

CURRICULUM POLICY AS COMPENSATORY LEGITIMATION? A VIEW FROM THE PERIPHERY

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ABSTRACT

The continuing debate on the relevance and imposition of 'Western theories' for explaining educational policy in the Third World is fascinating on a rhetorical level but lacking in the actual 'testing' of such theories in a cross-national context. Responding to the general debate, and to a particular paper by Hans Weiler included in this issue of the Oxford Review of Education, on curriculum reform in West Germany, this paper explores the utility of the construct of 'compensatory legitimation' for the comparative study of curriculum policy. After demonstrating the limits of existing compensatory strategies for explaining the curriculum policy of Zimbabwe, a new application for the theoretical construct is advanced for post-colonial states. The specific argument of this paper is that socialist curriculum policy, independent of actual curriculum practice, serves as a powerful vehicle for the legitimation of the state in post-colonial societies in the face of unaltered (capitalist) material conditions.

INTRODUCTION

In the growing discontent with the intellectual content and unidirectional flow of "North-South" research exchanges, a central criticism has been the irrelevance and imposition of Western-derived theoretical constructs in the peripheral states of the world system. In the African context writers such as Claude Ake characterised the practice of Social Science as Imperialism [1], Ali Mazrui identified The African University as a Multi-National Corporation [2], and Nnoli calls for "intellectual struggles" to eliminate the imperialist model of Nigerian social science [3]. It behoves African scholars, therefore, to appraise critically the contextual relevance and explanatory power of externally-derived theories which have been fruitfully applied in advanced capitalist states of the

West. In doing so, both the limits and, quite possibly, the extended utility of a theoretical construct may be demonstrated in comparative studies.

Hans Weiler, in his paper in this issue of the Oxford Review of Education, uses the construct of "compensatory legitimation" to explain the failure of curriculum reform in the Federal Republic of Germany. As a subset and outgrowth of Habermas's legitimation theory, this construct has been broadly applied and theoretically refined in Europe and North America. This short paper, designed in part as a response to Weiler's notion of compensatory legitimation, critically examines curriculum policy and practice in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY AS COMPENSATORY LEGITIMATION: REVIEWING THE ARGUMENT

Briefly, the basic thesis of the legitimation theorists is that the modern state faces an increasing problem of legitimacy in relationship to its citizens [4]. According to Habermas [5] the economic crisis of capitalism leads the state to become increasingly involved in managing social and economic problems--only to increase the problem of legitimation. That is, in an effort to maintain power without having to resort to coercion, the state "attempts to compensate for legitimation deficits through conscious manipulation" [6].

Building on this theoretical tradition, Weiler has defined compensatory legitimation as an attempt by the state to retrieve its eroding legitimacy [7]. This construct has been applied in innovative ways to the study of educational policy in advanced capitalist states [8]. The fundamental premise of these applications can be stated as follows:

If the state's behaviour in setting and implementing educational policy is primarily determined by concerns with its own legitimacy and with how to sustain, restore or regain it, then other motivations would of necessity become less significant [9].

In order to attempt this retrieval of legitimacy, certain policy instruments are utilised. Several strategies have already been proposed in Weiler's writings as "preferred instruments" of legitimisation for the modern state vis-a-vis its educational policies: legalisation--the increasing role of judicial decisions in influencing educational policy; expertise--the power and the status conferred on policy decisions when sanctioned by expert studies and experimentation; participation and decentralisation--the involvement of citizen participation as an instrument to restore the legitimacy of the state; and planning--as a manifestation of scientific 'rationality' and objectivity.

Finally, since the manipulation of educational policy for compensatory reasons does not confront the fundamental sources of the state's legitimation problems (classically perceived as the contradiction between distributing the social surplus inequitably and yet legitimately [10], such strategies can be expected to enhance the legitimation problems of the modern state.

THE RELEVANCE OF COMPENSATORY LEGITIMATION FOR DEVELOPING NATIONS

A review of the literature shows that the theoretical advances in and applications of legitimation theory have been made primarily in the context of advanced western capitalist societies. Would the same framework apply in Japan? In developing countries? In the African context? If so, in what form?

A single attempt was made to transfer this theoretical framework to the developing world in a paper by Weiler & Gonzalez [11] in which they found that legalisation, expertise and participation did play important roles in the legitimation of the state in Tanzania and the Philippines. As a result of this transnational application, they also found an additional instrument at work, which they have called external legitimation: "policy strategies which mobilise certain participants in the international system in order to bolster the legitimacy of the state in a given individual society" [12].

