Apartheid According to Wikipedia

A Comparative Analysis of English, Dutch and Afrikaans Wikipedia Pages on Apartheid.

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I. INTRODUCTION

An issue of apartheid history is a fascinating one. It involves actors of many nationalities and languages, from native South African inhabitants, descendants of slaves (often of Asian origin), former Dutch and British colonizers, to the apartheid government itself. Brendan Luyt in his research on The Nature of Historical Representation on Wikipedia writes that "the basic premise is that Wikipedia history pages represent a collective vision of the past, one that is shaped by the dominant historiography of the country or region so that the potential of digital history writing is more or less circumscribed according to preexisting social visions of what constitutes valid or accurate historical representation." (Luyt 1058) However, if an issue involves many countries, societies, languages and cultures, what is the "dominant historiography of the country"and by whom is it created?

A comparative study on Wikipedia pages about apartheid would reflect different accounts on history of apartheid and illustrate whether, in fact, we can talk about a dominant historical narrative. By comparing and contrasting content and history of changes on Wikipedia pages in English, Dutch and Afrikaans, this research attempts to answer the question: to what extent do national points of view on apartheid history emerge on these particular Wikipedia pages? It also tries to investigate how Wikipedia is a bearer of these differences, i.e. what these differences consist of?

This research can also test two of the claims posed by R. Rogers and E. Sendijarevic. First hypothesis is that "Wikipedia language versions "distort" by emphasizing the local over the universal (Rogers, Sendijarevic 544). Second premise is that there is a "bias in Wikipedia in the sense of the coverage in the articles, with the English- language ones containing more information." (Rogers, Sendijarevic 544)

Some researchers, like Livingstone, also doubt the adequate representation of particular geographical areas on Wikipedia, such as Africa, Latin America, Asia, and parts of Eastern Europe. (Livingstone 503) This research, since it relates to the part of South African history, addresses Livingstone's doubt. It has a potential to illustrate the extent to which the area of South Africa is covered on Wikipedia, and whether the content on page in Afrikaans emerged organically from within South Africa.

II. METHODS

We have first selected a complex topic of apartheid, since the accounts of history provided by different actors involved might differ from one another. We queried Google for the English version of the Wikipedia page on apartheid and opened the links to the Dutch and Afrikaans versions as well. We have decided to conduct a comparative analysis on the three Wikipedia pages on apartheid, taking into account: title, table of contents, contributors and the size of the pages. A number of tools were used in order to provide automated and thorough results for the report:

- Wiki TOC Scraper[1]
- Wikipedia Edits Scraper and IP Localizer[2]
- Wikipedia Contributors[3]
- Wikipedia Page History Statistics[4]

A list of top 10 editors for each page was constructed and added into a table in the Appendix, as well as a separate table with the number of edits for each contributor (Excel Sheet 2). We have also added a list of the geo location of each anonymous user from the list of top contributors (Appendix, Excel Sheet 3). The list was helpful in determining the country of origin for most active editors and whether any of the editors has introduced changes on more than one Wikipedia page on apartheid. It also showed whether the content on a specific page was edited from within or from outside the country.

In order to research the changes that have occurred in the page titles during time we have used the "Talk"[5] feature on the Wikipedia page.

Moreover, all three table of contents (TOCs) were put into the Appendix (Excel Sheet 1) and color coded. This allowed to find out which of the chapters are common for all pages, and which are unique. This has also given an insight into the extent to which each subject was covered on each page.

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III. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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The Length of the Page

The size of the three Wikipedia pages is notably different. The English page is the most extensive one and has the biggest number of sections. This finding has been confirmed by the number of edits conducted on each page. With the use of the Wikipedia "Page History Statistics" tool it was found out there have been 8,339 edits for the English version of the apartheid page. For the Afrikaans version there have been 370 edits and for the Dutch version there have been 375 edits, even though the Dutch page is significantly shorter than the Afrikaans one.

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[1] https://tools.digitalmethods.net/beta/wikitoc/ - scrapes Table of Contents for revisions of a wikipedia page and explore the results

[2] https://tools.digitalmethods.net/beta/wikipedia2geo/ - scrapes Wikipedia history and does IP to Geo for anonymous edits

[3] https://toolserver.org/~daniel/WikiSense/Contributors.php - contributors per article, ordered by number of edits

[4] http://vs.aka-online.de/cgi-bin/wppagehiststat.pl - builds an edit history overview page for the article with the given name

[5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Apartheid_in_South_Africa

Contributors

We have analyzed the top 10 contributors for each version of the Wikipedia pages, taking into account the number of edits of each contributor (Appendix Sheet 2). The biggest number of edits has been made on the English version of the page. Top contributor is "Zaian" with 456 edits. However, none of the contributors on the English version has made edits on the other two pages. As it can be observed in the first table of the Appendix (Excel Sheet 2), the same editors can be found only on the Dutch and Afrikaans pages, but all of them are bots.

