Curriculum Reform for Social Justice: A Critical Policy Historiography of Transformation in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa

Godsend Tawanda Chimbi*[a] & Loyiso C. Jita[b]

* Corresponding author
E-mail: Chimbi.GT@ufs.ac.za

a. Department of Curriculum Studies and Higher Education, Faculty of Education, University of the Free State, Phuthaditjhaba, South Africa.

b. Natural Sciences and Technology Education, Faculty of Education, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

The call for social justice in education has been echoed across the globe for many decades. However, the dual hatchets of racial and social-class segregation have refused to be buried in the 21st century. Inequalities within and across nations remain pervasive and conspicuous. Tapping into the framework of policy genealogy, this theoretical qualitative historiography teases the evolution of curriculum reform in three post-colonial states – Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa. These three nations share a common legacy of British colonialism and unequal access to education anchored in race, social class, gender and other manifestations of injustice. Using primary and secondary documents available in the public domain, the paper traces and juxtaposes post-colonial curriculum policies initiated in search for social justice and how these policies were implemented at school and classroom levels. The grounded theory emerging from this policy historiography is that the genealogy of curriculum reform policies was dictated by historical circumstances and the unique context of each country, rather than deliberate policy sharing among decision-makers in the three post-colonial states. Although reform policy espouses equitable education, the attainment of social justice in the three nations remains largely a mirage. Only children of the new Black elite are enjoying the fruits of post-colonial curriculum reform by attending expensive and generously resourced former White-only schools, but the poor majority remain marginalised in poorly resourced schools. This study recommends collaboration among policy makers in the three nations so that policy talk may be translated into policy action.

KEYWORDS

Critical policy; curriculum reform; historiography; policy genealogy; post-colonial states; social justice.

INTRODUCTION

The dual hatchets of racism and social class, and the inequalities they promote within and across nations, have refused to be buried in the 21st century. Tremendous strides were made in the second half of the 20th century to dismantle institutionalised injustices for marginalised people. But the May 2020 murder of George Floyd in the United States and the international protests that followed bear testimony to the existence of multifaceted and simmering socio-racial disparities and tensions in many countries. History, race and social class continue to anchor inequality, injustice and uneven opportunities to learn in many education systems across the globe (Anderson, 2022; Anand & Hsu, 2020; Darolia, 2020; DeMatthews, 2018; Moloi, 2019; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Welborn et al., 2019). Consequently, the search for social justice demands immediate attention and action in educational research.

Despite the proliferation of multifarious curriculum reform policies that speak against discrimination and vouch for social justice, many nations continue to be haunted by the ghosts of injustice and inequitable education systems. Pigott et al. (2021) asked a germane question that pricks the conscience of policy makers and reform implementation scholars:

If our research endeavors are not effectively combating racism in education, providing help as our schools refashion themselves for remote and hybrid teaching, or supporting schools in other ways to address the myriad of equity gaps they face, then what are we doing? (p. vii).

Of course, there are no easy answers to this benign question, causing curriculum reform scholars to peek into the rearview mirror and examine how policy changes have evolved over time and hit (or missed) the target of social justice in education. The shift to computer-based online learning further exposes some previously camouflaged inequalities among learners from different socio-economic strata within and across nations (Gustafsson & Deliwe, 2020; Johnson & Tawfik, 2022; Mhlanga & Tankiso Moloi, 2020). Gibbs (2020, p. 98) points out that "there are wide gaps and omissions in state-sanctified curriculum that leaves out people of colour and women." The term "people of colour" is used to refer to Blacks, people of mixed races and other minorities that are not classified as White.

At independence, the new governments in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa committed themselves to transformation and social justice for the Black majority and other minority groups who were denied education under colonial rule (Bantwini & Feza, 2017; Khama, 2018; Mavhunga, 2014). To garner popular support, the post-colonial governments in the three former British colonies promised education for all and social justice through curriculum reform. Lesotho was the first to gain independence, in 1966. Zimbabwe followed in 1980, with South Africa being the last to be liberated, in 1994. One wonders whether the call for equity and social justice in education was mere political sloganeering or a genuine commitment to social transformation and the improvement of the lives of the marginalised majority.

