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The State and Curriculum in the Transition to Socialism: The Zimbabwean Experience

JONATHAN JANSEN

Much still remains to be done if African education systems, either in their curricula or their methods are to be divorced from colonial systems.¹

Across curriculum perspectives, there is a broad consensus in the literature that postcolonial curriculum reconstruction has failed in fundamental ways.²

Curricular forms persist (in the Third World) and have recognizable genealogies.³

In varying degrees, curriculum continuity besets every postcolonial state. Textbooks, syllabi, and examinations reflect their colonial heritage. Radical curriculum policies have done little to change curriculum practice. Why?

Through an in-depth case study of curriculum innovation in Zimbabwe, this article will (a) outline the limitations of existing explanations (namely, technicist, dependency, cultural relevance, and legitimation paradigms) to account adequately for curriculum continuity in the Third World; (b) argue for the primacy of conflict, the state, and politics as determinants of the school curriculum in Third World transition states; and (c) assess the theoretical contributions of this new perspective toward explaining curriculum continuity in postcolonial Zimbabwe.⁴

This article is a revised version of a paper entitled "The State and Curriculum in Zimbabwe: In Search of Explanations for Curriculum Continuity," presented at the 1990 Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society, Anaheim, California.

¹ Yacine Samba, *Education in Africa in the Light of the Harare Conference, 1982* (Paris: Unesco, 1986), p. 8.

² Jonathan Jansen, "Curriculum Reconstruction in Post-colonial Africa: A Review of the Literature," *International Journal of Educational Development* 9, no. 3 (1989): 225.

³ Keith Lewin, "Quality in Question: A New Agenda for Curriculum Reform in Developing Countries," *Comparative Education* 21, no. 2 (1985): 120.

⁴ The specific methods include content analysis of curriculum documents and newspaper articles, and a set of intensive interviews with officials in the Ministry of Education, with participants in the state's Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), and especially with those who were initially involved in the development of the controversial curriculum, the Political Economy of Zimbabwe (PEZ). Interviews were conducted with participants in the curriculum development process on both sides of the issue: those who favored the implementation of PEZ and those who were opposed. This investigation was somewhat circumscribed by the fact that there was extreme sensitivity among participants about publicly expressing views on this controversy and that most of the documents in preparation (e.g., textbooks) for this curriculum were inaccessible.

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Terminology

Curriculum continuity is used in this article to refer to the relative stability in the colonial curriculum content (as codified in textbooks, syllabi, and examinations) during the postcolonial period. Following independence, most African nations embraced an educational policy that sought to revise radically the inherited colonial curriculum. Today, in almost every post-colonial nation, there is evidence of greater continuity with the colonial curriculum than the radical change envisaged by official policy.

Transition states refer to those African nations that have adopted a (broadly defined) socialist policy for the reconstruction of the colonial society in general and the inherited educational system in particular. The term *transition states* does not assume a teleological route for the transition; that is, there is nothing inevitable about such a transition, and the outcomes (projected and actual) may vary among the different radical states that declare themselves to be “in transition to socialism.” The focus of this study is on understanding the process during which radical intentions for curriculum reconstruction are subverted by political conditions in the period following independence.

Existing Explanations for Curriculum Continuity

While there is a broad consensus on the fact of curriculum continuity in the Third World, the explanations for this phenomenon vary greatly.⁵ It has been argued more fully elsewhere that:

1. The technicist explanation is inadequate because it emphasizes technological characteristics of curriculum innovation (inputs, outputs, effectiveness, and efficiency) to the exclusion of the political bases for curriculum contestation in Africa.⁶

2. Dependency theory, by simply describing Third World reliance on metropolitan (i.e., Western) curriculum models, fails to account for the national political processes that undermine or promote curriculum change.⁷

3. The cultural relevance model correctly argues that the curriculum change fails because the models transported to Africa are governed by Western assumptions but again avoids the political conflict over issues of culture and curriculum.⁸

⁵ See Jonathan Jansen, “The State and Curriculum in Zimbabwe: In Search of Explanations for Curriculum Continuity” (paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society, Anaheim, Calif., March 1990).

⁶ R. G. Havelock and A. M. Huberman, *Solving Educational Problems: The Theory and Reality of Educational Innovations in Developing Countries* (Paris: Unesco, 1977).

⁷ Kevin Lillis, “Processes of Secondary Curriculum Innovation in Kenya,” *Comparative Education Review* 29, no. 1 (1985): 80–96.

⁸ John Gay and Michael Cole, *The New Mathematics and an Old Culture: A Study of Learning among the Kpelle of Liberia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967).