A number of 5 anonymous users has been found. They have been located by their IP (list in Appendix Sheet 3). Each anonymous user is located in the same country as the page he has edited, except for one, who is located in the United States and has edited the Afrikaans page.

Title

The different titles of the pages is a striking difference. On the English Wikipedia version, the query "Apartheid" automatically redirects to "Apartheid in South Africa". A disclaimer under the title reads: *"Apartheid" redirects here. For the legal definition of Apartheid, see <u>crime of apartheid</u>. For other uses, see <u>Apartheid (disambiguation)</u>*. Dutch and Afrikaans pages are titled simply "Apartheid". The changes made to the title on the English page are analyzed by looking at the discussion under the "Talk" tab. The Dutch and Afrikaans pages do not contain a discussion thread related to the title.

In April 2011 the title of the page was "South Africa under apartheid". User NickCT suggested that the title should be "Apartheid", because it is a common sense that apartheid refers to South African history. Another user, Johnuniq explained that "changing the name would not be helpful. This article is about South Africa and its apartheid system. (...) If the article were just "Apartheid", people would want to (...) start introducing modern day usage, and other unhelpful stuff."

The discussion dates back even to June 2006, when a title used to be even more specific: "History of South Africa in the apartheid era". Zaian (the user with the biggest number of edits on this page) pointed out that "South African apartheid is the only 'indisputable' use of the term, because that's where it was invented and officially used. The redirect to the specific name is to prevent the page being diluted with discussions of other countries, where the term has no official status."

Therefore, one can see that the editors of the English page see "apartheid" as a broader category that can be applied to other cases outside of South Africa. Especially the argument that the term should also cover the situation of contemporary Israel often reappears in the discussion. However, editors of the Dutch and Afrikaans pages do not consider this as an issue. It seems that, for them, the link between apartheid and South Africa is self-explanatory.

Table of Content

It is immediately noticeable that the English and Afrikaans versions of the table of contents include significantly more information than the Dutch one. Content on the Dutch page is split into 4 sections, as opposed to 19 on the English one and 12 on the Afrikaans one.

The English page offers more context, providing information on the precursors to the regime and its implementation in South Africa. This page also offers insight into the legal aspects of apartheid, such as prohibition of Colored people to vote, institutions of apartheid and the unity of white South Africans. Apartheid legislation is also discussed on the Afrikaans version of the page, but not on the Dutch one.

The "Homeland System" dividing South Africa into 10 sub-states is extensively covered on the English page, whereas on the Dutch version the subject is only discussed in one chapter, "Great apartheid".

Moreover, the English page discusses administrative aspects, such as forced removals, petty apartheid (basic limitations for colored people) and colored classification. These aspects are also mentioned briefly on the Dutch page under "Small apartheid".

"Women under Apartheid" is a subject common for both the English and the Afrikaans pages, but not for the Dutch one. "Sports under Apartheid" is also treated as a separate chapter on the English page, but the subject is not mentioned on other two pages.

Interestingly enough, the Table of Content of the Afrikaans page concentrates primarily on the resistance to the regime. Five out of twelve sections describe different forms of resistance: initial struggle, passive and armed resistance, domestic opposition and the role of women in the fight against Apartheid. This subject is also covered in one chapter of the English page. On the Dutch page there is no mention of internal resistance of any kind.

The section devoted entirely to minorities is present on the English and Afrikaans pages, however the Dutch page does not mention the subject.

The English page allocates an extensive chapter to South Africa International Relations during Apartheid, also covered in one chapter on the Afrikaans version. However, the content on the latter is oriented towards other countries' reaction to the regime, whereas the English page discusses internal matters, such as religion, economy, culture, Western influence and the South African border war. This subjects do not appear on the Dutch page.

State security is also discussed on the English page and is mentioned briefly on the Afrikaans page. Again, the Dutch page does not cover the topic.

The Afrikaans page dedicates a separate chapter to the "Construction of new identities in South Africa in the '90s" a subject that is not mentioned on the other two pages.

Both the English the Afrikaans pages provide extensive information on the "Final Years" of the Apartheid and the 1994 elections. This is only briefly mentioned on the Dutch page.

A very interesting finding is that the English page contains the section "Contrition" providing information on public gestures or declarations of apology from marcant political figures involved in the Apartheid. This section is inexistent on the other two pages.

It can also be seen that there are 24 sections and subsections on the Afrikaans page. 19 of them can be also found on the English page. Thus, it can be assumed that the content on the Afrikaans page was not originally created, but was translated from or based on the English page.

An important finding is that the English page provides a list of other related articles and an extensive list of references. The Dutch and Afrikaans pages provide only few references, and no links to other apartheid related articles for further reading.