Gale (2001, p. 386) viewed curriculum reform policies as "temporary settlements" often passed to cool down political tempers, with no genuine obligation to implementation by the policy makers. Reform policies are negotiated by competing and conflicting stakeholders at

particular historical moments to pacify opposing interest groups. Policy changes, therefore, are crafted on shifting sands rather than sedentary rock boulders. In the same vein, Regmi (2019) argued that educational changes serve "a political purpose, constructing particular meanings and signs that work to mask social conflict" (p. 68). Though officially presented as neutral documents, reform policies are bound to benefit some social/racial groups more than others when implemented.

The critical policy historiography presented in this paper will not only tease out the assumption that reform policies are temporary settlements. It will go further to trace patterns and divergences in the evolution of curriculum reform policies in pursuit of social justice in independent Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa. An introspective assessment will mull whether the goal for social justice is being attained or whether it remains a mirage in the desert – constantly drifting away from those pursuing it.

Objectives of the Study

A substantial amount of literature exists on post-colonial curriculum reforms in Lesotho (Khama, 2018; Makumane & Ngcobo, 2021; Raselimo & Mahao, 2015; Tlali, 2018), Zimbabwe (Mavhunga, 2014; Runhare & Muvirimi, 2017; Sibanda & Young, 2019; Zhang & Alwang, 2019) and South Africa (Du Plessis & Marais 2015; Jansen, 2002; McKeever, 2017; Moloi, 2019; Moses et al., 2017; Ndimande, 2016). Although all these studies are country specific in focus, Chisholm and Leyendecker (2009) and Kanjee et al. (2010) have engaged in multi-country comparisons of post-colonial curriculum reforms in sub-Saharan Africa. Significant comparative studies have also been conducted on curriculum reform in Zimbabwe and South Africa (Kallaway, 2005; Pape, 1998; Stenvoll-Wells, & Sayed, 2012; Zezekwa et al., 2013). However, only a single comparative study on curriculum change in Lesotho and Zimbabwe has been attempted by Ansell (2002). No comparative research on post-colonial education reform in Lesotho and South Africa was found on Google Scholar. Furthermore, no tripartite comparative studies have juxtaposed the evolution of curriculum transformation (in search for social justice) in independent Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa. This is the gap which the current critical policy historiography seeks to fill.

The objective of the current study is twofold: (1) to trace common patterns and divergences in the genealogical evolution of curriculum reform policy in pursuit of social justice; and (2) to assess the attainment of social justice for the previously segregated Black majority and other minority groups in three Southern African states. Guided by these objectives, two research questions brace-up this historiographical study on curriculum reform policy in the three post-colonial polities:

- How do historical anecdotes shape the policy genealogy of curriculum reform in post-colonial Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa?
- To what extent is social justice in education being attained in these three countries?

Contextualising Education for Social Justice

Multiple constructs are attached to education for social justice. Terms associated with the search for equitable education include anti-racist education, multi-cultural education, education for democracy, education for liberation, social reconstructionist education, and pedagogy of discomfort (Gibbs, 2020; Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2016; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Zeichner, 2011). Although there are nuanced differences among these constructs, a common thread is the desire to remedy injustices of the past and create equal educational opportunities for marginalised social groups. According to Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017), "[s]ocial justice is commonly understood as the principles of 'fairness' and 'equality' for all people and respect for their basic human rights" (p. xix). Some scholars have questioned the meaning of fairness, equality, respect and basic human rights. This paper has no intentions to muddle in definitions, as it recognises the multiple dimensions of social justice and the complex nature equity in education takes in the 21st century.

Scholars of social justice and curriculum reform have agreed that education must reduce inequalities between children from impoverished backgrounds and those from the middle and upper classes by equalising access and the curriculum offered. However, the quest for social justice goes beyond schooling and instruction to include access to food, shelter, healthcare, transport, employment and other basic human rights (Darolia, 2020; Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2016; Moloi, 2019; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Like other policy reforms, social justice is easier to talk about than implement. The policy–practice gap is more pronounced in post-colonial societies where values associated with race, colour, creed and class were entrenched under colonialism and the neo-colonial aftermath (Moloi, 2019; Runhare & Muvirimi, 2017). This study images social justice in education as policy reforms and efforts post-colonial governments in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa initiated to redress unequal educational opportunities afforded to marginalised Black people.