4. Legitimation theory assumes that curriculum policy is nothing more than an attempt by the state to compensate for its eroding legitimacy in a capitalist economy but then fails to account for those changes in the curriculum that may be broadly described as “socialist” and certainly does not explain the varied (nonstate) sites of conflict and struggle that characterize transition society.⁹

Theoretical Framework

The search for a more powerful explanation for curriculum continuity has recently received considerable impetus from Martin Carnoy and Joel Samoff, who advance three theses concerning educational (and curriculum) change in the transition:¹⁰ (1) that the state is the principal force in shaping transition society so that politics (not economics) dominates social transformation;¹¹ (2) that historical structures condition the behavior of the state in the transition so that educational policy and politics have to be interpreted in reference to both historical and political contexts;¹² (3) that the dialectical nature of education in the transition is characterized by “struggles for greater equality of political power in the state by the forces of democratization against the forces of reproduction.”¹³

In this article, these three theses of transition-state theory will be used as a guiding framework but at the same time reexamined for their utility in explaining curriculum continuity in Zimbabwe.

Thesis 1: The State Is the Principal Shaper of Policy in Transition Society

Recently, an influential body of work has emerged to suggest that the curriculum is a critical arena in which the ideology of the state is both projected and contested.¹⁴ The curriculum becomes a site of conflict and

⁹ Hans Weiler, “Legalization, Expertise, and Participation: Strategies of Compensatory Legitimation in Educational Policy,” *Comparative Education Review* 27, no. 2 (1983): 259–77; Jonathan Jansen, “Curriculum Policy as Compensatory Legitimation? A View from the Periphery,” *Oxford Review of Education* 16, no. 1 (1990): 29–38; Hans Weiler and Hernando Gonzalez, “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, 1982); Hans Weiler, *Compensatory Legitimation in Educational Policy: Legalization, Expertise and Participation in Comparative Perspective*, Institute for Finance and Government, IFG report 81-A 17 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, Institute for Finance and Government, 1981).

¹⁰ Martin Carnoy and Joel Samoff, *Education, Social Transformation and Transition States in the Third World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990). Quotations and references in this article are taken from a 1989 prepublication draft of the book. See also Joel Samoff, “The Durability of Modernization,” unpublished manuscript (Center for African Studies, Stanford University, 1989).

¹¹ The “primacy of politics” is characteristic of more recent studies in neo-Marxist scholarship. See the review (esp. chap. 5) in Vicky Randall and Robin Theobald, *Political Change and Underdevelopment* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1988).

¹² The term *conditioned* is used in preference to the determinism implied in the more popular term *dependency*. States have options for reform, and political and historical constraints only modify rather than cancel out such space.

¹³ Carnoy and Samoff, p. 75.

¹⁴ Michael Apple, “Regulating the Text: The Socio-historical Roots of State Control,” *Educational Policy* 3, no. 2 (1989): 107–23; D. L. Carlson, “Curriculum Planning and the State: The Dynamics

contestation because it embodies the values, norms, objectives, interests, priorities, and directions of the state and other powerful sectors of society.¹⁵

This symbolic value of curriculum is particularly powerful in newly independent African states, where a high premium is placed on uprooting the ideology and values of the colonial class within the context of local struggles and international power relations. Accordingly, Carnoy and Samoff argue that, in the transition, education is “the state’s principal ideological apparatus.”¹⁶ Struggles over education—its distribution, access, content, and objectives—are therefore profoundly struggles over the nature of the state and transition.

If, indeed, the state is the principal shaper of transition society, this fact is clearest in the formulation and implementation of curriculum policy in Zimbabwe.

First, the formulation of curriculum policy is centrally controlled and could be seen largely as a response to the nature of the inherited curriculum. With the advent of political independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited a colonial curriculum that has been criticized as racist, elitist, Eurocentric, competitive, individualistic, and capitalist oriented.¹⁷ The victorious Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) party of Robert Mugabe immediately announced its intention to direct its reconstruction program in accordance with the tenets of “scientific socialism.”

Curriculum reconstruction became one of the most important ideological vehicles of the socialist state. The espoused curricular goals were quite specific: (1) to develop a socialist consciousness among students; (2) to eliminate the distinction between manual and mental labor; (3) to adapt subject-matter content to the Zimbabwean cultural context; (4) to foster cooperative learning and productive development strategies as art of the school curriculum; and (5) to increase opportunities for productive employment.¹⁸

of Control in Education,” in *The Curriculum: Problems, Politics and Possibilities*, ed. L. E. Beyer and Michael Apple (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1988); Martin Carnoy and Henry Levin, *Schooling and Work in the Democratic State* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985); Jonathan Jansen, “Curriculum Policy as Compensatory Legitimation?”; Hans Weiler, “Curriculum Reform and the Legitimation of Educational Objectives: The Case of the Federal Republic of Germany,” *Oxford Review of Education* 16, no. 1 (1990): 15–27.

¹⁵ Weiler, “Curriculum Reform.”

¹⁶ Carnoy and Samoff, p. 74.

¹⁷ Zimbabwe, formerly known as Rhodesia, won independence from a white-settler colonial regime led by Ian Smith, which had, in turn, declared independence from the metropolitan colony, Britain, in 1960. After a long and destructive war between the black liberation movements and the Smith government, a negotiated settlement (the Lancaster House Agreement) was mediated by Britain, leading to independence and majority rule in April 1980. Fay Chung and Emmanuel Ngaru, *Socialism, Education and Development: A Challenge to Zimbabwe* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1985).

