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Rethinking Multiperspectivity as a Logic of Perspective Selection in History Education

ABSTRACT: Debates on multiperspectivity in history education are commonly framed as an addition of perspectives intended to counter the dominance of a single narrative. This framing rests on a quantitative epistemology that treats perspectives as discrete, countable, and additive units. This article advances an epistemological critique of that quantitative reading and argues that it reproduces the very hegemony it seeks to counter, because it conceals the selection apparatus that determines which perspectives are counted. Using a critical review of the history education literature, collective memory studies, and historiography, the study shifts the object of analysis from the number of perspectives to the logic governing their selection. Two logics are distinguished conceptually. A pluralist-additive logic adds voices for the sake of representational completeness. A critical-power logic makes the selection apparatus and archival asymmetry an object of historical reasoning. The central claim is that a pluralist logic indifferent to power produces false balance, that is, a formal equation of victims and perpetrators that obscures the asymmetry of evidence and power between them. A finding on one 2013 Curriculum eleventh-grade history textbook, which records approximately 10% multiperspective content, is reread as a symptom of a decorative pluralist logic rather than a mere shortage of quantity. Reforming history education, therefore, needs to target the logic of perspective selection and the literacy of power rather than the addition of a diversity quota.

KEY WORDS: Multiperspectivity; Perspective Selection; Power Asymmetry; Collective Memory; History Education.

INTRODUCTION

Multiperspectivity occupies a central place in contemporary history education reform and appears as a corrective to the single narrative that naturalizes one version of the past (Stradling, 2003). Demand for it intensifies at a time, when citizens confront competing historical claims in the public sphere and require the capacity to weigh the position from which each claim speaks (Wineburg, 2001).

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Curricula in many countries have adopted multiperspectivity as a core competence, and this adoption positions the concept as a measure of the quality of history learning. Precisely because it functions as a measure of quality, the concept demands examination of how it is understood and operationalized. The understanding of multiperspectivity is transformed once the concept is translated into a research instrument. Cross-national textbook studies measure the success of multiperspectivity through the proportion of content that presents more than one point of view (Kropman, Boxtel & Drie, 2020).

This mode of measurement yields figures that are concise, comparable across regions, and legible to policymakers. That operational convenience conceals a rarely examined epistemological assumption, namely that a perspective is a discrete unit that can be counted and that the summation of such units yields more critical understanding. Because this assumption determines what is regarded as success, it requires fundamental scrutiny.

The quantitative assumption is problematic, because it neglects the power at work in the production of historical knowledge. Critical historiography shows that what is decisive is not the number of perspectives available, but the structure of power that determines which perspectives are recorded and which are silenced at the level of source production (Trouillot, 1995).

The calculation of proportions treats the outcome of selection as a settled fact and normalizes the apparatus that produces it, even though the curriculum is itself a selective tradition born of conflict and compromise over power (Apple, 2014). A concept intended as a critique of narrative dominance, thus, risks perpetuating that dominance in a form that appears inclusive.

The emphasis on quantity also runs counter to the findings of collective memory studies. A dominant narrative is not defeated by the addition of voices, but by an analysis of how the narrative itself works, since national narratives operate through schematic plot patterns that absorb new perspectives without altering their structure (Wertsch, 2002).

Official memory even actively suppresses recollections that disturb the dominant narrative (Molden, 2016). Adding perspectives to a structure that remains intact produces an appearance of diversity without any shift in the center of the narrative, so the problem of multiperspectivity cannot be resolved at the level of quantity.

The Indonesian context sharpens the urgency of this problem. The official history of the *Orde Baru* (New Order) government era (1968-1998) positioned the state and the military as protagonists and

suppressed alternative narratives of contested events, particularly the violence of 1965 to 1966 (Heryanto, 2006; McGregor, 2007).

A study of the teaching of that event within the 2013 Curriculum shows that textbooks contain competing versions concerning the perpetrators yet omit the account of the victims (Pratama, 2022). In a similar vein, A. Aderoben (2024) analyzed one 2013 Curriculum history textbook for the first and second semesters of eleventh grade and found that only approximately 10% of the content was indicated as multiperspectives, with a skewed distribution between the voices of the victors and the vanquished. This pattern shows that the Indonesian problem lies in the logic that determines, which perspectives appear rather than in the absence of perspectives (Aderoben, 2024).

