers of history teaching. For example, when talking about empathy in history teaching, they did not mince their words. They called such hopes of eliminating prejudice 'simple-minded and grandiose claims', and argued that 'People's views are in large part based on material interests, fear, and their social relations with others: the presentation of rational alternatives in education is often almost powerless against all this' (Ashby and Lee, 1987: 65). However, we still cling to the aspiration that in spite of the undoubtedly powerful variables that they mention, history teaching can affect and even change students' views and orientation. There is some empirical research evidence that shows that particular pedagogic principles and praxis/teaching methods can in fact make a positive difference to students' values, attitudes and behaviour. Two examples of this type of research are Alan McCully's work in Northern Ireland and Eyal Navah's work in the Middle East. McCully used history teaching to analyse the Northern Ireland conflict with school children (see, for example, McCully and Pilgrim, 2004; McCully, 2005a, 2005b). Professor Eyal Navah (2008) attempted to use history teaching to produce a common narrative of Israel and Palestine.

The results of a small-scale Maltese action research study give some cautious cause for optimism about this. When the Likert scale was used to analyse the pre-lesson and post-lesson attitudes resulting from a history lesson whose main objective was to help students move away from Islamophobia, there was a slight shift in students' responses and 'the other' was viewed in slightly more positive terms (Vella, 2013). This was quietly encouraging, considering that the action research was for only one lesson. The researcher attributed this success to the fact that the students had themselves created different interpretations from primary historical sources, which greatly helped to create new frames of thought and a sense of ownership of their interpretations. This can be seen from the frequent references in their statements after the lesson to their 'discoveries' about the Ottoman Empire, which arose from their class tasks on

primary sources. This showed that the action research teacher supported the students' independent thinking through key questions and constant reinforcement, enabling changes in student perceptions to emerge. The teaching style was the facilitator of the students' learning. The research evidence suggested that such learning occurred incrementally, piece by piece, one element at a time. Fresh knowledge was absorbed, while old information was discarded and conflicts were resolved (cognitive conflict), enabling students to develop new or to revise existing conceptualizations.

Democratic bias

While the Islamophobia study (Vella, 2013) showed that pedagogy/praxis can influence young people's attitudes, the action researcher was under no illusions that she had eliminated her own bias. The students' thinking was being influenced by the teacher's choice of sources and by the pedagogic principles reflected in the class's learning activities. There was a clear teaching agenda, a script, in the lesson to highlight the positive elements of the Ottoman Empire and to demonstrate that what students conceived negatively as 'the enemy' ('the other') had considerable positive attributes. It was hoped that the students would perceive 'the other' – in this case, 'the Ottomans' – in a different way to the negative stereotypes that are typically found in Maltese history, and that permeate Maltese consciousness and attitudes towards the Ottoman Empire.

It is not possible for teachers to operate in a valueless vacuum, so the set of values that society and the school supports should be openly acknowledged – in this case, adherence to democratic values enshrined in human rights, the Maltese constitution and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While populism is a threat to positive liberal democratic principles, they are the moral yardstick that most nations have adopted after hundreds of years of struggle to support the individual democratic rights of all citizens and the rule of law. Since reconciliation and peacebuilding rest on these accepted democratic ethics, values and ideals, schools and their teachers should uphold them. History teaching should therefore continuously and forcibly include analyses of multi-perspective sources, and how to make judgements about their reliability, and include learning about controversial history topics and critical thinking skills, which include diverging points of view, while all the time working within the democratic paradigm that promotes democratic bias towards open-mindedness, tolerance, respect for diversity and human rights.