There are several concerns which remain in considering and transferring Weilerian instruments to the Zimbabwean context: (a) Zimbabwe has only

recently emerged from independence (1980), so that the pressures on the new state are different from those in long-established capitalist democracies; (b) Zimbabwe has announced itself as a socialist country which stands opposed to colonial and neo-colonial capitalism so that the tension between public rhetoric and objective material conditions may require a very different approach to educational policy decisions; (c) as a developing country Zimbabwe has inherited an underdeveloped capitalist economy, so that the state cannot assume the same conditions for its rule as in advanced capitalist states; and (d) the fragility of the new state in the light of "politicised ethnicities" [13] and the regional threat of apartheid [14] suggests a greater role for coercive authority than legitimation through manipulation of educational policy.

Our initial analysis points to (1) the relevance as well as limits of Weilerian categories in the Zimbabwean context; and (2) the need for further evidence of the functioning of legitimation in Third World contexts. In terms of legalisation, the case of school integration presents an interesting but very limited application. The Education Act of 1979, for example, was devised by the colonial power to promote a degree of school integration. Its limited intent and effects led the new government to evoke legal means to make school integration a *fait accompli*. However, there is certainly not "a tremendous increase in the role played by legal norms and judicial decisions in shaping educational policy and practice" [15] as in Western capitalist states. Participation as an instrument of legitimation assumes that representation is a problem [16], so that new forms of legitimising curricular goals "are conceived to derive their legitimacy from certain properties of the process of curriculum reform, among which its participatory quality is seen as the most critical" [17]. Centralised curriculum planning in Zimbabwe, on the other hand, assumes that the new state is representative, a perception gained as a result of the successful revolutionary struggle (in the sense of leading to decolonisation) and strengthened by the recent constitution of a *de facto* one-party state uniting rival ZAPU and ZANU parties [18]. The cycles of decentralised planning in independent African states [19], and the emerging evidence of conflict and alienation resulting from centralised models of curriculum

development [20] may in time, however, lead to a more participatory form of curriculum planning.

External legitimation seems to have the strongest theoretical relevance in developing countries, and in Zimbabwe specifically. For example, the Cambridge Overseas Certificate not only serves internal expectations and the state's legitimation needs, but may also reflect a need for the metropole's validation of the quality of Zimbabwe's graduates and, therefore, of the "success" of the state in meeting international standards. Further evidence of the need for such validation is suggested by the heavy dependence of Zimbabwe on international publishing houses and therefore its connection to the global knowledge system [21]. Finally, the increasing involvement of international donors--such as the expertise provided by the Swedish International Development Association (SIDA) may satisfy further needs for external validation.

Beyond the limits of Weilerian categories for the African setting, are there other instruments of compensatory legitimation which may apply in such contexts?

'DEFENSIVE RADICALISM' AS AN INSTRUMENT OF COMPENSATORY LEGITIMATION

As Zimbabwe approaches the end of its first decade of independence, there is an uncomfortable but emerging consensus across perspectives that there remains a considerable gap between socialist policy and social practice [22]. Worse, there is also a sense that even the preliminary conditions for the "transition to socialism" in practice has not been laid down. Several commentators point to the inherited structural conditions, ethnic rivalry, international capitalism and regional conflict as conditions undermining socialist practice. Others note the reversal of initial gains in what seemed to be a socially directed policy and practice (such as the expanded educational system). The concentrated focus on outcomes, or the lack thereof, has left open a fairly fundamental question: Why, if social practice negates official policy, and if no groundwork is being laid for the transition, does the state

maintain a radical socialist policy? In other words, what is to be gained from persistent adherence to a radical social policy?

Claude Ake [23] provides a particularly perceptive analysis of the underlying problem facing the African state:

It is clear that the new rulers could not meet the pressure for participation or the demand for welfare in a manner compatible with the maintenance of existing relations of production and their privileges. And insofar as they could not solve these two problems, they were in no position to solve the problems of authority and integration.

Therefore, as an attempt at compensating for these deficits, African states formulate and extol an ideology--normally one or other variant of socialism--which is the antithesis of colonial capitalism. According to Ake, this is not surprising since ideology is existentially determined, i.e. it is derived from the objective conditions of colonial rule and inheritance of its institutions. The propagation of a radical ideology in new states in order to legitimise its rule and activities in the face of unaltered material conditions, is what Ake calls 'defensive radicalism'. But such a strategy creates further problems for "to purchase legitimacy by defensive radicalism is to establish a new criterion of regime performance and legitimacy which becomes a constraint on the regime" [24]. It is the theoretical potential of defensive radicalism as an instrument of compensatory legitimation that leads us to explore its operation in the curriculum policy of post-colonial Zimbabwe.

