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A comparative study of the construction of memory and identity in the curriculum in societies emerging from conflict: Rwanda and South Africa

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ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
AS	Assessment Standard
CNE	Christian National Education
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CSC	Core Syllabus Committee
CTSC	Curriculum Technical Sub-Committee
CUMSA	Curriculum Model for South Africa
C2005	Curriculum 2005
DNE	Department of National Education (apartheid era)
DoE	Department of Education (post-apartheid)
EFA	Education for All
FET	Further Education and Training (Grades 10 – 12)
FHAO	Facing History and Ourselves
GET	General Education and Training (Grades R-9)
HEG	History Education Group
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HSS	Human and Social Sciences
ICTR	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
IRDP	Institute for Research and Dialogue for Peace
JET	Joint Education Trust
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MPC	Ministerial Project Committee
NCDC	National Curriculum Development Centre
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NECC	National Education Crisis Committee
NETF	National Education and Training Forum
NTB	National Training Board
NURC	National Unity and Reconciliation Commission
OBE	Outcomes-based Education
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
RTLM	Radio-Télévision Libre des Milles Collines or Radio Milles Collines
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SO	Specific Outcome
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

ABSTRACT

One of the most common struggles of societies emerging from violent conflict is the struggle to re-invent or re-imagine the 'nation'. In the process, the critical question becomes: what to do with the traumatic knowledge of the past? Education policy becomes a crucial arena for asserting political visions for a new society and for signalling a clear break with the past - the history curriculum the means through which new collective memories and identities are both reflected and asserted.

The purpose of this study is to understand how two African societies, Rwanda and South Africa, in transition from a traumatic past, re-invent or re-imagine themselves as they emerge from conflict. The particular focus is the intersection between the politics of memory and identity and education policy in the form of the history curriculum.

The construction of curricula in post-conflict societies is an under researched facet in the field of curriculum development and education policy. While there are studies on the curriculum of transition from socialist to post-socialist states or colonial to post-colonial regimes or routine changes of government in capitalist democracies there are very few studies which examine societies that have experienced the transitional trauma arising from internecine racial conflict that was culturally embedded at all levels as the focus of curriculum analysis – and how in such societies issues of memory and identity are both reflected and contested through what is taught.

The main research question for this study focuses on how post-conflict societies re-conceptualise/re-imagine themselves through the medium of the schools' curriculum. Ancillary questions include the ways in which memory and identity are constructed and to what purpose; how societies emerging from conflict deal with the traumatic knowledge of the past; and how curriculum reflects and asserts the new identities.

The research methodology included historical research; the analysis of key education policy documents; workshop observation and the analysis of evaluations and focussed responses; and group interviews. Being intimately involved in South African curriculum change, the theory of situated learning provided a valuable context for the analysis of the South African data.

The study breaks new ground in that it is the first comparative African case study research on how societies emerging from violent conflict engage with a traumatic past. Secondly, it is the first study to take the legacy of trauma after identity-based conflict into account. What have been underlined by this study are the complexities of educational change and the fragility of post-conflict societies. The deep inequalities which remain after the conflict has been settled need to be taken into account, but seldom are, in the construction of post-conflict education policy and in teacher development. Importantly, the study also raised questions about the extent to which identities formed within a conflict society, filter curriculum knowledge in post-conflict classrooms.

The main findings to emerge from the research are firstly, that the depth, direction and pace of curriculum change in post-conflict societies is conditioned by the terms that settled the conflict; secondly the nature of the emergent state and the character of regional or provincial politics sets limits as well as possibilities for curriculum change and implementation; and that in a post-conflict society, theories of change need to move beyond the formal curriculum to take into account the historical meanings of identity within the national context.

Key words:

Memory, identity, history education, curriculum change, education policy, post-conflict societies, transition societies, trauma, South Africa, Rwanda