Teaching how to detect bias

By moving away from the narrative approach of traditional history teaching, a teacher can eliminate the innate bias of the history teacher as narrator of narrative, while helping students learn how to detect and analyse the bias within history sources, both primary and secondary. The most positive stance the teacher can take is to recognize and acknowledge their own orientation/perspective, with both implicit and explicit biases in the selection and presentation of sources and historical accounts, that is, narratives. Through teaching history within the democratic paradigm, with recognition of the clear biases of different accounts and interpretations, it is possible to investigate multiple historical sources so that students can learn to analyse and build arguments based upon historical evidence, both primary and secondary. Significantly, it is what professional historians do: they study their sources, extract and evaluate the evidence they contain, and then interpret. History does not provide

an absolute truth, only historians' interpretations. In history we are not in search of 'the truth'; historical analysis of evidence is different from analysis of evidence in a law court. The legal system is usually interested in answering one basic question: guilty or not guilty. In history, however, there is rarely a single, straightforward answer to a historical question. All sources have the potential to be 'biased', and yet may have elements of reliability; it depends upon what questions are asked of them. Within this teaching approach, history teachers can deepen students' critical thinking skills and learn that in history, different interpretations can coexist as long as they are based on historical evidence. This is no mean feat in itself. Indeed, teaching students how to detect bias is a skill, and the beauty of such skills is that they are transferable to different situations. Therefore, detecting bias is a valuable critical thinking skill, and while acknowledging that it does not necessarily change one's point of view, it might, within democratic agendas, empower students to gain a multi-perspective, evidence-informed view of an issue.

Detecting bias

Detecting bias is not an easy, natural skill. On the contrary, it is quite naive for history teachers to assume that if students are given a set of sources, they will automatically analyse them accurately and pick up on all the hidden agendas and innuendos that might be within a source. Unfortunately, I have often come across history questions in classrooms and textbooks, and sometimes in international history projects, that ask what seems a straightforward question: 'Do you think this source is biased and why?' Experience has shown me that students' answers often reveal an element of confusion, even if they know what the word 'bias' means.

Detecting bias is difficult for various reasons. One problem is that often to be able to detect bias, one must have deep understanding of the historical situation, and to do so one must possess a substantial amount of background and contextual knowledge about the issue. Also, detecting bias means understanding 'hidden agendas' and motivation, both of which require a certain amount of insight and maturity, which may be absent in school students but which can be developed by skilful and appropriate teaching, as the CHATA (Concepts of History and Teaching Approaches: 7 to 14) project demonstrated (Lee *et al*., 1996). Another problem is that there seems to be an instinctive reaction of ignoring or dismissing anything that challenges our own values. Preconceived notions are influential; they tend consciously or subconsciously to make one ignore any bias in a source that might challenge established values, attitudes and beliefs that the source reflects.

We tend to find it more difficult to detect bias when we are in agreement with the political or ideological stance of the source (Campbell and Friesen, 2015). Furthermore, it appears that when we are presented with facts showing that our political position is incorrect, not only does this not persuade us that our view is wrong, but it actually consolidates our ideological position. One manifestation of this has become known as the 'backfire effect'. A group of researchers at Dartmouth College, USA, have studied this problem, which is defined as the effect in which 'corrections actually increase misperceptions among the group in question' (Nyhan and Reifer, 2010: 303). In other words, detecting bias is no easy task, and detecting one's own bias seems to be very difficult indeed. Adults are likely to resist or reject arguments and evidence that contradict their opinions. This is a significant problem when it comes to judging whether or not information we are receiving is biased.

However, in school students it may not be as big a problem as in adults, for young people may not yet have consolidated their values as strongly as adults have. Perhaps since their values have not been held for as long as those of adults, it is easier to discard them. On the other hand, lack of information and lack of emotional intelligence are obstacles that hinder school students from being able to detect bias, so it is important that the history teacher supports students' thinking as much as possible when embarking on history 'bias' exercises.

Detecting bias in history can be difficult for various reasons. The first problem is that unless equipped with a substantial amount of background, contextual knowledge about the issue, bias might not be identified at all. Second, understanding human motivation requires a certain amount of insight and maturity that may be absent. Also, as explained previously, people tend to reject information that contests their beliefs. There is also the problem of the impact of the daily avalanche of information from a range of sources, including social media, newspapers, the internet and television. It is based on these sources that opinions are formed. So, dismissing information that contradicts beliefs – no matter how disturbing that information is – is a huge defect.