Conceptual Framework: Policy Genealogy

This historiographical study is couched within the conceptual framework of policy genealogy. Policy genealogy is a theory developed by Michael Foucault (1972) in his seminal work *The archaeology of knowledge.* The framework was elucidated by Dreyfus and Rabinow (1986), Gale (2001) and Regmi (2019). The term *genealogy* is borrowed from Biblical studies to trace the relationships between past and present family generations. Gale (2001) explained that policy genealogy aims at examining how the past influences the shaping of contemporary educational policy by creating connections between "social actors' engagement with policy … the stories they tell about policy and the data used to tell them" (p. 379). The aim is to pick on continuities and disruptions (changes) between current policies and the past that influences them.

Dreyfus and Rabinow (1986) cautioned that policy genealogy should not be misconstrued to mean the simple discovery of continuities between past and present curriculum policies, because "genealogy seeks out discontinuities where others found continuous development" (p. 2). Thus, policy genealogy seeks deeper and critical insights into the evolution of reform policy

rather than superficial connections between chronologically and seemingly related developments. Foucault (1972) pointed out that "what emerges out of this [policy analysis] is something one might call a genealogy, or rather a multiplicity of genealogical researches, a painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts" (p. 22). This caveat implies that while genealogically related policies may appear to be working in harmony, dissonances are always embedded in them – and these may not be visible to the uninitiated eye.

Policy genealogy was deemed an appropriate conceptual framework for tracing the evolution of curriculum reforms in post-colonial Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa. The framework teases how colonial policies of inequality and injustice permeated the negotiation and crafting of new curriculum changes in novel post-colonial settings. This conceptual frame forewarns researchers to take closer insights at what may be misconstrued as reform when it is perpetuation of inequalities of the past. Policy genealogy recognises Gale's (2001, p. 386) observation that curriculum reforms are often "temporary settlements" with no genuine commitment to implementation. The theory also guards against the superficial tracing of reform policies for continuity when deeper insights may reflect a significant break with the past. This allows for the interrogation of Regmi's (2019) contentious proposition that curriculum reforms "work to mask social conflict" (p. 68). The conceptual framework of policy genealogy works in unison with qualitative policy historiography – the selected methodological approach for this study.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative policy historiography to trace the evolution of post-colonial curriculum reform in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa. In this qualitative desk-top research, data generation and analysis took place concurrently and iteratively across different levels.

Level 1: Primary sources

The initial search and analysis focused on primary documents which shaped the transformation of curriculum reform policy in the three territories under review. These primary documents, available in the public domain, were obtained through Google Search. The post-colonial constitutions of the three countries were scrutinised for sections that guide education transformation. Reports from the ministries/departments of education, reform policy statements, commissioned inquiries, census data and reports, and other public records on school reform were collected and analysed.

Primary data yielded unadulterated documentary evidence on curriculum reforms legislated after independence and statistical evidence on progress (or lack of it) in the provision of equitable education for social justice in the three countries. Primary documents enabled us to assess whether the previously marginalised social groups benefited from the education policies pronounced in the post-colonial era.

Level 2: Secondary sources

Secondary sources (books and journal articles) were collected and analysed under Level 2. These were obtained from Google Scholar using the following topic descriptors: post-colonial education reform in Southern Africa; curriculum reform in Lesotho/Zimbabwe/South Africa; and education for social justice in Lesotho/Zimbabwe/South Africa. Comparative searches were also performed for studies which contrasted curriculum reforms in Lesotho and Zimbabwe, Lesotho and South Africa, and South Africa and Zimbabwe. No study was found contrasting the three countries.

A search on Google Scholar using the keywords 'Curriculum reform in South Africa' (without time limitation) yielded 365 000 articles and books. But only 26 800 and 10 600 sources were obtained on 'Curriculum reform in Zimbabwe' and 'Curriculum reform in Lesotho', respectively. Jeater (2018) discussed the dearth of literature in accredited journals by Black Zimbabweans on post-colonial education reforms in their country. She found that most Zimbabwean academics find it difficult to publish in internationally accredited journals due to over-dependency on the largely discredited positivist epistemology, poor utilisation of theory as a tool for analysis, and mediocre writing skills. Most of the literature available on Google Scholar on post-colonial reform policy in Zimbabwe has largely been published by non-Zimbabwean academics and a few Zimbabweans in the diaspora. By comparison, "there were more articles from scholars based in South Africa in Journal of Southern African Studies in the period 2005-15 than from any other nation" (Jeater, 2018, p. 12). Khama (2018) partly explained why literature on curriculum reforms in Lesotho is so scant, observing that "British colonial authorities neglected the national productive capacity of Lesotho and encouraged continuous dependence on South Africa in all aspects of education" (p. 17). Up to the present day, Lesotho is struggling to wean itself from South Africa.

