

# HISTORY CURRICULUM, NATION-BUILDING AND THE PROMOTION OF COMMON VALUES IN AFRICA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ZIMBABWE AND SOUTH AFRICA

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## ***Abstract***

A challenge for Africa is how to derive common values from the values of diverse communities. The challenge becomes even more difficult in the face of notions such as autonomy, multiculturalism and respect for difference which are accompanying the emergence of neo-liberalism, globalisation and cosmopolitanism. While it is important to respect diversity in a post-colonial society, it is equally important that nation-building should strive for the promotion of common values among the citizenry. This article uses the example of Zimbabwe and South Africa as a comparative case study to investigate how the ruling elites in these two southern African countries have endeavoured to apply the curriculum for nation-building and the promotion of common citizenship by inculcating common values in young citizens. The article also explores the role of the curriculum from the perspective of social constructivism, where 'curriculum' is defined as an agency to foster social, cultural and political ideals in society. The academic discipline that is highly vulnerable to the imperatives of nation-building and the interests of the political elite is history, as it is prone to manipulation by political regimes in their hegemonic projects.

**Keywords:** Nation-building; Curriculum; Multi-culturalism; Hegemony; History; Ideology.

## **Introduction**

In countries with a huge variety of cultural, ethnic, racial, religious and other social identities, nation-building is a big challenge. This challenge has led governments to take numerous steps to create durable nation states. In Africa the situation is compounded by the fact that there are many states without

nations.<sup>1</sup> Mandaza describes such states as ‘nation-states-in-the-making’, which are characterised by a lack of essence, weakness and dependency.<sup>2</sup> What is missing or ignored in the numerous investigations of nation-building processes in Africa is the role of the curriculum. This article explores the neglected role of the history curriculum in the debate on nation-building and the process of forging general citizenship in Africa. In this context, the concept ‘curriculum’ is understood from the social constructivist perspective as an agency of social and political reproduction.<sup>3</sup> The curriculum emerges directly from society and is an ideological tool as well as a vehicle of social change driven by the dominant social group. As such, it plays a central role in the development and reproduction of society over time and geographical area. Seen from this perspective, it is no wonder that the curriculum is appropriated by political regimes in an endeavour to construct particular nation states, impart particular ideologies, promote common values and form a particular type of citizen.

### **Problem statement**

This article presents a comparative analysis of Zimbabwe and South Africa to show how the national curriculum in these two southern African countries is manipulated by the political elites to promote certain values and particular characters. In South Africa, the national curriculum has the overriding aim of democratic transition by inculcating liberal democratic values and producing democratic citizens who are fully de-racialised and de-tribalised.<sup>4</sup> Zimbabwe, on the other hand, is locked in orthodox nationalism, and its curriculum is being driven by so-called ‘patriotic values’ and the aim of forming of patriotic citizens.<sup>5</sup> These underpinning ideological and political issues are being played out in the history curriculum and the practice of history by the community. This makes the idea of the curriculum as a promoter of values and character

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1 Montserrat Guibernau, *Nations Without States: Political Communities in a Global Age*, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999); EV Masunugure, ‘Nation-Building, State-Building and Power Configuration in Zimbabwe,’ in *Conflict Trends Magazine*, Volume 1, (2006), p. 3-8.

2 I Mandaza, *Peace and Security in Southern Africa* (SAPES Books, Harare, 1996), pp. xviii-xxi; I Mandaza, *Governance and Human Development in Southern Africa: Selected Essays* (SAPES, Harare, 1998), pp.1-8.

3 PW Jackson, ‘Conceptions of Curriculum and Curriculum Specialists’, PW Jackson (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Curriculum: A Project of the American Educational Research Association* (Macmillan Publishing Company: New York, 1992), p. 14-15.

4 Department of Education, *National Curriculum Statement for Grade 10-12* (Pretoria, 2002).

5 Terence Ranger, ‘Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle Over the Past in Zimbabwe,’ in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30, 3, (2004), pp. 215-234.

problematic, particularly where multiculturalism, diversity and autonomy are concerned.

The history curriculum in general is intended to promote the acquisition of knowledge and the understanding of human activity in the past and to link it with the present so as to help learners to understand causes and consequences, continuity and change, and the general evolution of society over time to become what it is today.<sup>6</sup> History as the study of human activities cuts across the social, economic and political aspects of society. The history syllabus is closely followed by politicians and policy makers to make sure that the history that is taught is in line with the ideology of the ruling elite. What this means is that history, whether at secondary school or tertiary level, is never taught in a neutral way.

