



## BOOK REVIEWS

# Teaching African History in schools: Experiences and perspectives from Africa and beyond.

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This book provides a remarkable collection of contributions that raise and discuss serious issues associated with teaching African history in schools. All the case studies show an exceptional sensitivity to the dangers and opportunities associated with teaching and learning African history across the continent and beyond. Cases are drawn from South Africa, Kenya, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Cameroon and Tanzania, as well as the teaching of South African history outside Africa in the United Kingdom and Canada. This is relevant in raising Afrocentric voices and contributions to existing debates in the global field of history education. The book provides an in-depth examination and analysis of nine individual and comparative empirical studies. It highlights thematic issues related to the history curricula and textbooks with content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and activities on how African history is diffused in schools. The book presents thoughts and dialogical conversations of teachers and learners on history curriculum implementation coupled with pedagogical practices on African history focusing on primary schools, secondary schools and preservice teacher education at the tertiary level. Additionally, consideration is given to the challenges and opportunities of tackling sensitive and controversial issues in the history classroom such as engaging with national

histories of trauma, racial or ethnic discrimination and intercommunal wars and conflicts. The proceeding sections, present a chapter-by-chapter summary highlighting a few details aligned with the main argument of the book.

In the first chapter, Carol Bertram begins by questioning the knowledge that is included in the official curriculum and how the selection is made. She alludes to the fact that the purpose of school history in a particular country is influential in designing a history curriculum. Consequently, she presents an analysis of the purpose of secondary school curriculum documents underpinned by the relevancy of content knowledge with case studies from Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Bertram investigates the influences of both substantive and procedural knowledge of history complemented by the ideological beliefs surrounding the role of school history. The findings reveal that, in the cases of Kenya and Rwanda, the policies and purpose of school history closely align with a memory-history discipline that mostly requires learners to recall and memorise facts. For South Africa and, to some extent, Zimbabwe, the policies adopted a procedural knowledge in history focused on thinking historically, doing history and hermeneutical interpretations of the past (Oldham, 2020). However, while Bertram focused on the purpose and content knowledge of official curriculum documents in the four case study countries, it would be useful to take the reader through, or conduct further research on, the unofficial history (hidden curriculum) covering key aspects such as social structures in the classroom, learning activities, school context/cultures and history teachers' roles, as these greatly influence the curriculum content, how the selections are made and who makes them (Dlamini, 2019).

In the second chapter, Annie Chiponda's study seeks to explore the extent to which the policy of inclusion of people with disabilities (PWDs) in school curricula and textbooks is adhered to in curriculum development and textbook publication. This study hinges on the background of the government policy of inclusion of PWDs in curricula and supporting inclusive education coupled with increased numbers of such students at the different levels in the Malawian education system. Chiponda's research fills the gap in literature by investigating whether there are policies and frameworks for representation of PWDs in junior secondary-school history textbooks. She engages with two theoretical underpinnings of disability, namely the medical and social disability models, to inform her understanding of the portrayal of PWDs in history textbooks. The medical model indicates that PWDs are sufferers, are a problem to others, cannot make decisions about their own lives and need professionals to look after them. The social model of disability, on the other hand, views disability as a social construction aligned to barriers that exist in society such as physical,

organisational and attitudinal barriers. Chiponda engages with the theoretical constructs to analyse the visual images and verbal texts of four purposively selected junior secondary history textbooks. Her argument for the choice of the sampled history textbooks was that they were commonly used in schools as the government-approved history textbooks for implementation of the new junior secondary-school history curriculum. Chiponda's findings revealed that PWDs are marginally represented in the content topics included in the sampled history textbooks in the junior secondary textbooks. Therefore, she concluded that the way in which historical characters with disabilities were represented in Malawian junior secondary-school history textbooks contradicts the policies that favour inclusive education for PWDs. However, the medical and social disability theoretical underpinnings are not sufficiently used to inform the analysis and interpretation of findings as indicated earlier in the text. An in-depth engagement with theoretical language would have been welcome.

In chapter three, Marshall Maposa's study continues with the conversation on history textbooks and focuses on the representation of the experiential notion of postcolonial Africa in contemporary South Africa history textbooks. Maposa makes a strong case for engaging with history textbooks as teaching and learning resources/educational media in South Africa. He engages with the postcolonial theory to understand the images and meanings of Africa found in four purposively selected history textbooks. He argues that the rationale for selecting the sampled textbooks was that they were approved by the Department of Education, were contemporary and contained topics and units of study on postcolonial Africa. He generated data from the verbal and visual texts in the selected history textbooks. Maposa engaged with Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA), focusing on three dimensions: description, interpretation and explanation. He asserts that his ability to explain the representations in the textbooks as discursive constructions was obtained from the contemporary postcolonial conversations at both macro and micro levels. In conclusion, Maposa's study echoes two important issues—firstly, that textbook authors need to be aware of the implications of their linguistic and visual choices when representing Africa because of the textbook users (South African teachers and learners) as key agents of pedagogical change. Secondly, following South Africa's exceptionalism, her position in Africa should be under scrutiny as teachers teach African history. However, it would have been useful to inform the reader how personal prejudices and bias were revised and dealt with in the research process (Gander, 2015).