Level 3: Source reduction

At Level 3, the secondary sources obtained from Google Scholar were reduced to manageable levels using the time factor. Except in cases where sources were considered ground-breaking, books and journal articles written before the year 2000 were excluded as they were considered outdated. Keywords 'curriculum reform for social justice' were also used and abstracts and introductions carefully perused to trim down the sources to a manageable set of 20 secondary sources on South Africa, 14 on Zimbabwe and 10 on Lesotho. Two journal articles focusing on curriculum reform policy in sub-Saharan and Southern Africa were also utilised in this historiographical study.

Level 4: Higher order analysis

The primary documents and secondary sources selected at Level 3 were cross-examined and analysed at Level 4. Gale (2001) advised that two key questions guide critical policy historiography as a method for policy analysis: "what are the complexities in these coherent accounts of policy; and what do these reveal about who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by these arrangements?" (p. 385). Partly informed by Gale (2001), the following questions were

developed to illuminate the higher order analysis at Level 4: Why were the reforms initiated? How were they implemented? Which internal contradictions emerged? Who benefited? and Who was disadvantaged?

To answer these pertinent questions, data from primary/policy documents and secondary sources were triangulated in search of convergences, divergences, paradoxes and policy–practice gaps (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Data were analysed and interpreted using inductive and deductive reasoning, content analysis and intra-case and cross-case analyses. Similar data were grouped together and categorised into emerging themes (Creswell, 2013). Themes emerging from the higher order analysis were used to anchor the presentation and discussion of findings in the next section.

FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

This critical policy historiography uses the policy genealogy framework to trace the evolution of post-colonial curriculum reform in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa, three countries that share a common legacy of British colonialism. An analysis of primary reform policy documents and related secondary sources from the three polities reflects commonalities as well as diversities. This presentation and discussion is guided by three major themes: inequality in diverse settings; waves of reform/policy genealogy; and the quest for social justice.

Inequality in diverse settings

Although Lesotho, South Africa and Zimbabwe share a common legacy of British imperialism, the colonisers did not practise a uniform educational policy across the three territories. Besides the common elements of racial segregation and uneven opportunities in favour of White people, colonial education for Africans in the three countries had marked differences. Khama (2018) observed that "Britain was a reluctant coloniser and never wanted Lesotho as its colony" (p. 17). The British made Lesotho a protectorate to check out Boer expansionism from the Orange Free State. Consequently, the little education there was for Africans was in the hands of missionaries, because "British colonial authorities encouraged [Lesotho's] continuous dependence on South Africa in all aspects of education" (Khama, 2018, p. 17). Thus, when Lesotho gained independence (on a silver platter) in 1966, the country only had rudimentary education for Africans.

It is ironic that Zimbabwe and South Africa had better developed education systems for Africans at independence (compared to Lesotho). The former only gained independence 14 and 28 years after the latter (respectively) – and only after protracted armed struggles between the Black majority and White minority regimes. Zimbabwe and South Africa had evolved into settler colonies, after their large White populations rebelled against Britain's overlordship. As a result, the White settler governments in Zimbabwe and South Africa had more control over African education.

Despite the diverse settings and different timeframes in the attainment of independence, racial segregation and educational inequality were the hallmarks of the colonial

legacy. Some statistical evidence may help illustrate the educational injustices inherited by the Black governments. In the 1977–78 financial year, the Rhodesian Government (in what became Zimbabwe in 1980) spent 490 Rhodesian dollars on the education of each White child and a paltry 44 dollars on the African child (Riddell, 1980). Out of 1000 Black children in colonial Rhodesia, 250 never went to school and 750 entered Grade 1. However, of these 750, only 337 completed primary education (Zvobgo, 1994), 60 went to secondary school, 3 progressed to Form 6, and just 1 entered university.