¹⁸ These common curricular goals have been synthesized from statements starting with the party’s Election Manifesto (1980), declarations by the prime minister and president, the writings of senior ministry officials, and the outline provided in the Three Year Transitional National Development Plan, 1982/83–1984/85.

Several educational strategies were planned and many implemented that suggested a serious effort by the state to translate policy into practice: a system of mass schooling to give all students access to the curriculum; the construction of experimental (pilot) socialist schools (the so-called Zimbabwe Foundation for Education with Production [ZIMFEP] schools) to engage students in productive agricultural activities with the view to increasing employment prospects; and the decision in 1986 to provide a compulsory vocational curriculum for all students.

Second, curriculum policy is also implemented through a central bureaucracy, the Ministry of Education. The principal agency assigned this task is the state's Curriculum Development Unit (CDU). The manner in which the task of implementing curriculum policy is managed is complex and varied but remains strongly linked to official policy.

The Ministry of Education, through the CDU, compiles a syllabus for a specific school subject that contains an outline of the various topics and subtopics to be taught in the nation's school system. This syllabus is then made public, and national publishers are invited to submit drafts of textbooks conforming to the state syllabus.

Textbook drafts are forwarded to the CDU and then carefully evaluated through its smaller Evaluation Unit. One of the tasks of the Evaluation Unit is to assess the degree to which the text corresponds to the state's socialist goals. The evaluation guidelines of the CDU suggest that textbook evaluators pay attention to questions such as the following: Does it promote a strong scientific socialist understanding of Zimbabwe society, Africa, and the world as a whole? Are appropriate socialist role models created?¹⁹ Only approved textbooks are distributed to the schools.

Finally, most school examinations are developed locally through the CDU, and they tend to reinforce the content of syllabi and approved texts. In sum, one of the clearest formulations of the state's goals for schools and society is found in the school curriculum.

However, the direct role of the state in formulating and implementing the school curriculum is not uniform. My research revealed that while there was state-led curriculum change, it was accompanied by divergent (if not contradictory) ideological motivations and consequences. Three examples will suffice. First, Education with Production (EWP) is the curriculum innovation most closely associated with socialist policy. It emphasizes vocationalism, productive activities, and self-reliance. Second, ZIMSCI (Zimbabwe Science), a widely heralded innovation, is not "socialist" by any measure; it is a program that already existed prior to independence with the general characteristics of "modern science"—fostering inquiry,

¹⁹ Curriculum Development Unit, *Manuscript Evaluation Guidelines* (Harare: Ministry of Education, 1989), p. 4.

experimentation, and student-centered learning. Third, my review of the history curriculum at O-level suggests that the different school texts approved by the state include a range of ideological orientations from pure Africanization (celebrating national culture) of content to “scientific socialism.”²⁰ Three preliminary conclusions can be drawn:²¹ (1) there is no single or consistent ideological orientation to the curriculum reconstruction program; (2) curricula closest to the “socialist” agenda remain marginal in the national education system (there are still only eight schools using EWP programs) with little chance of national adoption;²² and (3) the wide range of curricular choice in science (12 courses for the same year) or history (at least eight different texts) potentially reduces any conflicts that may arise with a common socialist curriculum.

To all this, there was one exception, a curriculum called *The Political Economy of Zimbabwe*. This curriculum was (a) thoroughly socialist, (b) to be implemented on a rational basis, and (c) a compulsory program using prescribed texts. This unambiguous attempt to radicalize the school curriculum sheds light on the contested role of the state in changing the school curriculum (thesis 3, the subject matter of social conflict over the school curriculum, discussed below). But first, we need to understand the political and historical contexts of curriculum policy in Zimbabwe.

Thesis 2: Historical Structures Condition Curriculum Reconstruction during the Transition to Socialism

Carnoy and Samoff’s second thesis concerns the conditioning effect of “historical structures” on the process of educational reconstruction.²³ The reference to historical structures suggests that socioeconomic development in Third World states is not simply a reflection of international forces but, in large part, a result of particular histories, social movements, forms of state, class alliances, and policy choices at the local level.²⁴

²⁰ For this review I used the two volumes for each of the following texts: *Junior Certificate History for Zimbabwe* (Longman Zimbabwe, 1986 and 1988); *The African Heritage* (Zimbabwe Educational Books, 1989); *People Making History* (Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1985 and 1987); and *Focus on History* (Harare: College Press, 1988).

²¹ In the period immediately following independence, a range of assessments of educational and curriculum change surfaced in Zimbabwe that described reform efforts as “cosmetic,” “skin deep,” and “smacking of retardation” (see a review of the literature in Jansen, “The State and Curriculum [n. 5 above]. These assessments can be dismissed as superficial, given the time frame required in any situation for proposals to be translated into practice, especially in a situation where the first and preoccupying priority of the state was educational expansion. However, as the dust of reform rhetoric settles at the end of the first decade of independence, a much clearer picture is emerging on the trajectory of state-led curriculum change.