The tool Wiki TOC Scraper was used to scrape table of contents, to see what changed and when. The tool does not provide the table of content from the Afrikaans page, therefore only the English and Dutch versions were scraped. The English page is too extensive to be covered in this paper. However, the analysis of the changes in table of content on the Dutch page[6] resulted in some interesting findings.

In 2010 there were some attempts to introduce sections on "Contemporary popularity in Flanders" and "Apartheid in Flanders". They referred to the Belgian far-right political party in the Flemish Region that, supposedly, favored the idea of apartheid. It quoted the party's chairman Bruno Valkeniers saying that he could immigrate to South Africa even under apartheid regime, because apartheid system does not really bother him. The sections were quickly deleted.

Until 2012 there was a section "Other Countries". It included information that "nowadays Saudi Arabia is also known as an apartheid state because of the strict separation between men and women and between Muslims and non-Muslims." It also included the case of Israel and occupied Muslim territories. The section disappeared in November 2012. This case illustrates well the concerns of the editors of the English page about the broad use of the term apartheid (see section **Title**). As the table of content on the Dutch page shows, the general title "Apartheid" does allow for inclusion of other, often disputable cases.

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[6]
https://tools.digitalmethods.net/beta/wikitoc/?jobid=50b629233686e&json=result&view=renderHtmlResults

The Absence of African languages

It is vital to note that there are no Wikipedia pages for apartheid in IsiZulu, nor in IsiXhosa language, even though they are two most used languages of South Africa (23.82% and 17.64% respectively). Afrikaans is the third biggest language in the country (13.35%), and English being the fifth one (8.2%). All of these languages are official[7].

Even though the apartheid influenced people speaking native African languages the most, their account of history has not yet emerged on Wikipedia. It is former colonizers and white Afrikaners who wrote the history of apartheid on Wikipedia. These accounts of history are definitely not the only ones that can be constructed.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Roger's claim that "bias in Wikipedia in the sense of the coverage in the articles, with the English- language ones containing more information" proved to be correct in above analyzed case. Not only the English page contains much more information than the Dutch and Afrikaans pages, but it is also better structured and more specifically titled. Even though the Afrikaans page is also rich in information, it is much more concentrated on resistance to Apartheid, leaving other aspects undiscussed. The Dutch page is the most incomplete one, not providing sufficient information on the topic.

Our research also comes into agreement with the fact that "Wikipedia language versions "distort" by emphasizing the local over the universal" (Rogers, Sendijarevic 544). This is visible in the case of the introduction of the Flemish case on the Dutch page and focus on internal resistance to the regime on the Afrikaans page. This claim would be even more applicable to this case if there were Wikipedia pages on apartheid in the dominant native African languages. However, such pages have not yet emerged. Perhaps in other corners of the internet alternative voices of native South Africans are available, but not on Wikipedia.

It is, unfortunately, impossible to make a claim whether the Afrikaans page emerged organically from within the country, since most of the top editors are not anonymous (it is impossible to track their location through their IP addresses). It is, however, possible to say that the majority of content (at least the structure of sections and subsections in the table of content) on the Afrikaans page was most probably based on the English version of the page instead of organically emerging from within the country.

There are national points of view on apartheid history that emerge from the Wikipedia pages. The English title takes into account international users and their different perspectives on and understandings of apartheid. Some editors on the Dutch page also associated apartheid with the Flemish politician.

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[7] CIA. The World Factbook https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/countrytemplate_sf.html

The analysis of the tables of content provided an insight into essential differences between the pages. The differences between tables of content shows that the English page offers information on different aspects of the problem, providing quite a neutral account on the history of apartheid. It contains extensive information and, most importantly, provides a large list of further readings and references the text with key works. The Afrikaans page is much more concentrated on internal struggle against apartheid, which is an important part of their national history. The Dutch page, however, provides little content, few references and no suggestions for further reading. This is a peculiar finding, especially that South Africa is a former colony of the Netherlands and the Dutch role in providing background for racial separation legislation can be considered an important part of the Dutch history.

One has to understand, that, in the end, it comes as no surprise that accounts of history on Wikipedia differ depending on the country. As Luyt writes, "historians construct their work out of the plentitude of artifacts surviving from the past; they select and arrange certain items to make what would otherwise be an incoherent jumble of events into something with a structure—a narrative." (Luyt 1059) The differences, therefore, contain national or cultural biases, but they do not show an attempt to maliciously manipulate history.

Further Research

This research focused on media-specific elements of the Wikipedia page, such as table of content, contributors, title and the "talk" tab. Further research could focus more on the content analysis of the pages themselves and find out whether the content, for example information on the origins of apartheid, is culturally biased. It is also possible to select controversial differences, and with the help of WikiBlame (Revision History Search) check which users inserted these claims. If they were anonymous users, it is possible to track their location through the IP addresses. Unfortunately, the Dutch and Afrikaans pages do not have the Revision History Search, so only English page can be analyzed in this way.

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