Church–state relations in Malta in the early twentieth century

The topic of church–state relations in Malta in the twentieth century is found in Malta's History National Curriculum in the final secondary years (15 to 16 year olds) and forms part of Malta's national certification examination in history, known as the SEC (short for secondary) O levels. There were several times in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when church–state relations in Malta became strained. However, the exercise used in this study deals with one particular event: the 1950s politico-religious crisis that arose due to serious differences between Domenico Mintoff, the leader of the Labour Party and the then Prime Minister of Malta, and the Maltese Archbishop Michael Gonzi.

Dom Mintoff was the dynamic and controversial leader of Malta's Labour Party (MLP) for over three decades, and he first became prime minister in 1955 after winning the general election. At the time, Malta was still a British colony, despite the granting of the 1947 Constitution. The constitution allowed for a locally elected government but with a British Governor (Joseph Laycock) representing the Queen for defence and foreign affairs. Mintoff proposed integration with Britain, which was a bid at incorporating Malta within the United Kingdom:

> The attempted integration of the island colony of Malta into the United Kingdom in the 1950s is noteworthy on account of its uniqueness in the history of British decolonisation. Although a number of other colonies were considered for incorporation into the United Kingdom – Gibraltar and the smaller Caribbean islands for instance – no other scheme of integration was pursued so systematically, or came so close to succeeding. (Smith, 2007: 49)

Negotiations with Westminster began in earnest, but were heavily opposed in Malta by both the church, under the strict leadership of Archbishop Gonzi, and the local Conservative Party, known as the Nationalist Party. When Mintoff's conditions for integration with Britain were not accepted by Westminster, he resigned as prime

minister in 1958. This was followed by riots by his supporters, which were heavily condemned by the church. There was a fear that Mintoff was far too socialist and to the left of politics, and the archbishop announced that it would be a mortal sin for any Catholic to vote for the Labour Party. This led Mintoff to lose both the 1962 and 1966 general elections, but he was back in power in 1971, when he embarked on a total reversal of his integration policy. He rejected the 1964 independence as not going far enough, and made Malta a republic in 1974. All British troops were to be expelled by 31 March 1979, which became known as Freedom Day.

The exercise discussed in this paper is based on the 1950s period, when the church opposed Mintoff's proposal for integration with the United Kingdom, particularly because they feared that the interests of the Catholic religion would not be safeguarded. Archbishop Gonzi openly criticized Mintoff's integration proposals, and also denounced violence and riots by Labour supporters, while the Labour Party newspapers criticized the church leadership. Catholic organizations such as Azzjoni Kattolika and MUSEUM (Magister Utinam Sequatur Evangelium Universus Mundus/ The Society of Christian Doctrine) set up the Diocesan Junta, and the junta soon became the church's secular arm in the struggle against Mintoff. On 31 July 1960, the Malta Labour Party, a member of the Socialist International, announced it had joined the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO). Since the church regarded AAPSO as a communist front, Archbishop Gonzi regarded membership by Malta's Labour Party as proof that his fears about Mintoff representing a communist threat to Malta were well founded.

A pastoral letter during Lent 1961 categorically condemned the MLP's affiliation with AAPSO, and ecclesiastical sanctions against the MLP followed. (Pastoral letters are written by bishops to their Catholic parishioners when they wish to announce something of importance; they are usually read by the priest instead of the sermon during Sunday mass.) The sanctions included the interdiction of MLP officials and the party's newspapers. In a pastoral letter read in all churches, the church declared that those voting for the MLP would be committing a mortal sin and would therefore not be able to receive the sacraments. The subsequent general elections were overshadowed by these ecclesiastical sanctions, and the MLP lost the 1962 and 1966 elections. This is a controversial topic in Maltese history: *From the Coming of the Knights to EU Membership* (Vella, 2008) was the first history textbook to include this topic and exercises about it in one of its chapters; previous textbooks had avoided the topic completely.

The research: Design and implementation

The detecting bias activity in this study

The author of this paper created the following teaching exercise based on the topic of church–state relations in this period (see Chapter 5 of the Maltese history textbook for secondary O level students, *From the Coming of the Knights to EU Membership* (Vella, 2008)).