²² See Jansen, “Curriculum Policy as Compensatory Legitimation?” (n. 9 above).

²³ Carnoy and Samoff (n. 10 above).

²⁴ This “historical-structural” approach was first formulated by two Latin American theorists in part as a response to dependency theory. See Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

What, then, are the historical-structural factors shaping reconstruction in Zimbabwe? The first set of factors relates to the political and economic conditions governing the transition.

1. *The nature of the inherited economic system.*—Zimbabwe emerged from 90 years of colonial rule with an entrenched capitalist economy from which to launch socialist development.²⁵ Despite considerable state intervention in the economy, today “most production, whether agricultural, industrial or mineral, is still carried out by private capital—about half of it foreign.”²⁶

2. *The nature of the transition to independence.*—The transitional Lancaster House Agreement provided for a negotiated end to colonial rule but contained provisions limiting radical transformation of the state (retention of a conservative white civil service) and the economy (land redistribution only on a willing-buyer-willing-seller basis).²⁷

3. *The destabilizing role of South Africa.*—The quantifiable costs of South African intervention in Zimbabwe since 1980 have been estimated at a staggering U.S.\$ 2,844.13 million.²⁸ Through both military intervention and economic sanctions, South Africa has consistently sought to undermine socialist development in Zimbabwe and increase its economic dependency on the apartheid system.²⁹

4. *The hostile international capitalist environment.*—Zimbabwe’s dependence on international capital and, accordingly, its low-key socialist stance, can be related to several factors, including the devastating liberation war, the restrictions posed by the Lancaster House Agreement, the drought of the early 1980s, the threat of Western sanctions against radical policies, international recession, and the conditions attached to Western economic assistance programs.³⁰

5. *The nature of the ruling class.* Speaking about “the gradual embourgeoisement of the African petit bourgeoisie” in Zimbabwe, Ibbo Mandaza found that “as the African petit bourgeoisie began gradually to find access to the same economic and social status as their white counterparts so, too, did it become increasingly unable to respond effectively to the as-

²⁵ Colin Stoneman and Rob Davies, “The Economy: An Overview,” in *Zimbabwe’s Inheritance*, ed. Colin Stoneman (New York: St. Martin’s, 1981), pp. 95–126.

²⁶ Colin Stoneman and Lionel Cliffe, *Zimbabwe: Politics, Economics and Society* (New York: Pinter, 1989), p. 119.

²⁷ Ann Seidman, *The Roots of Crisis in Southern Africa* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1985), pp. 122–23.

²⁸ Phyllis Johnson and David Martin, *Apartheid Terrorism: The Destabilization Report* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 76.

²⁹ Seidman, pp. 85–89.

³⁰ Seidman, pp. 123–24; Ibbo Mandaza, ed., *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition, 1980–1986* (Dakar, Senegal: Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa [CODESRIA], 1986), pp. 63–68; Stoneman and Cliffe, pp. 95–97; Nelson Moyo, “A Hostile World Economic Climate?” in *Zimbabwe’s Prospects: Issues of Race, Class, State and Capital in Southern Africa*, ed. Colin Stoneman (Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 176–92.

pirations of workers and peasants.”³¹ The “corruption scandals” that recently rocked the leadership of Zimbabwe are only the latest evidence to support Mandaza’s thesis.

The factors cited above do not directly determine educational policy. However, they are likely to circumscribe the possibilities for radical change in terms of available resources, the strength of official commitment to socialist education, and the nature and range of educational policy choices. For this reason Carnoy and Samoff speak of the “conditioning” effects of historical-structural factors on educational policy in the transition.

A second set of factors concerns the educational structures and orientations at independence.

1. *The nature of the inherited colonial education system.*—The task of educational transformation was faced by a deep colonial legacy reflected in the curriculum (largely academic), administration (a modern [former white] and underdeveloped [now largely black] educational sector), pedagogy (especially in black schools, rote learning sustained by underprepared teachers), and evaluation (largely controlled by the Cambridge Examination Syndicate). All these factors remained largely intact after a decade of independence.³²

2. *The dominant social values and expectations of parents.*—Across the racial divide, there is evidence that both white settlers and black parents favor the traditional academic education offered under colonialism. Any change in the direction of socialist education (such as a vocational emphasis in the curriculum) would therefore encounter strong resistance in black and white communities.³³

Evidence from the political, economic, and educational arenas suggests, therefore, that educational policy and practice in Zimbabwe cannot be understood apart from this context. But how does one theoretically clarify the effects of these historical structures on specific social (and educational) practice? Here the literature is divergent. Andre Astrow’s deterministic thesis dismisses the possibility of any transition to socialism (and a socialist curriculum) based on “the predictable result of the nationalist leadership’s class interests.”³⁴ Mandaza’s transitional thesis concedes that the leadership is “petty-bourgeois” but does not foreclose the possibility of “transition to socialism” (and socialist curriculum) since the outcome of ongoing

³¹ Mandaza, ed., p. 51.