A similar scenario played out in South Africa. The 1996 Census showed that nearly 25% of Africans had no formal education and the average education for Africans was primary school. In contrast, almost 25% of White students had some post-secondary education and their median education level was high school (Statistics South Africa, 1999). In 1994, the apartheid government spent 4772 South African rand (ZAR) per year on each White student and only ZAR1600 on each Black student (Pape, 1998).

Statistical evidence on colonial expenditure on African education in Lesotho was difficult to come by. Nonetheless, Muzvidziwa and Seotsanyana (2002) pointed out that:
The curricula and subject content taught in Lesotho schools was modelled along the lines of the Cape Province of South Africa Department of Education. This model was meant to advance white supremacy and to serve the interests of a white minority …. (p. 5)

It is not surprising, therefore, that the clarion call for social justice in education was loud in all three countries at independence. The new Black governments appeared to have no choice but to heed this call, or at least pretend to.

Waves of reform and policy genealogy

After independence, a plethora of reform policies were either legislated or imposed in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa. In some cases, policy changes were disseminated into schools and only legalised later by acts of parliament. Table 1 juxtaposes the genealogy of curriculum reform in each of the three countries.

Common policy trajectories

Table 1 shows that there are some common policies which were adopted in the three countries, although the timeframes differ. For example, Zimbabwe introduced EFA in 1980 and Lesotho adopted FPE some 20 years later – both in pursuit of social justice for the disadvantaged Black majority and other minority groups. However, there are some reform policies that synchronise in focus and timing across the two nations. For instance, Zimbabwe introduced EWP in 1980, with Lesotho following suit with ESR and EWP in 1982. We argue that this policy planning and sharing between the two post-colonial states was not deliberate but dictated by common historical circumstances. These common policy changes were a product of colonial injustice, educational inequality and the common problems of unemployment and underdevelopment the two nations faced (and still face). Furthermore, in the 1980s, socialist policies (such as ESR and EWP) were viewed by politicians/policy makers as the panacea to third-world countries' economic problems.

Table 1.

Policy genealogy in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa

Lesotho	Zimbabwe	South Africa
1970 First Five-Year Development Plan	**1980** Education for All (EFA) & Education with Production (EWP)	**1997** Outcomes-Based Education (OBE)
1971 Education Order No. 32	**1981** Zim-Science	**1998** Curriculum 2005 (C2005)
1978 First National Education Reform	**1987** Political Economy	**2010** National Curriculum Statement (NCS)
1982 Education for Self-Reliance (ESR) & Education with Production (EWP)	**1990** New History Syllabus	**2012** Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)
1988 Second National Education Reform	**1998** Commission of Inquiry into Education & Training (CIET)	
2000 Free Primary Education (FPE)	**2017** New Curriculum Framework (2015–2022)	
2009 Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP)		

The three countries also share similar policy trajectories which guide current curriculum reform. Lesotho introduced CAP in 2009, South Africa adopted CAPS in 2012, and Zimbabwe disseminated the New Curriculum Framework in 2017. The central foci in these three policy reforms (currently being implemented) are the decolonisation of the curriculum, facilitation of learner-centric pedagogy and empowerment of learners with the 21st century skills of problem-solving, creativity, tolerance and collaboration (Lesotho. MOET, 2009; UMALUSI, 2014; Zimbabwe. MOPSE, 2015). Though there are contextual variations (due to unique geographical and historical settings), these curriculum reforms reflect common challenges and vision in the three neighbouring states. The following sub-sections present a case-by-case analysis of policy genealogy in the three polities since independence.

Lesotho: Wrestling with church hegemony

In 1966, the Lesotho Government inherited an education system that was exclusively in the hands of missionaries (Khalanyane, 1995). Expectations of radical reforms in education were high, as education was perceived as a tool for national transformation. "More importantly, taking control of education and the management of schools was the government's top priority in its reforms," remarked Khama (2018, p. 15). In pursuit of this objective, the government developed the First Five-Year Development Plan (1970–1975), which emphasised education for national development (Government of Lesotho, 1970). The plan culminated in the legislation of Education Order No. 32 of 1971, which provided for the control of education by the government. Public frustration with slow progress in educational transformation resulted in the

First National Education Reform (dubbed National Dialogue on Education) of 1978 to resolve the church–state conflict. Muzvidziwa and Seotsanyana (2002) reported that: "The First National Educational Reform conference was a total failure as churches, the actual proprietors of schools, snarled against government proposals …. They interpreted the proposed changes as undermining their authority and hence were not prepared to cooperate" (p. 9). Not much was achieved, and most schools remained under church control.