The textbook presents students with a photograph of the two main leaders of the dispute: Archbishop Gonzi, and the Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party, Dom Mintoff (see Figure 1). Students are then told to read two contemporary newspaper articles: Source A and Source B (see Figures 2 and 3).
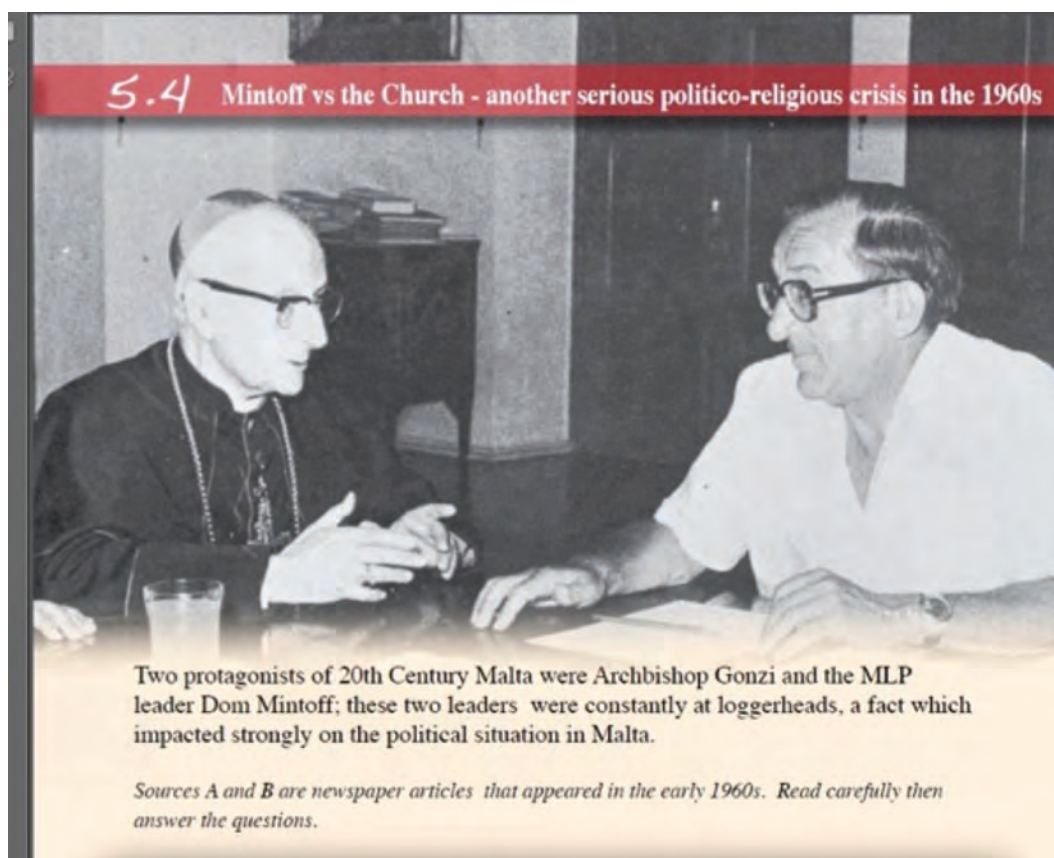
Figure 1: Textbook illustration of the two leaders of the dispute
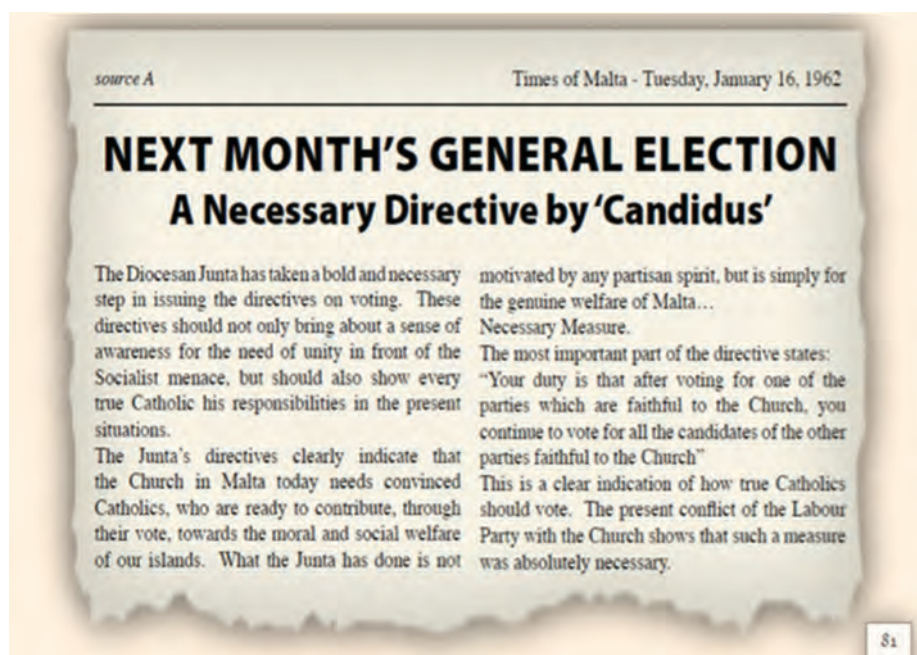*Source*: Vella (2008: 75–6)