³² See Rungano Zvobgo, “Education and the Challenge of Independence,” in Mandaza, ed., pp. 319–54.

³³ See, among other sources, Clive Harber, “Weapon of War: Political Education in Zimbabwe,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 17, no. 2 (1985): 163–74; S. Horst, “Zimbabwe’s Ex-Combatants Test New Models for Education,” *Christian Science Monitor* (May 2, 1988), p. 11; G. W. Knamiller, “The Struggle for Science Education in Developing Countries,” *Studies in Science Education* 11 (1984): 60–78; and C. G. MacKenzie, “Zimbabwe’s Educational Miracle and the Problems It Has Created,” *International Review of Education* 34, no. 3 (1988): 337–53.

³⁴ Andre Astrow, *Zimbabwe: A Revolution That Lost Its Way?* (London: ZED Press, 1983), p. 2.

struggles, conflicts, and pressures within the state is as yet undecided.³⁵ Rob Davies's conditional thesis once (1988) allowed for the possibility of transition (as does Mandaza)³⁶ but now (1990) finds specific empirical evidence to suggest "a much clearer picture . . . there is no transition likely or possible."³⁷

These three positions are not very helpful in explaining the actual trajectory of curriculum reconstruction during independence since they simplistically dichotomize transition/lack of transition on a macrotheoretical level without getting inside the process of change in specific areas of policy. The third thesis focuses on that process.

Thesis 3: Social Conflict over the School Curriculum Concerns Struggles for Greater Equality versus Struggles for Reproduction

The third thesis of Carnoy and Samoff holds that, in the transition, the struggle for curriculum brings into conflict those social forces favoring reproduction of the status quo (e.g., the academic curriculum) versus those seeking democratization (e.g., the vocational curriculum). In the transition to socialism, the state's attempt to project a socialist curriculum will therefore be challenged by counterforces hoping to retain the inherited colonial curriculum. The most dramatic case of curriculum contestation in the 10 years of Zimbabwe's independence concerned the new syllabus, called *The Political Economy of Zimbabwe* (PEZ).

To set the stage for examining this thesis, some background detail is in order. Shortly after independence, Fay Chung, then director of the state's Curriculum Development Unit, conceived a plan to develop a radical history curriculum for Zimbabwe's secondary schools. This curriculum was to be the most direct reflection of the socialist orientation of the new state and was to be required of all students and schools in independent Zimbabwe.

By 1985, serious work began on the development of a syllabus, and a national panel of educationists from across the country was constituted, including lecturers at teacher training colleges and the university. A series of panel meetings was convened in 1985 on both a national and regional basis to develop PEZ. By early 1987, a final draft of the syllabus was produced and forwarded to Fay Chung, apparently before final discussions were held among CDU members. The *Annual Report of the Secretary of Education* for that year (1987) proudly announced the completion of the

³⁵ Mandaza, ed.

³⁶ Rob Davies, "The Transition to Socialism in Zimbabwe: Some Areas for Debate," in Stoneman, ed.

³⁷ Rob Davies, interview with author, February 6, 1990.

new PEZ syllabus.³⁸ The first examination of this 2-year course was planned for 1990.

Before examining the response to PEZ, it is instructive to examine the syllabus itself. It consists of six parts. Part 1, the introduction, summarizes the context and purpose of the syllabus as follows. "In the colonial history of Zimbabwe, pupils were subjected to a capitalist view of life. Independent Zimbabwe has chosen scientific socialism as the guiding ideology for its social, economic and political programme. This syllabus is therefore intended to acquaint pupils with the fundamentals of Political Economy."³⁹ And in this regard, "The subject matter will be taught from the Marxist-Leninist perspective."⁴⁰

Part 2 outlines the methodology, which suggests several methods designed to "foster group spirit and collective consciousness."⁴¹ These methods include visits to cooperatives and the formation of Marxist-Leninist study groups and clubs.

In Part 3, five general aims are stipulated, broadly concerned with developing self-reliance, critical analytical skills, understanding capitalist and colonial ideas, and developing critical consciousness of socialist issues in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in the Third World. This would enable pupils to (aim 5) "play a meaningful role in the national transformation to socialism through a creative approach toward socialist development and the problems related to it."⁴²

Part 4 is a more detailed specification of instructional objectives, based on the aims in part 3, as is part 5, which contains related assessment objectives.

Part 5 is the most substantial and enumerates 12 themes containing the content for the course:

1. *Introduction to political economy*: the meaning, method (historical materialism), motive, and origins of political economy.
2. *Labor and production as the basis of social life*: the different productive forces and their social character.
3. *The development of human society*: modes of production, production relations, the social product, and commodity production.
4. *Property relations*: personal, private, public, collective, and social property.
5. *Social formation*: economic base and superstructure, and their interaction.

³⁸ Isaiah Sibanda, *Annual Report of the Secretary for Education*, for year ending December 31, 1987, presented to the Parliament of Zimbabwe (Harare: Government Printer, 1988), p. 11.