The existing literature treats multiperspectivity primarily as a matter of representation and quantity and has not sufficiently theorized the logic of selection that determines which perspectives are deemed worthy of appearing. This article addresses that gap by shifting the object of analysis from the number of perspectives to the logic of their selection, and by distinguishing a pluralist-additive logic from a critical-power logic that makes the selection apparatus an object of reasoning (Miller, Liu & Ball, 2020).

On this basis, the article addresses two research questions. *First*, what logics of perspective selection operate behind the term multiperspectivity, and how does each logic treat power asymmetry in the production of historical knowledge? *Second*, under what conditions does a power-attentive logic of selection develop critical thinking without falling into either false balance or relativism?

METHOD

This article is a conceptual study employing critical literature analysis. The corpus of references encompasses the history education literature, collective memory studies, historiographical theory, and the empirical finding on one Indonesian history textbook (Kartodirdjo, 1992; Sjamsuddin, 2014; Aderoben, 2024).

The analysis is directed not at testing hypotheses, but at a conceptual reconstruction of the category of multiperspectivity and at distinguishing the logics of selection that have hitherto been subsumed under a single term. The discussion is arranged in three analytical parts, namely an epistemological critique of the quantitative reading together with the distinction between two logics of selection; an analysis of power in the production of historical knowledge with a rereading of an Indonesian textbook; and a differentiation of power-attentiveness from relativism and counter-indoctrination.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

An Epistemological Critique and Two Logics of Perspective Selection.

The disciplinary definition of multiperspectivity is methodological rather than arithmetical. R. Stradling (2003) formulates it as a procedure for examining events, figures, and historical developments from various positions through a process fundamental to history as a discipline (Stradling, 2003); while B. Wansink *et al.* (2018) affirm that every historical narrative arises from a particular geographical, temporal, social, and political position, so that teaching multiperspectivity means training students to analyze the position from which a narrative emerges (Wansink *et al.*, 2018).

In this context, K.C. Barton & L.S. Levstik (2004) stress that recognizing perspectives requires reconstructing the frame of reference of historical agents rather than enumerating points of view (Barton & Levstik, 2004). This methodological definition shifts silently once it is translated into an instrument for analyzing textbooks, because operational needs drive researchers to count the presence of perspectives as separate units (Kropman, Boxtel & Drie, 2020 and 2021).

The translation of a methodological procedure into a countable indicator is rooted in the institutional conditions of textbook research. Cross-national textbook studies require indicators that can be compared across regions and read by policymakers, and the demand for comparability and policy accountability drives researchers to select units that are easy to count and report. The analysis of the proportion of multiperspectives content meets this need because it produces concise, comparable figures (Kropman, Boxtel & Drie, 2020 and 2021).

This methodological choice determines what is regarded as important, because the chosen indicator defines what counts as the success of multiperspectivity; and what remains uncounted tends to be treated as non-existent. Once that proportion becomes a policy target, textbook authors are pushed to satisfy the indicator through the insertion of ceremonial perspectives, and satisfying the indicator reproduces decorative pluralism instead of altering the structure of the narrative. The methodological principles of textbook research in fact affirm that what a textbook omits is often as meaningful as what it includes; so an analysis that only counts the presence of perspectives is blind to structured absence (*cf* Ahmad & Suwirta, 2007; Suwirta & Ahmad eds., 2007; Pingel, 2010).

The curriculum is itself a selective tradition, a particular group's selection of the knowledge sanctioned as legitimate, and that selection arises from cultural, political, and economic conflict and compromise (Apple, 2014). Treating multiperspectivity as a summation of perspectives

raises three interrelated epistemological problems. The first is reification, because counting perspectives requires positing a perspective as a sharply bounded and separate entity, whereas historical reasoning requires an understanding that perspectives are formed relationally and mutually define one another (Lévesque, 2008; Seixas & Morton, 2013).