Figure 2: Source A
Source: Vella (2008: 75–6)

Figure 3: Source B
Source: Vella (2008: 75–6)

Students then had to answer a set of questions (see Figure 4).

1. Both sources A and B are biased in favour of their cause. Both writers are trying to convince their readers in subtle and not so subtle ways that their point of view is the truth. Which source do you think supports Mintoff and the Labour Party? Which source do you think is against Mintoff and the Labour Party?
2. One way of detecting bias is by looking at the adjectives being used by the writer. Look at source A. Write the adjectives used by the writer to describe the following nouns. There are more than one for each noun. Step (referring to ecclesiastical sanctions), Catholic, Welfare
3. Another way to detect bias is to see how the writer uses sarcasm and how s/he ridicules his enemy. The writer of source B uses this tactic often. Pick phrases in source B to show when the writer does this.
4. A way to draw attention to your written argument is to use fonts and punctuation marks that draw the attention and the emotions of your readers. For example capital letters, bold letters, question marks, inverted commas and exclamation marks. Look at source B and list down the places when s/he does this. Do you think this is effective?
5. Source B mentions another newspaper, il-Helsien.
   a) Look at the adjective the writer uses to describe this newspaper. What fonts does he use?
   b) He also uses a noun to describe how il-Helsien described the incident. What is it?
   c) Do you think il-Helsien was in favour of Mintoff and the Labour party or against?
   d) And do you think the writer of source B and il-Helsien believe in the same cause?
6. Source A clearly states a directive which was one of the ecclesiastical sanctions. The writer makes his/her position clear about this directive in one strong sentence. Which sentence do you think this is and write it down.
7. These sources were written in the early 1960s the words of the writer of source A " the need of unity in front of the Socialist menace" also reveal the international political tension of the times. What was happening internationally at this time?
8. Source B reveals the local political tension of the times. Would a broken noticeboard cause so much trouble today? Why do you think so much importance was given to this incident in 1960?

Figure 4: Questions for students based on Source A and Source B
Source: Vella (2008: 75–6)

Since this textbook (Vella, 2008) has been in use, this exercise has proved to be popular. Teachers using the book reported informally during in-service courses and History Teachers' Association meetings that they had also used it to model bias-detecting exercises for written sources on other historical issues. At the same time, teachers observed that students did not find it an easy exercise and there were rarely any students who answered all the questions correctly. The bias in both newspaper articles used as sources, which was obvious to adults, was not so obvious to students. Even after reading and answering the questions, teachers said that students sometimes incorrectly understood the bias of the sources, and were not even sure which source supported which political protagonist. The definition of sarcasm in Question 3 was particularly difficult, because some students could not recognize when the writer was being sarcastic. In one lesson of a history teacher trainee observed by the author during teaching practice, the teacher happened to be doing this exercise during her lesson. On this occasion, the author got further insight into students' difficulties with this exercise. Even when told the correct answer (that is, the sentence 'We have been taught "the heart of a Priest must be filled with love …"' was written in sarcastic mode), the reaction of some students was still to assume that the writer liked the priest because he was praising him.