³⁹ *The Political Economy Syllabus*, Zimbabwe Junior Certificate (Harare: Ministry of Education, 1989).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

6. *Classes and class struggle*: class definitions, the emergence of classes, class alliances, class struggles, and the classless society.
7. *The state*: the role and forms of the state, the state apparatus, and the state and revolution.
8. *Socialism*: the economic and political bases of socialism; and analyses of the problems and achievements of socialism.
9. *Precolonial modes of production in Zimbabwe*: precapitalist modes of production (primitive communal, slave, and feudal) and precapitalist class formation.
10. *Imperialism and colonialism in Zimbabwe*: colonial occupation and its relationship to capitalism and imperialism; resistance to colonialism.
11. *The struggle for national liberation*: race and class under colonialism; phases of the national liberation struggle.
12. *Postcolonial Zimbabwe and the struggle for socialism*: assessment of the national liberation struggle, neocolonialism, counterrevolution; consideration of "problems of the transition from capitalism to socialism in Zimbabwe."⁴³

Part 6 simply concludes with "evaluation," noting that "all work set for the two years will be examinable."⁴⁴

In sum, the syllabus contains an important, distinctive element absent from other history syllabi being used in Zimbabwe: a clear commitment and comprehensive plan for teaching the principles, methods, and aims of Marxism-Leninism in and for the Zimbabwean context. Furthermore, those compiling the syllabus clearly saw their tasks as interpreting and implementing state policy through the medium of this curriculum. (This was repeatedly confirmed in several interviews with key participants.)

The community reception of PEZ was nothing short of disastrous for the new state. First, a vibrant debate broke out in the local newspapers, particularly through the pages of *The Sunday Mail*, about the appropriateness of the new syllabus. Foremost in this debate was the Catholic Church.⁴⁵ There were several important issues of interest to the broader analysis pursued in this paper.

1. While declaring its loyalties to both the liberation struggle and a specific definition of socialism, the Catholic Church resisted PEZ on the grounds that it was anti-God and antireligion. Speaking for the Catholic Church, Father Oskar Wermter insisted that "we cannot tolerate that the

⁴³ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁵ While this article concentrates on the role of the Catholic church, it should not imply that the church was the only opponent of the new curriculum. Parents of students, both black and white, spoke out on this issue as well. In addition, there were probably many other organizations (such as the conservative churches) who stood opposed to PEZ but did not have the legitimacy of the Catholic church to confront the state so directly. In any case, the most visible and articulate opponent of PEZ was the Catholic church, and this justifies its preeminence in the study.

students in our schools are fed with anti-religious propaganda under the guise of 'scientific socialism' as is happening already in our teacher training colleges."⁴⁶ According to Wermter, "The Church does insist . . . on the right of parents to provide their children with a Christian education."⁴⁷ It is important to note that the church was sympathetic to a particular version of socialism. Father Oskar Wermter, at an early stage in the debate, contended, in a pastoral statement of the 1984 Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference, "In Zimbabwe socialism is understood to mean equality regardless of race, creed or sex, an equitable distribution of land, health care and education for all regardless of income; it means fair wages, a life-style of self-reliance as well as of sharing, the promotion of co-operative ways of production and a national policy of reconciliation."⁴⁸ This was not, however, the "scientific socialism" envisaged by the Zimbabwean state.

2. A second view on the debate was that Christianity and socialism were compatible in philosophy, method, and objectives, and that there was in fact no conflict between religion and the PEZ syllabus. As N. C. G. Mathema argued through the pages of the *Harare Sunday Mail*, "Christianity and communism have one fundamental position—they are against the exploitation of one person by another . . . [they] are also against racism and apartheid, tribalism and the division of society into classes."⁴⁹ Parenthetically, this idea of compatibility between Christianity and socialism is also supported by the first President of Zimbabwe, the Reverend Canaan Banana.⁵⁰

3. A third perspective on the debate was directly the opposite, namely, that Christianity and socialism were incompatible. Religion was mystification, socialism was science. H. M. R. Farinya spoke for many within the Ministry of Education and the government in general when he argued that "it would be a misfortune if our schools would be shut to progressive thinking only because a few religious obscurantists are intent on going back to the darkness of the middle ages. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education would do well in finding means to avoid open confrontations with the churches, but certainly scientific knowledge cannot be disfigured for the sake of expediency. Relativity should be taught as Einstein explained it. . . . The same applies to Marx."⁵¹ In a letter responding in part to

⁴⁶ Oskar Wermter, "Socialism: What Has That to Do with Zimbabwe's Liberation?" *Harare Sunday Mail* (May 21, 1989), p. 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; "Socialism and the Gospel of Christ," pastoral statement, Catholic Bishops' Conference, Zimbabwe, January 1, 1984.

⁴⁹ N. C. G. Mathema, "Jesus Christ and Karl Marx Teachings Have Similar Goals," *Harare Sunday Mail* (May 28, 1989), p. 8.