CURRICULUM POLICY AS DEFENSIVE RADICALISM IN ZIMBABWE

When Zimbabwe won formal political independence from settler-colonial rule in 1980, the new state immediately confirmed its commitment to scientific socialism as the basis for the country's development. Since education was a central focus of the revolutionary struggle, it was seen as the key to radical development; according to then-prime minister Mugabe, "Our schools, our

entire educational system, must develop a socialist consciousness among our young people" [25].

The new government gave special attention to curriculum policy as the arena for promoting socialism and creating 'the socialist man'. Parenthetically, Jurgen Habermas specifically identified curriculum planning as an area in which the state seeks legitimation "based on the premise that traditional patterns could as well be otherwise" [26]. While several curriculum plans were developed by the new Curriculum Development Unit, the most ambitious was a programme called "Education With Production" (hereafter referred to as EWP), recommended by the Minister of Education shortly after independence and administered by the Zimbabwe Foundation for Education with Production (or ZIMFEP). It was this innovation which was to demonstrate on an experimental basis the application of socialism to education by reducing the gap between mental and manual labour, fostering co-operative development strategies and increasing productive employment.

Despite the explicit formulation of a socialist curriculum policy displayed in various sources [27] a recent evaluation concluded that "there has so far been no radical transformation of the curriculum to facilitate the achievements of national objectives" [28]. Furthermore, criticisms of curriculum reforms have been severe, described as "cosmetic" [29], "skin deep" [30] and "smacking of retardation" [31].

Since EWP represents not only an arena in which a Zimbabwean socialist curriculum would be designed and tested, but also a curriculum model to be adopted on a nation-wide basis, it makes sense to reflect on this innovation as a case illustrative of curriculum as 'defensive radicalism'.

EWP had several goals: to promote economic development through the provision of skilled labour; to foster self-reliance by exposing students to practical work; to educate the whole person by integrating academic and technical knowledge; to reconcile theory and practice in education by promoting a vocational bias in the curriculum; to erode class divisions by breaking down the distinction between mental and manual labour; and to

promote co-operation through community and group work replacing competitiveness and individualism.

Rather than repeat the well-documented fact that few of these goals have been met in the seven pilot schools, let alone its extension into the national school system, I will focus on the possible reasons for the gap between socialist policy and curriculum practice as exemplified in EWP. One way of approaching the disjunction is to focus on the several contradictions which underlie curriculum reform in Zimbabwe.

First, there are the glaring contradictions in the broader political economy. It is probably safe to assume that this decade will completely pass with Zimbabwe retaining a capitalist economy: 80% of the economy is still foreign-owned and white farmers control 50% of the most suitable arable land. Any notions that a localised pilot project can produce a curriculum that will negate the powerful social and economic arrangements under existing capitalism is pure fantasy. As a Zimbabwean commentator recently observed: "socialist curricula in a capitalist economy will be contradictory and destructive in the long run" [32].

Secondly, and as important, there are contradictions in the educational system itself. Within ZIMFEP schools many subjects are indistinguishable from regular school subjects and a recognised subject hierarchy continues to exist in favour of academic subjects. Also, the strongest determinant of curriculum practice, the examinations, are still based on the British O-level system; this system of evaluation remains despite the devastating results of the Cambridge Examinations--only 20% of students pass. Furthermore, success in the O-level examinations remains "the most important determinant of successful employment in the formal sector, as well as the sole criterion of acceptance into all further educational and training opportunities" [33].

Thirdly, there are contradictions within the state bureaucracy concerning the direction and content of EWP programmes. Within the state apparatus there are those who see such programmes as leading to a lowering of standards, while others in the Ministry of Education are sympathetic to the socialist vision of EWP. Furthermore, many teachers (as servants of the state) employed in

the experimental schools neither support nor understand the philosophy behind the EWP school and curriculum. If judged by the lack of enthusiasm and support for EWP and its expansion, it is clear that the success of the curriculum is not a priority of the state and its declared final outcomes (such as becoming a nation wide programme) are almost certainly politically precarious.

But the evidence suggests not only that EWP as a radical curriculum innovation has not been successful, but that initial signs of a radical departure from the colonial curriculum and capitalist values may be reversed. A teacher and researcher within the EWP system noted the following:

In 1981 ZIMFEP envisioned the schools as miniature socialist states. This would teach the students how to avoid participating in the capitalist economy. By 1984, this idea had been replaced with the concept of production units, miniature companies that would teach the students how to compete in the free market. [34]

Given this curriculum stagnation and reversal from the stated socialist goals, and the fact that the state recently re-instituted the tracked system (vocational and academic) within the national education system, at least some re-consideration of developing and implementing a socialist curriculum would be expected. On the contrary, the state continues to hold forth its commitment to socialist education in the face of social contradictions and curriculum stagnation. Why?