This situation drew the attention of the author, who decided to review the exercise to see what was making it so popular with teachers, and at the same time try to find out how to further support students' learning in order to help them overcome the difficulties reported by the teachers. This involved an intervention strategy that was, crucially, within the contextualized knowledge of the students concerning the Gonzi–Mintoff dispute. What follows reports this reflective exercise. The questions in the textbook exercise were analysed and the specific tasks that students were asked to do in the questions were selected. The questions ask students to focus their attention on:

1. a reminder of what is bias
2. nouns in the text and the adjectives used in front of each noun
3. sarcasm and ridicule in the text
4. the fonts
5. the punctuation marks
6. finding sentences that reveal the writers' beliefs
7. bringing in the historical context, both locally and internationally
8. making comparisons with today.

To overcome the difficulties that teachers reported students were finding with these tasks, the author prepared further re-enforcement class exercises to support students' thinking when analysing bias using this exercise. The author piloted these new activities with a sample of four students (15 year olds) similar in age to students normally using the textbook. The author carried out the activities with the students in a 90-minute history lesson. The class teacher introduced the author as a history teacher who would be doing the lesson instead of him on that day. These students had chosen history as their special option subject and they would be sitting the national history SEC O level at the end of that year. At that school they were the only students who specialized in history at that level, so the author worked with the whole class as a group, totalling four students. The activities took place in only one session. This was purposely done so the author could later promote the activities as history tasks that can be done in normal history lessons and easily incorporated into lesson plans and history schemes of work, and not as a one-off extraordinary research intervention not feasible in normal school history lessons.