In both Zimbabwe and South Africa, as the case study shows, the teaching of history is always influenced by political ideologies so that the subject is taught either as liberal history, nationalist history, working class history, women's history, popular history, colonial history or post-colonial history. These different aspects of history impose different values and promote a different character. Zimbabwe is well known for preferring a narrowly defined nationalist history which is intended to impart the noble spirit of patriotism.

The practice of history by the community in many parts of the world has been, and still is, aligned with particular political ideologies and political exigencies. Different political regimes emphasise the teaching of a particular aspect of history for particular ideological purposes. It is within this context that the examples of Zimbabwe and South Africa are discussed to demonstrate how the history curriculum promotes values and character. The key challenge in promoting particular values and character is respect for diversity and multiculturalism. There is controversy over how to ensure common values while at the same time respecting differences. There is also the challenge of compatibility and incompatibility between the re-conceptualised notions of autonomy – present-day South Africa's educational vision is to promote core values as the basis of democratic citizenship.<sup>75</sup>

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6 Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council, *History 9155, Examination Syllabus for 2003-2007* (Government Printers, Harare 2003).

7 A Gutmann, *Challenges of Multiculturalism in Democratic Education*, [www.ed.uiu.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook95\\_docs/gutmann.html](http://www.ed.uiu.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook95_docs/gutmann.html); S Pendlebury, *Diversity, Mutual Respect, and Education of a Deliberative Citizenry* in [http://www.edu.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook/95\\_docs/pendlebury.html](http://www.edu.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook/95_docs/pendlebury.html).

## **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to create awareness of how history curriculums can be manipulated by political elites for nation-building in either positive or negative ways. Through a comparative analysis of Zimbabwe as a 'mid-de-coloniser'<sup>8</sup> and South Africa as a 'late de-coloniser',<sup>9</sup> this study attempts to provide the latter country with a practical lesson on the dangers of manipulating history curriculums for political and ideological ends that cannot be reconciled with the notions of respect for diversity and cosmopolitanism. Since the history curriculum is prone to political manipulation for nation-building, it is essential that both good and bad examples be examined so that we know what to avoid and what to emulate. The lesson of this study is relevant not only to the political elites, but also to the broader community in the teaching of history in schools, colleges and universities. This study uses the example of Zimbabwe to highlight the dangers of imposing on the history curriculum a narrowly defined and exclusive political process of nation-building, while the South African case serves to show that the curriculum can be manipulated politically to pursue democratic ideals in nation-building.

## **Literature review: A comparative analysis between Zimbabwe and South Africa on the drive for values and a particular character**

Terence Ranger wrote that:

Over the past two or so years there has emerged in Zimbabwe a sustained attempt by the Mugabe regime to propagate what is called 'patriotic history.' 'Patriotic history' is intended to proclaim the continuity of the Zimbabwean revolutionary tradition. It is an attempt to reach out to 'youth' over the heads of their parents and teachers, all of whom are said to have forgotten or betrayed revolutionary values. It repudiates academic historiography with its attempts to complicate and question. At the same time, it confronts Western 'bogus universalism' which it depicts as a denial of the concrete history of global oppression. 'Patriotic history' is propagated at many levels on television and in the state-controlled press; in youth militia camps; in new history schools courses and text books; in books written by cabinet ministers; in speeches by Robert Mugabe and in philosophical eulogies and glosses of those speeches by Zimbabwe's media controller, Tafataona Mahoso.<sup>10</sup>

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8 The term 'mid-de-coloniser' means that Zimbabwe is neither one of the first African states to get independence from colonial rule nor one of the last.

9 The term 'late de-coloniser' means that South Africa is one of the last countries to break from colonial rule.

10 T Ranger, 'Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle Over the Past in Zimbabwe,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30, 3, (2004) p. 1. Tafataona Mahoso is Chairman of the Media Commission of Zimbabwe. He is one of the leading apologists of the ruling party in Zimbabwe.