The second is the criterion of completeness, because the claim that a piece of content presents many perspectives presupposes a complete set of perspectives as a benchmark, whereas that set is never available (Trouillot, 1995). The third is the concealment of the apparatus, because the calculation of proportions treats perspective selection as a settled fact and ignores the question of who selects and with what effects of power (Apple, 2014; Molden, 2016).

The calculation of proportions also blurs the disciplinary distinction between the perspective of a historical agent and the interpretation of a historian. In this context, B. Wansink *et al.* (2018) sort perspective-taking into three temporal layers, namely historical perspective-taking whose subject is contemporaneous with the object in the past; historiographical perspective-taking whose subject stands between the past and the present, that is, historians; and contemporary perspective-taking whose subject in the present imposes its position upon the historical object (Wansink *et al.*, 2018).

These three layers demand different reasoning competences, because the reconstruction of an agent's perspective rests on historical contextualization, whereas the evaluation of interpretations rests on the assessment of evidence and argument. An instrument that counts the presence of perspectives treats all three as units of the same kind and sums them without distinguishing the reasoning each demand. A textbook that juxtaposes several feelings of historical figures can thereby be judged multiperspectives on a par with a textbook that juxtaposes competing historiographical interpretations, even though the two train different abilities.

Reducing perspectives to countable units produces a rarely recognized performative contradiction. The concept of multiperspectivity arose to reject the positivist epistemology that treats the past as a closed collection of facts, yet the quantitative reading of the concept repeats the same epistemology at the level of perspective, because perspectives are reduced to countable units whose boundaries are assumed to be clear (Wineburg, 2001; Van-Sledright, 2011; Seixas, 2017).

The critique of narrative dominance is, thus, carried out through the very logic of calculation that sustains that dominance, so a concept intended as a corrective becomes an instrument that perpetuates dominance in a form that appears inclusive. This epistemological non-neutrality requires a shift in the

object of analysis, from the question of the number of perspectives to the question of the logic that governs their selection (Nordgren, 2017).

That shift reveals two logics of selection that differ epistemologically and politically. The pluralist-additive logic adds perspectives for the sake of representational completeness and is rooted in an ethos that values the representation of many voices (Stradling, 2003; Banks, 2016). Such an additive approach places new perspectives as additions to a structure that remains unchanged; and according to K. Nordgren (2017), meaningful intercultural learning requires an epistemological reorganization of knowledge rather than a mere addition of content (Nordgren, 2017).

The critical-power logic makes the selection apparatus and archival asymmetry an object of reasoning and governs selection through questions about whose position is absent and what structures produce that absence (Korostelina, 2013; Miller, Liu & Ball, 2020). The two logics rest on different images of the student. The pluralist-additive logic positions the student as a recipient who accumulates points of view, whereas the critical-power logic positions the student as an analyst of the production of knowledge (Nordgren & Johansson, 2015). This difference in the image of the student is precisely what the quantitative instrument fails to capture, because that instrument counts the surface outcome without examining the kind of reasoning demanded.

The methodological consequence is that assessing the quality of multiperspectivity requires a qualitative analysis of the criteria of selection rather than a count of the frequency of appearance of perspectives. The failure to capture that difference causes the assessment of the quality of multiperspectivity to collapse into the calculation of number, and the distinction between the two logics together with their images of the student answers the first research question.

Power in the Production of Historical Knowledge and a Rereading of an Indonesian Textbook. The pluralist-additive logic that operates without attentiveness to power fails through three mutually reinforcing pathways. The first pathway concerns archival asymmetry. M.R. Trouillot (1995) shows that silences in the historical record are produced at four moments, namely the making of sources, the assembly of archives, the retrieval of facts, and the attribution of retrospective significance. Silence at these four moments is an active product of unequal power relations rather than a passive void that can be filled by adding perspectives (Trouillot, 1995).