The policy of ESR and EWP was introduced in 1982. "But this reform never materialised and was eventually abandoned due to lack of commitment on the part of the leadership" (Khama, 2018, p. 26). In 1988, the Second National Education Reform conference was convened in Maseru, the capital of Lesotho. Proposed legislation was aborted, as churches resisted state control of education (Muzvidziwa & Seotsanyana, 2002). Again, government attempts to restructure and transform the education system were a fiasco.

In 2000, the Lesotho Government shifted its focus to universal primary education by adopting FPE. However, the policy was only legislated in the Education Act (No. 3 of 2010) (Lesotho, 2010) because of resistance from the churches and opposition political parties. The policy on free and compulsory primary education was the major deliberate attempt by the Lesotho Government to achieve EFA and work towards social justice in education. In 2002, Muzvidziwa and Seotsanyana (2002) estimated that a third of school-going children in Lesotho were not in school. Two decades later, not much has changed – as attested by Makumane and Ngcobo (2021), who stressed that "different curricula have been introduced, although with little success" (p. 1).

Zimbabwe: Shooting in the dark

In Zimbabwe, there was no systematic planning of curriculum reforms in the first 10 or so years after independence. "The political mood in the early days of independence did not give policy formulators and implementers much room to rationally examine and debate the policies of the ruling party that were imposed on national government," remarked Zvobgo (1999, p. 115). Mavhunga (2014) added: "The government was in a hurry to reform the colonial curriculum, leaving very little room for planning" (p. 20). Political excitement and expediency spearheaded curriculum reform to please the previously disadvantaged Black majority and other minority groups.

The Zimbabwe Government introduced EFA and EWP in 1980, in line with the declared socialist ideology (Jansen, 1991). The Zimbabwe-Science (ZIMSCI) Project and the abortive Political Economy of Zimbabwe (PEZ) followed in 1981 and 1987, respectively (Zvobgo, 1999). After a six-year confrontation between conservative and progressive historians, a new secondary school history curriculum, with strong socialist inclinations, was introduced in 1990 (Chitate, 2005; Moyo, 2014). However, this change was short-lived, as the syllabus was unceremoniously removed by the government and replaced with a damp squid history curriculum in 2002.

The most significant curriculum reform initiative in independent Zimbabwe is, arguably, the CIET, set up in 1998. The CIET recommendations were not implemented, as Zimbabwe's economy collapsed at the turn of the 21st century because of the controversial land reform, the politics of patronage, corruption and dictatorship under the geriatric Robert Mugabe. Mavhunga (2014) remarked that:

Evaluations and observations of the situation on the ground indicate that while a measure of success has been realised through these innovations, a considerable number of these have collapsed, while others are struggling to have a foothold on the curriculum. (p. 13)

In January 2017, the Zimbabwe Government rolled out the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015–2022 (Zimbabwe. MOPSE, 2015). "The return of school reforms suggests that the [previous] reforms have failed to remove the problems they were intended to solve," observed Cuban (1990, p. 5). One has no choice but to agree with this seasoned observation.

South Africa: Attempts at systematic reform

Although post-apartheid curriculum reform in South Africa appears to be better organised and more scientifically informed (compared to Zimbabwe and Lesotho), it has had its own share of controversy. The first post-apartheid reform initiative was OBE of 1997, which was implemented more directly in 1998 as C2005 (Du Plessis & Marais 2015). Jansen and Taylor (2003) saw C2005 as "a strongly progressivist curriculum, based on constructivist epistemology" (p. 38). However, Khumalo (2014) remarked that the cascade model used by the Department of Education to in-service practising teachers was largely seen as ineffective. A review of C2005 resulted in the NCS of 2010 (South Africa. DoE, 2011). A review of the NCS brought in CAPS in 2012 –the current policy document guiding curriculum reform in South Africa.