The key issues raised by Ranger relate to how the practice of history by the community in Zimbabwe has been hijacked by politicians, and how it has been seriously infused with current ZANU-PF political imperatives of fighting an economic war against the West. The Ministry of Youth Development and Employment Creation, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, clearly stated that the mission of the Zimbabwean government was to “transform and empower youth for nation-building” and to promote the values of patriotism, creativity, team work, national commitment and effective communication.<sup>11</sup>

One can say that in Zimbabwe the Ministry of Education as an overseer of educational issues is not trusted to the extent that the more politically oriented Ministry of Youth Development and Employment Creation has been, given the mandate to teach a parallel curriculum in the National Youth Service Centres, which basically consists of a narrow political history of the country. Formal schools continue to teach a curriculum that is less political, less nationalistic and more objective and inclusive of Zimbabwean people of different political persuasions, including whites. In the National Youth Service Centres, black youths are taught anti-white ideology, which is at the centre of the ZANU-PF’s nationalist politics. This is a situation that was described in detail by the Solidarity Peace Trust in one of its reports on the youth and education in Zimbabwe. It noted that:

... there is overwhelming evidence that the youth militia camps are aimed at forcing on all school leavers a ZANU-PF view of Zimbabwean history and the present. All training materials in the camps has, from inception, consisted exclusively of ZANU-PF campaign material and political speeches. The material is crudely racist and vilifies the major opposition party in the country...”<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, South Africa has come up with a *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy*, emphasising transformation and democratisation. While in Zimbabwe the curriculum is seen as a vehicle for the inculcation of patriotism and nationalist thinking, South Africa emphasises the curriculum as a vehicle for transformation and the inculcation of democratic values. As stated by former Minister of Education of South Africa, Kader Asmal, “This

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11 The Ministry of Youth Development and Employment Creation has usurped some of the key functions of the Ministry of Education. For instance, this ministry has instated the National Youth Service Centres as competitors to legitimate schools and universities. See also the Ministry of Education, *The Development of Education National Report of Zimbabwe* (Ministries of Education, Sport and Culture and Higher and Tertiary Education, August 2004).

12 The Solidarity Peace Trust, *National Youth Service Training: Shaping Youth in a Truly Zimbabwean Manner: An Overview of Youth Militia Training and Activities in Zimbabwe*, October 2000-August 2003 (5 September 2003).

curriculum is written by South Africans for South Africans who hold dear the principles of democracy.”<sup>13</sup> Thus the South African curriculum is underpinned by 16 steps as a vehicle for democratic transformation, namely:

- Culture of communication;
- Role modelling;
- Reading, writing, counting and thinking;
- Culture of human rights;
- Promoting arts and culture;
- Putting history into the curriculum;
- Religion and education;
- Multilingualism;
- Sports and nation-building;
- Equal access;
- Anti-racism;
- Gender equality;
- HIV/AIDS and sexual responsibility;
- Rule of law;
- Ethics and the environment;
- Patriotism and common citizenship.<sup>14</sup>

The above blueprint for the promotion of values and character has major significance for the practice of history by the community. It raises the question of which history is to be taught. In Zimbabwe and South Africa, nationalist history has come to occupy mainstream education. The former so-called ‘terrorists’ have become ‘freedom fighters/war veterans’, and are now the models for nation-building and the leaders of Zimbabwe and South Africa. African nationalism, which was previously relegated to the position of terrorism and communism, is now studied as emancipatory development.

However, there are differences between Zimbabwe and South Africa concerning consensus on key issues related to nation-building and the purpose of history teaching. South Africa is barely 15 years into the achievement of

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13 Department of Education (South Africa), *Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grades R-9*, (Pretoria, 2001), p. 1.

14 Department of Education (South Africa), *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy*, (Pretoria, 2001).

its democracy - there is still a lot of euphoria about this, and the nation is still seen as young and new. The African National Congress (ANC) is still enjoying popular support in South Africa, but the ruling ZANU-PF party in Zimbabwe is no longer popular and it no longer holds the moral and political high ground with its nationalist position. Zimbabwean historians are now very critical of orthodox nationalism as a pillar of nation-building. Some are even calling for a post-nationalist dispensation that raises human security, human rights, democracy and pluralism far above ideas of a monolithic unity. While in South Africa there is still respect and common ground between historians and politicians, in Zimbabwe historians and other academics are accused of turning schools, colleges and universities into 'anti-government mentality factories'. The government has issued the following statement: "The Government will soon make youth training compulsory for all school leavers to instil an unbiased history of Zimbabwe."<sup>15</sup>