A.L. Stoler (2009) deepens this analysis through a reading of the colonial archive of the Netherlands Indies and situates the production of the archive as an act of governance that harbors the epistemic anxieties of the ruler (Stoler, 2009). The textbook occupies the endpoint of this chain of production and inherits silences formed long before the

textbook author begins to write, so that sources from groups close to the institutions of power are abundantly documented, whereas the experiences of subjugated groups are recorded sparingly or only through the filter of those who subjugated them (*cf* Barton & Levstik, 2004; Stoler, 2009). The call to present all perspectives on an equal footing cannot be met when both the raw material and the channels of distribution are already skewed from the outset.

The second pathway concerns the resilience of narrative structure. J.V. Wertsch (2002 and 2021) identified schematic narrative templates, abstract plot patterns that portray the nation as a protagonist facing a threat and achieving victory, and the textbook is a principal means of transmitting these patterns (Wertsch, 2002 and 2021).

Also B. Molden (2016) explains mnemonic hegemony as the active suppression of memory that disturbs the dominant narrative. New perspectives added to a template that remains intact are absorbed without altering the structure. This resilience is reinforced by a temporal dimension that often escapes notice (Molden, 2016).

Multiperspectivity is commonly taught synchronically through the juxtaposition of several points of view at a single moment of an event, whereas power over the narrative works diachronically through control over the sequence of events across time (Wansink *et al.*, 2018).

The juxtaposition of points of view at a single moment does not disturb control over the overall sequence, so additional perspectives function as local variation within a temporal framework, whose center remains held by the dominant narrative. Findings on Dutch textbooks reinforce this analysis, because research in a democratic education system likewise shows the dominance of the nation-state framework even when additional perspectives have been included (Kropman, Boxtel & Drie, 2020).

The third pathway concerns false balance, and this pathway is at once the subtlest and the most damaging. Presenting the position of the victim and the position of the perpetrator as two equal points of view equates the moral and evidentiary asymmetry between them (McCully, 2012; Korostelina, 2013). Such formal balance transfers a norm from the sphere of public deliberation and journalism, which requires equal space for parties to a dispute, into the sphere of historiography, which adjudicates claims through evidence.

A study of press coverage of global warming shows that the norm of balance produces coverage that in fact departs from the evidentiary consensus, because granting equal space to positions with unequal evidentiary support produces a distorted representation (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004). This cross-domain analogy illuminates the problem in

history education, since historiography weighs truth on the basis of the strength of the evidence supporting each claim. Equality of space for every position is not a measure of historical truth, so applying a norm of representational parity to historical judgment is a category error.

Understanding the context of a perpetrator's action remains legitimate, and understanding a motive differs from endorsing an action (Foster, 2001; Bryant & Clark, 2006), yet the formal symmetry between victim and perpetrator presents itself as neutral while consolidating the position of the party that is more documented and more powerful.

Indonesian history provides a site, where the three pathways converge. History has long functioned as an instrument of power for legitimizing authority, and national narratives are designed to determine which events are memorialized (cf Ahmad & Suwirta, 2007; Carretero, 2019; Song, 2021).

The official history of the *Orde Baru* (New Order) government era (1968-1998) positioned the state and the military as protagonists and suppressed perspectives that did not conform, including the experiences of the victims of the violence of 1965 to 1966, while the records of long-standing survivors lay outside the official archive (Kartodirdjo, 1992; Heryanto, 2006; McGregor, 2007; Leksana, 2009).

Studies of textbooks across curricula show the persistence of colonial discourse and a militaristic construction of national identity within the official narrative (Purwanta, 2018; Purwanta & Novianto, 2022). The stagnation of revision after *Reformasi* (the post-1998 reform era) does not stem from a scarcity of alternative perspectives, which are now widely available. Its source is the persistence of a selection apparatus centralized in the curricular authority and the mechanism of textbook approval (Suwirta & Ahmad eds., 2007; Pingel, 2010). It is this apparatus that determines which perspectives acquire official status, so that adding perspectives outside the official channels does not shift the narrative that is taught.

The framework of the logic of selection requires a rereading of the empirical finding. A. Aderoben (2024) and A. Aderoben, G.F. Gemilang & I. Septiansi (2025) analyzed one 2013 Curriculum history textbook for the first and second semesters of eleventh grade and recorded that only approximately 10% of the content was indicated as multiperspectives, with a skewed distribution between the voices of the victors and the vanquished. A quantitative reading interprets this figure as a shortage of quantity that can be remedied by adding a diversity quota (Aderoben, 2024; Aderoben, Gemilang & Septiansi, 2025).