But reform implementation scholars have been asking: Why one reform policy after another in such a short space of time? Jansen (2002, p. 199) used the lens of "political symbolism" to explain why reform policy has largely failed to bring the anticipated changes in post-apartheid South Africa. Political symbolism views educational reforms as political lip-service initiated by politicians to silence dissenting voices, so that they enjoy popular support, without any real commitment to implementation. Jansen's hypothesis is echoed by Regmi (2019), who postulated that curriculum reform serves "a political purpose, constructing particular meanings and signs that work to mask social conflict" (p. 68). The political spinning of curriculum reform policy reduces reform implementation to a mirage – making the search for social justice a wild goose chase.

The quest for social justice

The quest for social justice in education faces multiple challenges in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa mainly because of the loop-sided education system (in favour of the White population) inherited from colonialism. Although government policy in the three countries publicly purports to stand for equitable education (regardless of race or class), the new Black political and economic elite have also perpetuated educational inequality in the post-colonial

era (Colclough & Lewin, 1993). This has complicated and undermined the quest for social justice, as the (supposedly) Black liberators have (in some instances) turned out to be the new oppressors of the Black majority.

Lesotho: Sluggish progress

The search for social justice in education in Lesotho started at a very slow pace, because the government's major concern after independence was to wrestle education from church hegemony and place it under state control (Khama, 2018; Muzvidziwa & Seotsanyana, 2002). As already shown in this paper, government efforts were thwarted by the church in many instances, creating a lot of tension between the church and the state. This undermined government efforts to pursue education for all and an equitable education system. It was only in 2000 (some 34 years after independence) that the Government of Lesotho introduced free and compulsory primary education. Contrarily, in Zimbabwe and South Africa, ground-breaking reform policies post-independence democratised education for the Black majority and other minority groups, as the new governments actively pursued policies of education for all and social justice. As such, 55 years after independence, not much progress has been made to attain equitable education and social justice in Lesotho.

In response to the failure of previous reforms and demands of the 21st century, Lesotho introduced CAP in 2009. CAP seeks to address the socio-economic challenges the country is facing, which include poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation and HIV/AIDS (Lesotho. MOET, 2009). To achieve these goals, CAP advocates for learner-centred and integrated methodologies that equip learners with skills, attitudes and competencies to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Whether CAP will attain the goals it targets remains to be seen. However, research by Makumane and Ngcobo (2021) already recommends a review of the CAP framework so that it includes some omitted concepts. According to these scholars, "the policy should clearly outline the role of educators as interpreters and designers of learning programmes and the competencies embedded within this role" (Makumane & Ngcobo, 2021, p. 5). There is consensus that, although several curriculum reforms have been attempted since independence in 1966, these changes have had little success (Makumane & Ngcobo, 2021; Raselimo & Mahao, 2015). Khama (2018) explained unapologetically: "The post-independence changes have been minimal and cosmetic – the focus of Lesotho's education system still remains largely elitist and irrelevant to the needs of Basotho" (p. 30). Thus, the goal of social justice remains unattained.

Zimbabwe: The tragic story

Zimbabwe's search for social justice is a typical tragedy with a happy beginning and a sad ending. At independence in 1980, the new government openly declared its intention to create a just and egalitarian society (Mungazi 1985; Nhundu, 1992). EFA, introduced in 1980, was the most celebrated curriculum reform policy in post-colonial Zimbabwe. The policy was later legitimised by the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe, 1982a) and the Education Act (Zimbabwe, 1982b) that made primary school tuition free for all learners, irrespective of race, age, gender and social

class. In reality, this was meant to benefit the Black majority, marginalised under colonialism for close to a century. All Grade 7 school leavers were to go to secondary school – even if they had failed the exams. Before independence, only 7.8% of African students progressed to secondary school (Zhang & Alwang, 2019).