The argument of this paper is that the stated intention of radical curriculum reform, quite apart from the actual outcomes, may serve important political needs. A comprehensive (and sympathetic) assessment of EWP notes that:

Perhaps ZIMFEP's most important success is the high public profile it has given the ideas of EWP. Official pronouncements about education in Zimbabwe never fail to mention the centrality of EWP to current efforts at change. [35]

Consequently, as the evidence of the contradiction between curriculum practice and socialist policy raises uncomfortable political questions,

For the state, having EWP and the pilot schools to talk about as an example of transformation is useful when its socialist legitimacy is being questioned. [36]

Other studies have also shown that pilot schools exist precisely because they offer "little direct challenge to the established order [and] may even be tolerated because they provide a "safe" outlet for unorthodox practices." [37]. In Zimbabwe, however, these schools and the radical curriculum provide a more direct legitimacy function to the new state. How long such an impression of radical intention can be maintained, especially since the present situation suggests no intention of extending the radical curriculum project, remains an open question.

To return to our theoretical propositions, the case of EWP represents the use of socialist curriculum policy as 'defensive radicalism'. That is, the failure of the state (for whatever reasons) to resolve the contradictions in a capitalist society, in the inherited educational system, and within the state apparatus itself, leaves a situation in which the political legitimacy of the state is increasingly questioned and its stability rendered even more vulnerable, given additional factors such as the regional challenge of apartheid and the internal political mobilisation of perceived 'ethnic advantage'. In order to compensate for the erosion of its legitimacy, the state needs publicly to reassert its goal of radical curriculum transformation thereby legitimising its rule as preferable to other forms of governance--whether colonial, explicitly capitalist or non-ZANU. At the same time, the state realises that the actual and widespread implementation of such intentions would lead to a different but equally undesirable political confrontation. Stated briefly, radical curriculum policy can be interpreted as a case of "defensive radicalism" which is one more instrument in the arsenal of compensatory legitimisation strategies.

An important question remains to be addressed: will radical curriculum policies and objectives compensate for regime 'deficits'? There are two

possibilities. As Ake suggests, defensive radicalism "establishes a new criterion of regime performance and legitimacy" which becomes a further constraint [38]. This standard, according to Ake, provides a positive steering mechanism which forces a regime, in the face of popular discontents, actually, though unwillingly, to meet radical requirements in policy and practice. Thus, "when a regime is obliged to undertake defensive radicalism, it will in all probability become increasingly progressive" [39].

Weiler, following Habermas, is more pessimistic. The failure to compensate, he argues, inevitably leads to "some crucial confrontations between competing claims to legitimate authority" [40] thereby increasing the problem of legitimacy for the capitalist state. Preliminary evidence tends to support Weiler's thesis, i.e. using curriculum policy for purposes of compensatory legitimation is ultimately doomed. Zvobgo has observed that the discontinuity between curriculum rhetoric and social opportunity may disillusion, disappoint and, in the long term, create political instability: "This is a dangerous situation. Both pupils and parents are already beginning to ask: 'What is wrong with the system? Who is to blame?'" [41]. And in the first student protest movement at the University of Zimbabwe since independence, strong anti-capitalist statements were directed at the government: "The slogans addressed the nation's most explosive political issue--a widespread belief that many top officials are betraying the Zimbabwean independence movement's egalitarian goals . . ." [42]. The Zimbabwean state, no doubt, is aware of these problems. But the current strategy of providing yet another set of radical curriculum proposals without any indication of mechanisms for implementation is unlikely to gain support from the populace [43], and less likely to strengthen the state's legitimacy. If legitimation theorists like Habermas and Weiler are correct, a pattern of additional compensatory educational policies can be expected to emerge, only to deepen the legitimacy crisis of the state--a problem made more severe given the uncertain political environment of the newly independent nation.

A few caveats are in order: (1) this paper is an exploratory exercise, and much more empirical evidence needs to be gathered to elaborate our

argument; and (2) we recognise the recency of independence and the inherent difficulty of transforming colonial institutions that have existed for centuries. Nevertheless, what is common for the post-colonial Africa is that regime stability is extremely uncertain and that the legitimacy of the state cannot be secured simply by coercion. Radicalisation of social policies, including education, provides at least a nominal basis for the state to declare itself 'different' by holding forth the abiding promise of an alternative route for development. What is clear is that such intentions may be taken seriously by sectors of the African people, compelling the state to further action. Political stability will, however, depend heavily not on the state's curriculum policy, however radical in nature, but on its ability to confront and resolve the broader contradictions within which curriculum practice is located.