The session took place after the students had finished the topic about church–state relations. This was done to provide contextual understanding, and thus avoid the problem of lack of knowledge about the topic, which might hinder students' bias detection. The session took the form of a group discussion based on a set of cards (see Figure 5).
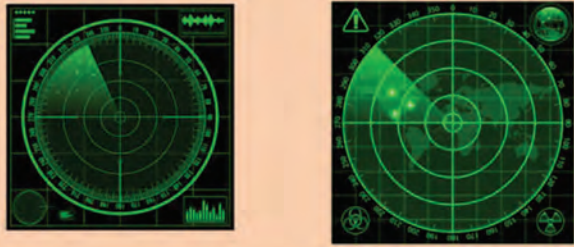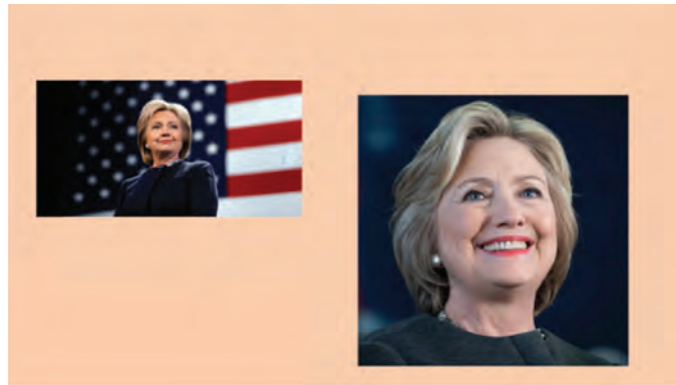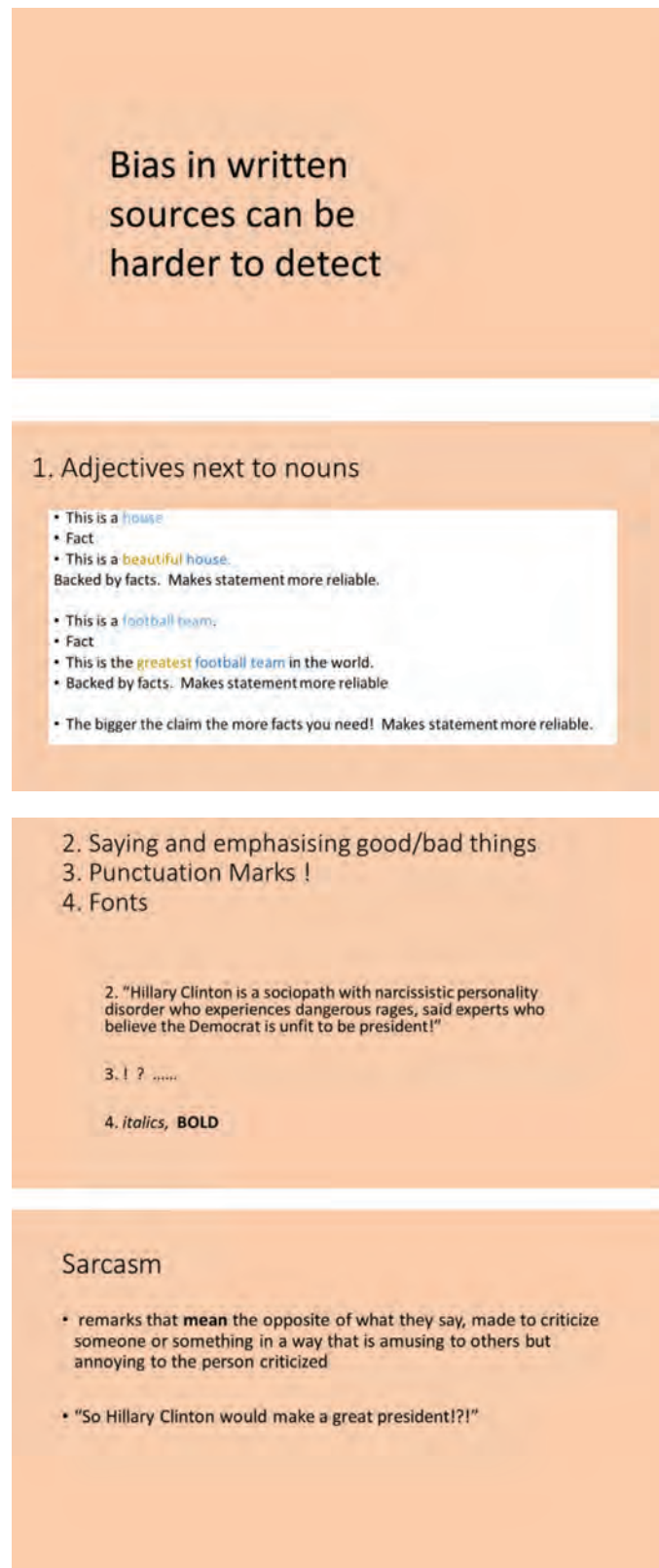
- Why would a source be biased?

- All sources are biased.

- Is it reliable?

Figure 5: Set of cards used by researcher during class discussion on 'what is bias?'
Source: Vella (2008: 75–6)

These cards were used in a round-table discussion involving the author/teacher and the four students to instigate explanation and debate on the following notions:

1. discussion of the meaning of bias
2. the difference between a fact and an opinion
3. you need something similar to a radar to pick out bias
4. detecting bias in pictures can be easy
5. photographs of politician being shown in ugly postures with hysterical facial expressions
6. how the same person can be made to look much nicer in other photographs
7. the same tactic explored through historical cartoons
8. all sources are biased, but they can still be used
9. we just need to ask how reliable they are
10. how the perception of different viewers creates different images, discussed by looking at sixteenth-century maps of Malta, comparing Christian and Muslim maps
11. how one often has to have a sharper radar to detect the bias in written sources.