⁵⁰ Canaan Banana (1988), *Christianity and the Struggle of Socialism in Zimbabwe Today* (Harare: Government Printer, 1988).

⁵¹ H. M. R. Farinya, "Political Economy Should Be Given a Chance," *Harare Sunday Mail* (June 4, 1989), pp. 6–7.

Farinya, another contributor to the *Sunday Mail*, Bernard Chisvo, was more blunt. "To be a bit crude, but simple and honest, Marxism-Leninism is a problem-solving tool and Christianity is a [cover] for problems caused by the evils of capitalism or imperialism. Yes, that is why the church elders are rich, pretend to be apolitical and in Africa are used by capitalists as compradores or bogus leaders or 'internal settlement leaders.'"⁵²

The mission schools and, in particular, the Catholic church schools, resisted fiercely the imposition of this new compulsory curriculum in their institutions. In addition, leading publishers of the accompanying textbooks stalled on the further development and production of materials, creating a major obstacle to implementation of PEZ. Then, on May 7, 1989, the decision to withdraw the curriculum was reported in the *Sunday Mail* under the caption "State to Revise Political Economy Teaching Plans." According to the newspaper account, "The government is to reconsider how political economy can be taught in schools so that it will be acceptable to mission-sponsored schools. . . ."⁵³ A series of apparently conflicting events then unfolded in the wake of the state's decision to withdraw the curriculum.

The reasons for the withdrawal of PEZ as given by the Ministry of Education and several ZANU officials were multiple. First, there was an attempt simply to write off the syllabus as the product of an inadequate curriculum development process: a lack of consultation with relevant communities, a level of theoretical abstraction inappropriate for secondary school students, and insufficient development of some original concepts. Second, there was an attempt to play down the conflict at the same time the church came under attack for its resistance. According to Minister Chung, "The conflict, if any, is being blown out of proportion by the right-wing churches which are speaking out of prejudices fuelled by superficial knowledge of political economy."⁵⁴ At the same time, the minister is reported to have said that "if the Roman Catholic Church . . . had been able to support the workers and peasants during the liberation struggle she could not see the reason why the church could not support the teaching of political economy. By attempting to resist the introduction of political economy in the schools . . . the church was reverting to the middle ages and the period of the renaissance, when it opposed the progressive march of political and scientific knowledge as 'anti-God.'"⁵⁵ Third, at the same time as the withdrawal of PEZ, the criticism of the church, and the apparent

⁵² Bernard Chisvo, "Political Economy Must Be Taught," *Harare Sunday Mail* (June 11, 1989), p. 8.

⁵³ Quoted in "State to Revise Political Economy Teaching Plans," *Harare Sunday Mail* (May 28, 1989), p. 8.

⁵⁴ Quoted by *Sunday Mail* reporters in article, "There Is No Going Back Says Chung," *Harare Sunday Mail* (June 11, 1990), p. 1, as part of an interview with Minister Fay Chung.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

commitment to revision, Minister Chung attacked the PEZ panelists. In particular, she isolated for criticism the Stalinists who spread “division among the panelists who worked on the old draft of syllabus because of their doctrinaire approach to political economy.”⁵⁶ The interesting question that remains, of course, is why the ministry approved the final draft of the syllabus, only subsequently to turn on the panelists themselves.

Finally, the ministry reiterated its commitment to the new syllabus at a future date following appropriate revisions. Toward the end of 1989, the Cabinet reviewed PEZ and found nothing disturbing in its content and promised adoption by all schools following state ratification. But by the end of 1987, several teacher training colleges were already using the PEZ syllabus in their curriculum. Whether or not the ministry will reintroduce PEZ at the secondary school level is uncertain, despite the minister’s promise that the new syllabus “will emulate the present Cambridge examination developmental studies” syllabus taught by some schools at the O-level.⁵⁷

Interpretation of the PEZ Case Study

There are several theoretical issues of a more general nature that could be deduced from this study of the state and curriculum in Zimbabwe. First, the Zimbabwean case confirms the directive role of the state in shaping and implementing curriculum policy. This relationship between the state and curriculum is clarified by examining both (a) curriculum change—the new state (rather than some decentralized or international agency) intervened directly in an attempt to replace the colonial-capitalist curriculum with one that most clearly reflected the socialist ideology of the new state—and (b) curriculum continuity—the fact that change was resisted makes the unchanged curriculum a powerful reflector of the broader struggles and conflicts in society acting in opposition to the state’s agenda.

In this respect the state is, indeed, as Carnoy and Samoff propose, the principal shaper of transition society.⁵⁸ The state becomes not only the focal point of change but also the site of resistance as struggles for the transition proceed.

Second, the Zimbabwean experience confirms the powerful influence of historical and political contexts in modifying policy choices in the transition.⁵⁹ Across the ideological spectrum, from within the state and among its critics, these factors (capitalist economy, apartheid destabilization, world

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid. This appeal to the prestigious colonial examination system is in itself revealing against the backdrop of socialist policy and anti-imperialist rhetoric.