CONCLUSION

This brief review suggests that Weiler's notion of compensatory legitimation is a useful construct for analysing the distance between curriculum policy and practice in Zimbabwe. Its application in a non-Western context, and specifically in a setting where the Third World state has declared a commitment to scientific socialism, allows us to extend the range of instruments for legitimation, and at the same time determine the limits of existing strategies originating in advanced capitalist states. As indicated, both the notions of 'external legitimation' and 'policy as defensive radicalism' are powerful constructs derived within third world settings as a result of the cross-national application of compensatory legitimation. This paper concludes, therefore, that rather than a cynical dismissal of social theories based simply on their Western origins (after all, scientific socialism is not exactly an indigenous theory), or the wholesale adoption of such frameworks in developing societies, a critical application may, in some cases, lead to a useful revision and extension of existing theoretical explanations in the periphery of the world system. Such an approach may lead to what Krishna Kumar, in his critical study of transnational cultural interactions, calls 'Bonds Without Bondage' [44].

NOTES

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[2] A. MAZRUI (1975) *The African university as a multinational corporation: problems of penetration and dependency*, *Harvard Educational Review*, 45, pp. 191-210.

[3] O. NNOLI (Ed.) (1981) *Path to Nigerian Development* (Dakar, Senegal, CODESRIA).

[4] See J. HABERMAS (1975) *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston, Beacon Press); A. WOLFE (1977) *The Limits of Legitimacy: political contradictions of contemporary capitalism* (New York, The Free Press); and H. WEILER (1983a) *Education, public confidence, and the legitimacy of the modern state: is there a crisis somewhere?* *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 15, pp. 125-142.

[5] J. HABERMAS (1975) *op. cit.*

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[7] H. WEILER (1983b) *Legalization, expertise and participation: strategies of compensatory legitimation in educational policy*, *Comparative Education Review*, 27, pp. 259-277 (p. 261).

[8] *Ibid.*; and H. WEILER & H. GONZALEZ (1982) *Compensatory legitimation: exploring the utility of the construct for the comparative study of educational policy*, paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society, New York.

[9] H. WEILER (1981) *Compensatory legitimation in educational policy: legalization, expertise, and participation in comparative perspective*, Stanford, CA, IFG Report, 81-A17, p. 34.

[10] J. HABERMAS (1975) *op. cit.*, p. 96.

- [11] H. WEILER & H. GONZALEZ (1982) *op. cit.*
- [12] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- [13] M. SITHOLE (1986) *The General Elections: 1979-1985*, in: I. MANDAIZA (Ed.), *Zimbabwe: the political economy of transition, 1980-1986*, p. 95 (Senegal, CODESRIA Press).
- [14] A. SIEDMAN (1985) *The Roots of Crisis in Southern Africa* (New Jersey, Oxfam).
- [15] H. WEILER (1983b), p. 263.
- [16] H. WEILER (1981), p. 25.
- [17] H. WEILER & H. GONZALEZ (1982), p. 25.
- [18] ZANU=The Zimbabwe African National Union, the victorious party in post-independence elections, and recently forming a one-party state that incorporated ZAPU (the Zimbabwe African People's Union), its arch-rival.
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[24] *Ibid., p. 242.*

[25] *R. MUGABE (1981) Keynote address, Conference on Education in Zimbabwe: past, present and future, 27 August 1981 (Harare, University of Zimbabwe).*

[26] *J. HABERMAS (1975), p. 71.*

[27] *See, for example, ZANU-PF Election Manifesto, 1980; F. CHUNG & E. NGARA (1985) Socialism, Education and Development: a challenge to Zimbabwe (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House); Zimbabwe News (1987) The thrust towards a new education curriculum: what is the result since Congress?, September, pp. 13-14; R. J. ZVOBGO (1986a) Education and the challenge of independence, in: I. MANDAZA (Ed.) Zimbabwe: the political economy of transition, 1980-1986 (Senegal, CODESRIA Press); R. J. ZVOBGO (1986b) Transforming Education: the Zimbabwe experience (Harare, The College Press).*

[28] *R. ZVOBGO (1986a), p. 345.*

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- [42] *Campus arrests spark fears of broad attack on academic freedom in Zimbabwe*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, XXXV, 8, 19 October 1988, pp. 43-44.
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