Students' feedback

The exercise to answer the questions in the textbook (Figure 4) was done after the students had participated in the discussion with the author/teacher using the cards shown in Figure 5. The students' answers to the questions were quite interesting. The students' responses were mostly correct and, on the whole, they tackled the questions well. They all recognized which source supported the Labour Party and which source supported the church, except for one student. Strangely, this student then answered most of the other questions correctly, so it was probably a mix-up between the letters A and B titling the sources, rather than because he did not pick up on the bias. Nouns and adjectives were all correctly found and noted. The sentence 'We have been taught "the heart of a Priest must be filled with love …"' was correctly picked by two out of the four students as the sarcastic statement; unfortunately, the other two did not spot this. However, the fact that various other sarcastic statements were offered by the students is encouraging. For example, they cited 'Did the Provost oblige?' and 'Surely this is not what the Church teaches us' to show that the writer was mocking the bishop. This shows a clear awareness of the notion of sarcasm. In their answer to Question 4, they all correctly listed all the punctuation marks, fonts, capital letters and bold print found in the source. For example, 'AND THE PROVOST HAD NOT SEEN OR KNOWN THE "CULPRIT"!' was cited by all the students.

Question 5 was also answered correctly by all. In a way, it is a repeat exercise of Question 2, and the correct answers indicate that students have indeed gained the skill of detecting bias in a written source by noting adjectives and fonts. For example, they correctly mentioned 'mass-circulation' as an adjective used to make *il-Helsien* newspaper appear to be a popular one.

Question 6 is an information retrieval exercise and it was correctly answered by all. Question 7 brought in the outside international context of the times, and the objective behind it was to show how the fear of the communists during the Cold War was a reasonable cause as to why the church authorities were behaving in such a manner. Unfortunately, none of the students answered this correctly, showing that despite the fact that the Cold War had been covered as a topic in their history lessons, students find it difficult to connect different historical events together, and this stops them from interpreting events correctly. As already stated, to detect bias, one needs to possess quite a lot of historical knowledge, and a lack of this historical knowledge

and context greatly hampers students' ability to analyse sources. This strengthens the pedagogical idea that the teaching of both knowledge and thinking skills must go hand in hand in history teaching. Answers to the last question, Question 8, were very interesting and displayed a good level of understanding when it comes to human behaviour and motivation. Students correctly deduced that a broken noticeboard would not be so important today but that because of the tension at the time, the whole incident was blown out of proportion. On the one hand, the pro-church priest and Catholic Action youths immediately decided that it was a Labour supporter who had damaged the noticeboard, and seized the opportunity to show their support of the bishop by holding prayers and a protest march; on the other hand, the Source B pro-Labour Party newspaper did its best to ridicule them when it was later discovered that it had all been a misunderstanding. As one student wrote, 'it was all an excuse to attack each other'. Another student answered: 'it would not be so today because then the church wanted Mintoff to lose so they grabbed on every detail'.

Conclusion

Today, analysing sources with the specific aim of detecting bias plays a big part in history teaching and learning. Therefore, the need to create activities that help students achieve high-level thinking has never been more important. The first aim of this paper was to share an exercise from a Maltese history textbook that was purposely created to do precisely that – that is, to help students detect bias in a written source. It is a useful exercise because apart from being successful in Maltese history classrooms, it can be adapted to any history class exercise in any context, for, to go back to Lang's (1993: 9) assertion, 'all accounts, primary or secondary, are subject to the bias of their authors', and this is in fact what makes them interesting.

Lang's article can be helpful to history teachers who are concerned to be precise and accurate in explaining bias to their pupils. Two other articles in *Teaching History* focus on the teaching of bias and might be helpful to teachers wanting to develop a clear and full understanding of bias and how to teach about it in history: Le Cocq (2000): 'Beyond bias: making source evaluation meaningful for Year 7', and Hinks (2014), 'Triumphs Show: Getting Year 10 beyond trivial judgements of "bias": Towards victory in *that* battle'. These articles can provide additional support and guidance to ensure that teachers have a sophisticated and well-informed understanding of the concept and how to overcome pupil misconceptions about it.

The second objective was to share the reflective process that the creator of the exercise – the author of this paper – went through to ameliorate the exercise and make it even more effective as a tool to support students' thinking when detecting bias in written historical primary sources. The students' answers after trying out the new scaffolding activities were quite encouraging, and show that breakdown of tasks is the key to help understanding in history learning.

Notes on the contributor

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