A reading through the logic of selection interprets it differently, because the skewed distribution indicates the operation of a decorative pluralist logic, that is, a passing mention of certain groups that leaves the

template of the national narrative intact. A study of the teaching of the 1965 event within the 2013 Curriculum reinforces this reading, because textbooks contain competing versions concerning the perpetrators yet omit the account of the anti-Communist killings and continue to tend to narrate one party as the culprit of the event (Pratama, 2022).

The problem is thus structural and political, so that an integration of diversity that touches structure strengthens national identity because it rests on recognition, whereas decorative integration yields only an appearance of inclusion (Banks, 2016). This analysis answers how each logic treats power asymmetry.

Power-Attentiveness between Relativism and Counter-Indoctrination. The critical-power logic faces objections that often conflate three distinct concerns, and separating them is necessary in order to answer them precisely (Van-Sledright, 2011; Korostelina, 2013). The first concern is epistemic relativism, the assumption that attentiveness to power implies that all interpretations are equally valid. The second concern is moral relativism, the assumption that an emphasis on position eliminates the possibility of ethical judgment. The third concern is indoctrination, the assumption that a counter-narrative merely replaces one partisanship with another. Each demands a distinct answer.

Epistemic relativism is refuted by disciplinary criteria. A model of epistemic cognition in history distinguishes three stances, namely the copier stance that regards a narrative as a direct copy of the past, the subjectivist stance that regards history as merely a matter of opinion, and the criterialist stance that acknowledges the constructed nature of history while maintaining criteria for judging the quality of interpretations (Maggioni, Van-Sledright & Alexander, 2009).

In this context, B. Van-Sledright (2001 and 2011), and other scholars, affirms that effective multiperspectivity stands on the criterialist stance, with criteria comprising evidentiary support, logical coherence, methodological transparency, and accountability to disciplinary standards, and these criteria form part of a model of historical thinking that places the evaluation of evidence at the core of competence (cf Van-Sledright, 2001 and 2011; Nokes, 2013; Seixas & Morton, 2013; Seixas, 2017).

The critical-power logic adds one evaluative obligation, namely accountability for the basis of perspective selection and for the silence it produces, so that this logic demands stricter rather than looser standards and stands opposed to a relativism that equates all claims without criteria. The criterialist stance also permits a distinction between historiographical questions that are genuinely open and factual questions that have been settled by evidence, so that not every claim deserves to be treated as an equally valid perspective.

Moral relativism is refuted by ethical judgment grounded in context. Ethical judgment in history does not require anachronistic condemnation that applies present-day measures to the past, nor does it require the suspension of all judgment, because an understanding of the norms of the era under study permits an informed judgment of an agent's action within the framework of choices available to that agent (Endacott & Brooks, 2013).

Disciplined ethical judgment requires students to distinguish value claims from factual claims, to examine the consensual status of both, and to assess the reliability of the process by which their own beliefs are formed (Karn, 2022). Reflection across normative ethical frameworks enriches that judgment and guards it against moral oversimplification (Milligan, Gibson & Peck, 2018).

K.C. Barton & L.S. Levstik (2004) stress that the moral response is a major component of history learning that is often unacknowledged and unanalysed, so that a claim of full moral neutrality in fact conceals a judgment that continues to operate tacitly. The ability to distinguish contextual understanding from moral endorsement guard students against two errors at once, namely a condemnation that severs an action from its context and an exoneration that erases responsibility (Barton & Levstik, 2004).

The concern about indoctrination is the most challenging and requires a distinction between procedural commitment and substantive commitment. T.E. Kelly (1986) distinguishes four positions of the teacher toward controversial issues, namely exclusive neutrality that avoids the topic, exclusive partiality that instils a single conclusion, neutral impartiality that facilitates without disclosing a view, and committed impartiality that discloses the teacher's view transparently while still teaching fairly. The last position is the most defensible, and it places the critical-power logic outside the domain of advocacy (Kelly, 1986).