The implications of all this are serious for the practice of history by the community in Zimbabwe. Firstly, the government has become very hostile to professional history teachers and academics who have refused to make the curriculum a tool of a particular political group, and some have been forced to leave the country. Secondly, the government has instituted National Youth Training Centres as vehicles to inculcate 'patriotic history' in the youth, which parallel the function of formal schools. Thirdly, teachers at the National Youth Training Centres are not even trained historians or professional teachers. They are war veterans, i.e. those who fought during the liberation struggle. Liberation war credentials have become a substitute for academic credentials. Finally, history is taught in a highly politicised, severely restricted manner. It is a narrow and selective approach bordering on direct indoctrination rather than one aimed at the dissemination of historical knowledge. The history curriculum has been turned into a political manifesto serving the very narrow political interests of a small political elite. The implication for South Africa is that as a late de-coloniser, it can learn from Zimbabwe about the dangers of subjugating the history curriculum to the political imperatives of ruling regimes. The obvious danger of any history curriculum that is politically subordinate, as in Zimbabwe, is that it does not produce critical history graduates, but instead extremely biased and dangerous citizens who cannot embrace difference and diversity.

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<sup>15</sup> Sikhumbuzo Ndiweni, the ZANU-PF Information and Publicity Secretary for Bulawayo, argued that "The mistake the ruling party made was to allow colleges and universities to be turned into anti-government mentality factories."

The issues raised above indicate the dangers of using a curriculum to promote values and a particular character. The key challenge relates to whose values are to be promoted, and what type of character must be created. Many governments worldwide have manipulated the curriculum and aligned it to their own particular political agendas. In a multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-tribal society such as South Africa's, is it possible to promote common values? Are the concerns with values in reality an attempt by one generation to think for another? The Zimbabwean example demonstrates how the nationalist elite with liberation war credentials is working very hard to inculcate its ideologies in the youth through National Youth Services Training. The character that is created must be obedient and grateful to the heroes of the liberation. It must worship the nationalist elite and view them as the correct leadership for Zimbabwe even if their shortcomings are obvious and dangerous in a world of diversity. This creates the problem of the dominant classes or social groups attempting to inculcate their values and ideologies in others by perverting the curriculum. Even South Africa's quest to produce democratic citizens through the curriculum raises the question of who decides what the key elements of democratic citizenship are. Amy Guttmann argues that the values must descend from the state, the parents and the professional educators, as well as from the citizens in general.<sup>1612</sup> The attempt to promote particular values and shape a particular character works against the notion of autonomy and choice, and tends to magnify power. Smith was not very far from the truth when he stated that:

We need to move to a simpler view of autonomy as comprising an understanding of where power over us is held and how it is maintained and exercised, together with a degree of ability to act in concert with each other to take back that power and control our own lives.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, political elites use the curriculum to safeguard their power. This is a point also emphasised by Basil Bernstein when he defines curriculum as a 'message system'. Bernstein demonstrates how shifts, ruptures and dislocations at the societal, political, educational and pedagogical level manifest as reconstructions at curriculum level.<sup>1814</sup>

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16 A Guttmann, *Democratic Education*, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1987), pp. 41-42.

17 R Smith, 'The Education of Autonomous Citizens', D. Bridges (ed.), *Education, autonomy and democratic citizenship: Philosophy in a changing world*, (Routledge, London, 1997), p. 136.

18 B Bernstein, 'Pedagogising knowledge: Studies in recontextualisation' in *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research critique* (Taylor Francis, London, 1996).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion it can be said that the curriculum is a lever of society. It is an ideological tool and is shot through with power relations, and hence cannot escape from shaping and socialising citizens through the promotion of values and by moulding character. This realisation is significant for history teaching in the community, because awareness of the dangers of subjecting a curriculum to narrowly defined political ideologies can help those who plan the curriculum to be critical of their own contributions. Indeed, curriculum has a hegemonic purpose and is inextricably intertwined with the imperatives of nation-building and power construction. The current age of cosmopolitanism is viewed as a challenge by some governments such as the government of Zimbabwe, which is trying to resist globalisation by resorting to orthodox nationalism. In the process, the curriculum becomes a battlefield of political contests as the ruling parties want the curriculum to carry their political heritage into the future. South Africa's attempt to make liberal democracy a common value is also caught up in a contradiction - it is trying to promote individual autonomy and at the same time is emphasising common values.

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