In chapter four, Raymond Nkwenti Fru and Johan Wassermann explore the silences in history education focusing on the reunification of Cameroon in a Francophone

Cameroonian history textbook. The authors conceptualise reunification as a discourse related to the 1961 “marriage” or union of the former British and French Cameroon. The authors argue that while the curriculum stipulates the teaching of reunification as a topic in the history classroom, the concept is absent among history texts in the Francophone sub-system of education in Cameroon. Yet, Francophone Cameroonian textbooks represent the official government position on the Francophone Cameroonian educational sub-system. Against this backdrop, the authors analyse a widely used history textbook as a case study in the Francophone sub-system of education with a view to understanding the silence on reunification. The theory of silence is used to inform the authors’ understanding of the nature and power of silence and the analysis of the sampled textbook. Both visual and verbal texts of the case study secondary-school history textbook were analysed. The finding reveals a purposive and manipulative form of silence on reunification influenced by both producers and stakeholders such as Francophone politicians and ideologues. As observed in chapter three above, it would have been useful to inform the reader how the personal prejudices and biases (preconceptions) of the authors were revised and dealt with in the research process (Gander, 2015).

Chapter 5, authored by Nancy Rushohora, focuses on the challenges of teaching the Maji Maji war in contemporary Tanzania. Rushohora describes the Maji Maji war (1905–1907) as a form of African resistance to German colonialism in Tanzania (formerly German East Africa). She opines that the war was included in the Tanzanian school history curricula to facilitate a memory history and patriotism. Consequently, she engages with features of history education—textbooks, teacher’s content knowledge, curriculum, teacher training, local oral history and nationalistic projects—to investigate the potential and challenges of teaching the war memory history. She utilises the agency conceptual framework with a grounding in community and daily life as an analytical lens to the formal school history pedagogy and unofficial war memory accounts of the affected indigenous groups. The findings reveal two major challenges of teaching the Maji Maji war: firstly, the decline of war memories among the Maji Maji community, partly because the silenced oral narratives have not been integrated into history education, and secondly, research output in history learning has not been used to influence the pedagogy of Maji Maji. To this end, Rushohora recommends that history teachers encourage learners to bring their everyday life and indigenous ways of knowing to the school curriculum and pedagogy. This is relevant as attending to students’ pre-understanding of historical knowledge, based on their families, communities and cultural inclinations, brings a sense of unity, ownership, inclusion and brotherhood (Seixas, 1993). However, the chapter is silent about the challenges/limitations

of subjectivity, exaggeration and distortions in community oral narratives. A provision for validation of community, learners' and teachers' oral accounts by stipulating strict rules, procedures and multiple understandings would be welcome. Accordingly, Seixas (1993) postulates that there are no means of assessing the many myths and distortions that students (communities) might present to the history curricula.

Chapter 6, authored by Denise Bentreovato and Jean-Leonard Buhigiro, offers preliminary insights into the role of emotion in history teachers' approach to the sensitive topic of genocide in Rwanda's secondary-school classrooms. The authors align genocide with the colonial legacies of divide-and-rule between the Hutu and Tutsi, which caused adverse effects such as trauma and mental and emotional stress among Rwandan children. They employed the social constructivist theoretical lens to inform their understanding of emotions influenced by the historical trauma of genocide. Following an exploratory qualitative ethnographic approach, the authors draw data from in-depth interviews of 11 Rwandan secondary-school history teachers. The sampled history teachers highlighted their personal experiences and teaching practices in the emotionally sensitive topic of genocide as stipulated by the Ministry of Education. The findings revealed silence on the emotional atmosphere in history education classrooms. The authors align this with the possibility of the emotional professional journey experienced by teachers, which involved fear, nervousness and futurist stances. Additionally, faced with both desirable and undesirable emotions within themselves and learners, the teachers tended to fall in line with official policy, encouraging particular emotional dispositions towards the past, present and future. The teachers' pedagogical choices concerning the teaching of genocide appeared controlled and guided in such a way that personal experience and memories that may lead to negative emotions and dangerous discourses were contained. However, the limitations of the research are not sufficiently discussed. Taking the reader through the limitations of the research and how they might have been addressed would have been appreciated.