The critical-power logic demands a procedural commitment to make the working of power in the production of narrative visible and open to analysis, and it does not demand a substantive commitment concerning who is right. Its aim is the student's ability to judge perspective selection, including the selection performed by the teacher. Indoctrination conceals the process of selection and presents a conclusion as final truth, whereas critical pedagogy opens the process of selection to scrutiny, and reflexivity about the teacher's own selection serves as the safeguard that distinguishes the two (Freire, 1970).

The critical-power logic needs to apply the same vigilance to itself. Treating the position of the victim as a fixed category immune to

scrutiny causes the counter-narrative to harden into a new orthodoxy, and such hardening repeats the error of the dominant narrative in inverted form. A consistent attentiveness to power requires that the canon of counter-narratives likewise submit to the criteria of evidence and remain open to revision (Miller, Liu & Ball, 2020); so that students analyse the selection performed by the dominant narrative as well as the selection performed by those who challenge it. This reflective consistency is what preserves the critical-power logic from turning into a counter-doctrine. The practical marker of such hardening is the disappearance of questions of evidence directed at the counter-narrative in the classroom, and the presence of such questions is the measure that the critical orientation remains at work.

The application of these three distinctions in the classroom depends on teacher competence and professional autonomy in selecting and evaluating sources. Teaching history that touches deeply contested events requires teachers, who command historiographical procedures and who are also able to manage discussion burdened by the legacy of conflict (McCully, 2012).

Maintaining disciplinary criteria, context-based ethical judgment, and reflexivity about selection demands a high level of teacher competence, and a system that maintains a centralized selection apparatus constrains that autonomy, so that the pedagogical demands of the critical-power logic are bound to the institutional conditions discussed earlier. Operationalizing these conditions requires an assessment system that rewards the student's ability to analyse the basis of perspective selection rather than the reproduction of a predetermined counter-narrative.

Assessment that measures the memorization of a particular conclusion returns learning to the logic of doctrine, whereas assessment that measures the quality of analysis of the process of selection keeps the critical orientation procedural. The residual tension between critical pedagogy and advocacy persists and is not erased through procedure, but it is managed through transparency and openness to evidenced rebuttal. This analysis answers the second research question concerning the conditions under which a power-attentive logic of selection can function without falling into either of the two poles of failure.

CONCLUSION

The logics of perspective selection that operate behind the term multiperspectivity comprise a pluralist-additive logic and a critical-power logic, and the two treat power asymmetry in opposing ways. The pluralist-additive logic adds voices for the sake of representational completeness and treats perspective selection as a settled fact, so that the

selection apparatus and the archival asymmetry that sustain it escape scrutiny and the dominant narrative template remains intact.

The critical-power logic makes the selection apparatus, archival asymmetry, and narrative structure objects of historical reasoning, so that students analyse the process that determines which perspectives are deemed worthy of appearing. The rereading of the finding on one 2013 Curriculum history textbook affirms this distinction, because the skewed distribution of perspectives indicates the operation of a decorative pluralist logic rather than a mere shortage of perspectives.

A power-attentive logic of selection develops critical thinking without falling into either false balance or relativism when three conditions are met. The first condition is the recognition of the asymmetry of evidence and power, so that the positions of victim and perpetrator are not formally equated and the context of the perpetrator's action is still analysed without moral equation. The second condition is the maintenance of disciplinary criteria comprising evidentiary support, logical coherence, methodological transparency, and accountability to historical standards, which distinguishes power-attentiveness from relativism. The third condition is the transparency of the process of selection and openness to evidenced rebuttal, including a willingness to make the teacher's selection an object of assessment, which distinguishes critical pedagogy from counter-indoctrination.

Reforming history education, therefore, needs to target the logic of perspective selection and the literacy of power through the redesign of textbooks, changes to the assessment system, and the strengthening of teacher competence, rather than the addition of a diversity quota to the curriculum.

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Reforming history education, therefore, needs to target the logic of perspective selection and the literacy of power through the redesign of textbooks, changes to the assessment system, and the strengthening of teacher competence, rather than the addition of a diversity quota to the curriculum.