EFA had an impressive track record in the first decade after independence. Primary school enrolment increased from 750 000 in 1979 to 2.2 million in 1990. Secondary school enrolment increased from 50 000 to more than 900 000 in the same period. Zimbabwe achieved the highest literacy rate (of around 90 percent) in sub-Saharan Africa (Narman, 2003). Attainment of social justice in education appeared feasible. However, behind this curtain of success, EFA "created a new form of inequality among the African population, a system of bad schools for the poor majority and good schools for the rich" (Colclough & Lewin, 1993, p. 109). Children of the new Black elite went to well-resourced former White-only schools with exorbitant fees. Conversely, children of the poor Black majority and other minority groups attended poorly resourced and overcrowded government schools in rural and urban areas.

The gains made in the quest for education for social justice were eroded when the Zimbabwean economy collapsed due to bad governance, corruption, politics of patronage and the controversial land reform programme. Welborn et al. (2019) observed that "Zimbabweans have endured recurring economic and political crises and a dramatic deterioration of livelihoods that have intensified sharply since 2000" (p. 2). Estimates are that 40% of the Zimbabwean population (7.3 million) live below the extreme poverty line of US$1.90 per day (Welborn et al., 2019, p. 8). Poverty remains chronic in urban and rural areas, scuttling efforts to attain social justice for learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. Consequently, some children in urban and rural areas no longer go to school because parents can no longer afford school fees, uniforms and basic food provisions.

South Africa: The elusive search continues

Given South Africa's brutalised past because of apartheid, calls for social justice have been louder compared to Lesotho and Zimbabwe. At policy level, the post-apartheid South African Government has taken some bold steps to correct the injustices of the past. One aim of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) is "to heal divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and human rights" (South Africa, 1996a, p. 3). Social justice and equity are among the 10 fundamental values of the Revised National Curriculum Statement of 2002 (South Africa. DoE, 2002). The South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) states that all learners must have access to basic education without any segregation (South Africa, 1996b). To make this possible, Section 39(7) of the South African Schools Act classifies schools into five quintiles for funding purposes (South Africa. DBE, 2003). Quintiles 1 to 3 represent poor schools, with Quintile 1 being the poorest. Nationally, 60% of public-school learners (mainly Black) attend quintiles 1 to 3 schools, so they do not pay tuition fees (Bantwini & Feza, 2017, p. 313). Quintiles 4 and 5 schools are better resourced and learners

pay fees. Although poor schools receive a larger government subsidy, the quintile system seems to reinforce existing inequalities.

Thus, close to three decades after independence, conspicuous disparities still exist between the education of the rich and the poor. Statistics South Africa (2017) revealed that 54% of South Africans (over 30.4 million) lived in poverty. Children in this category attend poorly resourced schools in townships, farms and rural areas. Moses et al. (2017) observed that "[b]y Grade 9, learners in poor (mostly Black) schools, have a backlog of approximately 3.5 years relative to their rich school counterparts" (p. 3). This reflects sharp differences between educational and employment prospects for children from affluent and those from poor backgrounds. McKeever (2017) remarked that "South Africa consistently ranks as one of the most unequal countries in the world, with many arguing that the country represents both a developed and developing country" (p. 114). The deep-rooted inequalities created by apartheid continue to overshadow post-apartheid curriculum reforms, making social justice a mirage.

CONCLUSIONS

This tripartite critical policy historiography has shown that post-colonial curriculum reforms in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa are a response to a shared legacy of injustice, inequality, underdevelopment, and a largely irrelevant curriculum inherited from British colonial rule. There was little deliberate exchange of ideas among policy reformers, but historical circumstances in the three post-colonial nations dictated the evolution of similar policy genealogies. Although the three nations gained independence at different times, their colonial inheritance appeared to have more commonalities (than divergencies), as the three nations are products of British imperialism. The quest for equitable education systems and education for social justice yielded some of the common reform policies the three nations pursued but with different degrees of vigour, commitment and success, as determined by each nation's unique context and political leadership.

However, the attainment of social justice largely remains a mirage in the three nations. Only children of the new Black elite are enjoying the fruits of post-colonial curriculum reform by attending expensive and generously resourced former White-only schools. Children of the poor Black majority and other minority races remain marginalised in overcrowded and poorly funded educational institutions. Future research can extend the discourse on the search for social justice in education by exploring how funding and learning opportunities can be improved in ill-resourced schools in the townships, farms and rural areas. This study recommends collaboration among policy makers in the three nations to exchange notes on past mistakes and limited successes if social justice is to be institutionalised in the three nations' education systems.

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