⁵⁸ Carnoy and Samoff (n. 10 above).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

recession, etc.) have been identified as strongly limiting the options for radical transformation.⁶⁰

Even though ZANU still has considerable popular support, and its radical agenda has recently (at the 1989 party congress) been confirmed, the power base of the church both on its own terms (a major source of funding for private schools) and as an indirect contributor to broader political challenges (such as the new opposition party, the Zimbabwe Unity Movement) forces the state to act cautiously in promoting curriculum change.

The third principle outlined by Carnoy and Samoff, that the character of educational conflict in the transition is determined by “struggles for greater equality of political power in the state by the forces of democratization against the forces of reproduction,”⁶¹ is problematic here. It would be difficult to place the Catholic church in the position of one of “the forces of reproduction” given its progressive role in the liberation struggle and, in particular, its commitment to some form of socialism. In fact, it could be argued that (a) the church’s desire to reserve space for Christian schools was, in fact, a struggle for democratization, and (b) that the church-state conflict could at best be described as a struggle over the meaning of socialism. The predominantly class-based explanation for conflict in the Carnoy and Samoff contribution must, in this context, be qualified, if not revised.⁶²

This suggests a research agenda that reconsiders the relationship between revolution and religion not simply as antithetical forces (according to Marx and especially Engels), but one that takes account of situations (such as Nicaragua and El Salvador) where “religion has an enormous influence over the revolutionary process and has provided the inspiration for many contemporary revolutionaries.”⁶³ Such an analysis is particularly pertinent in Zimbabwe, where the Catholic church is likely to continue to play a central role in further attempts to influence education and curriculum at the secondary level.

Conclusion

In sum, this research finds support for two of the three principles of transitional education proposed by Carnoy and Samoff.⁶⁴ The primacy

⁶⁰ See the interesting review, “Approaches to the Study of Zimbabwe,” in Stoneman and Cliffe, *Zimbabwe: Politics* (n. 26 above), pp. 1–7.

⁶¹ Carnoy and Samoff, p. 75.

⁶² A promising contribution to this debate is the “post-Marxist” perspective of Laclau and Mouffe, which holds that there are no privileged points of rupture in the social structure. Social movements (groups) therefore only become significant in progressive politics as a result of mobilization rather than because of an a priori class status. See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).

⁶³ Lawrence Littwin, “Religion and Revolution: A Brief for the Theology of Liberation,” in *The Socialist Register 1989*, ed. Ralph Miliband et al. (London: Merlin, 1989).

⁶⁴ Carnoy and Samoff.

of politics in the transition has specifically been demonstrated. The conditioning effect of both history and politics on Zimbabwe's curriculum decisions has been outlined. And finally, the nature of the conflict as one of reproduction versus democratization has been criticized as simplistic. Struggles over the meaning and content of socialism in the transition cannot be ignored.

However, the overall explanatory power of transition-state theory remains valid. Clearly the state's unsuccessful effort at curriculum change was not simply a case of resource availability, a paralyzing dependency on the colonial or neocolonial curriculum, a failure of cultural adaptation, or a delusory legitimization exercise. It was a genuine attempt, securing heavy investment over several years, to radicalize the colonial curriculum.⁶⁵ However, the policy options available in the fragile political environment of the transition are extremely limited. In this context, the political costs of reform cannot be excluded from the decision to implement.

A final question remains. Will the frustration of radical change inspire revived struggles for socialist curriculum or see a reversion to conventional educational discourse and practice? In this regard a new pessimism appears to be surfacing in Zimbabwe. A far more cautious and qualified assessment is replacing the celebration of the socialist vision of what education and curriculum in Zimbabwe should be.⁶⁶ According to Education Minister Fay Chung, "It remains to be seen whether Zimbabwe will be able to make use of its invaluable post-independence experiences in education to make further strides towards socialist transformation, or whether [these] innovations will remain as minor deviations."⁶⁷ Furthermore, where the early days of independence were characterized by a call for socialist education, there is now a very public debate on increasing efficiency, raising standards, and improving quality (all defined conventionally, i.e., not in terms of socialist referents). And the general commentary on curriculum change remains, "There has so far been no radical transformation of the curriculum to facilitate the achievement of national objectives."⁶⁸

Given this context, it will take revitalized political leadership and a considerable deepening of the social struggle if Zimbabwean socialism is to survive into the next century.

⁶⁵ Argues Bernard Chisvo through the pages of the *Harare Sunday Mail* (n. 52 above), p. 8: "What people of Zimbabwe should know, is that the promise to have political economy introduced was officially blessed by the Ministry of Education which even went to the extent of using the taxpayers money to have seminars and workshops for in-service teachers and teaching/learning materials published to enable the subject to take off with ease. Thousands of dollars were just blown out, therefore, for no logical reason in the process."

⁶⁶ Chung and Ngara (n. 17 above).

⁶⁷ Fay Chung, "Education: Revolution or Reform?" in Stoneman, ed. (n. 30 above), p. 132.

⁶⁸ R. J. Zvobgo (n. 32 above), pp. 319–54.