Chapter 7, by Reville Nussey, focuses on teaching another sensitive and emotive topic—that of apartheid in South Africa. In the introductory section, Nussey quotes a teacher who compared the teaching of controversial issues about South Africa's recent past to having "emotional elephants and other baggage" in the classroom environment. She echoes the epistemic phrase in the chapter title as she researches teachers' roles in embracing the controversial issues in the South African primary-school history classroom. Nussey argues that the contested issues in South African history are reminiscent of engagement of oral history and cooperative learning pedagogies in the classroom context. Drawing on data from classroom observations and interviews, Nussey examines teachers' attitudes in

dealing with the sensitive and traumatic topic of apartheid in the South African primary-school history classroom. Findings suggested a need to engage with a re-description of the teacher's role in helping to deal with sensitive and emotional topics in the teaching and learning of history in primary schools in South Africa. Nussey concludes with three major recommendations: (1) teachers to engage in continuous trainings on controversial issues; (2) teachers to become empathetic to the way apartheid has affected them by shifting roles from risk taker to enabler; and (3) engaging with active pedagogical methods of inquiry and questioning. Future research on emotive and controversial issues could come up with pedagogical frameworks grounded in theory to inform teachers (and indeed learners) in dealing with sensitive topics.

Chapter 8, by Robin Whitburn and Abdul Mohamud, examines the teaching of race and apartheid in different history classroom contexts in South Africa and the United Kingdom. The authors postulate that racism is a global aspect of injustice that has had a historical and contemporary impact on society. Inquiry-based learning on racism in South African (particularly apartheid) and British history were the highlighted topics in the respective history classrooms. Informed by the social justice framework, the authors conducted focus-group interviews with questions centred on the curriculum and the impact of historical inquiry on high-school students in South Africa and the United Kingdom. Findings revealed that, in the case of British history classrooms, learners engaged in historical thinking and moved beyond the binary of race, questioning master narratives while engaging with epistemic ideas outside the classroom context, while in the South African classroom, findings suggested more possible personal impacts as the history inquiry had disrupted conventional narratives and the psyche of students. Given the sensitivity of the topic of race and apartheid, it would have been useful for the authors to exhibit an awareness of their personal preconceptions and biases.

Chapter 9, by Sabrina Moisan, examined the teaching of South African apartheid history through the lens of human rights in the context of a Quebec high school (Canada). According to Moisan, apartheid is a global historical culture, which provides a better understanding of the concepts of structural racism, change and human rights. Moreover, Quebec teachers are required to teach anti-racism where apartheid is covered under history and citizenship education. Moisan engaged with theoretical frameworks of human rights education in the history classroom and social representation of social change to inform her study. Drawing on qualitative data from case-study teachers and learners from three secondary schools located in urban, semi-urban and rural areas, the findings revealed that none of teachers felt that they needed to develop the concept of racism during their study

of apartheid. Teachers avoided tackling the issue of racism with limited or no connections to the concepts of discrimination, segregation and repression. The results point to limited concerns on the issue of human rights in the Quebec classroom context as this is seemingly an issue in foreign countries. As I commented on chapter six, taking the reader through the limitations of the research and how they might have been addressed would have been desirable.

In conclusion, this is a timely and much-needed volume and should be read by history teachers, social studies teachers, teacher educators, teacher trainees, scholars, policy makers, students and all those teaching aspects of citizenship and history education. In the concluding chapter 10, Johan Wasserman and Denise Bantovato reflect that “Teaching African History in Schools serves as a channel that gives a quality voice to the history educationists writing about and for the continent” (p. 211). The authors argue that the book foregrounds Afrocentrism and representation of silenced voices and marginalised views as partially addressing the colonial legacies in the contemporary history education context. Wassermann and Bantovato echo a pertinent aspect of ownership and inclusion that is evident among African history educators, and indeed students, to be able to see themselves or similarities with themselves represented in the narratives. This fosters an understanding of the personal and local within a wider regional and global context. Thus, the book aligns with calls and global debates on decolonising the curriculum, particularly African history education curricula and pedagogy (Wassermann, 2018; Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2021; Sebbowa & Majani, 2021). Anchoring the studies (case studies) in theoretical frameworks and drawing on multiple sources of evidence in the form of history textbooks, interviews, observations and focus group discussions strengthened the credibility of the book in terms of its contribution to the development of historical content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. However, the book did not say much about the limitations of the studies conducted. Discussions on limitations of the studies would help readers contextualise the research findings.

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