

# “WHO DOES THIS HISTORY CURRICULUM WANT YOU TO BE?": REPRESENTATION, SCHOOL HISTORY AND CURRICULUM IN ZIMBABWE

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## **Abstract**

*This paper looks critically at representation in the history curriculum of Zimbabwe in relation to the production of subjectivity and identity that the government hopes will fulfil the quest for nationhood. It finds that content selection is skewed towards promoting a dominant group while syntactic knowledge is manipulated to make students be what the state wants them to think and be. Furthermore, the examinations reinforce the dominance of a single group by privileging metaphors that emphasize a selective narrative. The paper argues that the adoption of critical modes of address that promote critical pedagogic practice can help both the teachers and their students transcend the narrow specifications of the nationalist curriculum. This requires that the school history curriculum should be treated as a political performance which must be appraised beyond the written surface of its textuality as to uncover the unconscious and constraining representations in it. In this way teachers are likely to contribute new sentences, not oft-repeated ones, to that unending dialogue between the present and the past which is history.*

**Keywords:** History curriculum; Nation-state; Identity; Critical pedagogic practice; Modes of address; Zimbabwe.

## **Introduction**

This paper looks critically at what Parkes (2007:392) calls the uncontested “representational practices of history itself,” that are purveyed and canonized in the secondary school history curriculum, with specific reference to post-colonial Zimbabwe. As Parkes argues, embedded in the practice of school history are meta-narratives and narrative technologies that position us as peoples in relation to one another and to the broader political nation-state (p. 392). In this way, history curricula, imbued with the “capacity to define

the nation's story" (Clark, 2005:ii), assume an arrogance that presumes to know what they want the "world to be" and what students should become, (Todd, 2011:509). It is in this sense that the paper argues for the notion of representation in history, as constituting, in the words of Pötzsch (2011:76), "an intentional act – an articulation– that inserts an additional dimension, applies a certain frame, and adopts a particular perspective" to project meanings and alternative discourses in a pedagogical encounter as both a discursive and contested terrain. Invoking the contingency of historical representation invites us, as History curriculum designers and teacher educators (Parkes, 2007:396) to advancing a "counter-hegemonic discourse" (Hooks, 1990:149) that can unlock the hidden meanings that inhere in curriculum. Since the notion of a "national history curriculum" is highly contentious because the nation-state is always contested, it can never be fully representative of the interests of all who live in it (Sheldon, 2012:266; Christou, 2007:709). The susceptibility of school History is thus particularly pronounced but not limited to what Sheldon (2012:259) describes as "less mature states" where it can be used to inculcate a particular notion of national identity or promote the history of one particular group in society over another. For example, Korostelina (2011:2) illustrates that in Ukraine, state-controlled history education "intentionally concentrates on the complex processes of state-building as well as the dissolution of previous identities (including the Soviet identity) and the formation of a new national identity that promotes Ukrainian independence." Korostelina (2011) observes that following the establishment of Ukraine's independence in 1991, history education in public schools was completely revised. In addition, the Ukrainian Institute of National History was established and charged with studying and publicising the Ukrainian path to independence (Korostelina, 2011:2-3). Thus, Zimbabwe like Ukraine has to varying degrees deployed school history as "an apparatus for the social reproduction of national identities through the development of the individual to the images and narratives of nationhood" (Popkewitz, Pereyra and Franklin 2001:17). The main concern in this paper is thus about the transformational role that the history curriculum can play in order to make a difference in a world that presumes to know what it wants that world to be and what it wants students to become.

The paper addresses the above concern by drawing on the post-colonial school history syllabi in Zimbabwe to examine the question: 'Who does this history curriculum want you to be?' We assume that the symbolic and subjective meanings that are conveyed in curricula and notions of a Zimbabwean

national identity define curriculum as socially and historically constructed phenomena as Silva (1999:7) explains. He asserts that:

*Curriculum is itself a representation: not only a site in which signs that are produced in other places circulate, but also a place of production of signs in its own right. To conceive of curriculum as representation means to highlight the work of its production.*

To explore this representation in the history curriculum used in Zimbabwe, the following sub-questions are posed:

- What symbolic meanings and definitions of subjectivity are conveyed in school syllabi?
- What forms of identity politics are evident in school syllabi?
- What aspects of history teaching are emphasized in school history?
- How may students be encouraged to recognise the historically and socially, situated nature of knowledge and identity through the history curriculum?

The paper is divided into four sections as follows: the first outlines the methodological approach that informs this analysis. The second explores the context of history teaching in Zimbabwe and reflects on the representation that is employed to rebrand the nation-state. Seixas' benchmarks of history teaching, as well as substantive and procedural knowledge in history teaching (Bertram, 2009; Levesque, 2008) are employed as heuristics to understand pedagogical issues in history teaching. The theories are drawn on to unravel the (mis)representations that abound in history curricula in the hope that this opens new possibilities for school History as critical pedagogic practice (Parkes, 2007:383) in a post-colonial context. For as Freire (1990) reminds us, the text does not mirror the world as it is, but rather, creates the world in resonance to the prevailing hegemonies. The third presents an analysis of the two syllabi in order to identify notions of representation that they promote and their implications to the national cohesion they are meant promote in post-colonial Zimbabwe. The final section discusses what could be done to trouble the taken-for-granted assumptions that characterize the teaching of history and lay the foundations of critical pedagogic practice. First, however is an outline of the methodological approach that guided this analysis.

## **Methodological approach**

The analysis in this paper is informed by a qualitative interpretive inquiry

that uses content analysis as the main tool to examine the policy documents. Qualitative content analysis, as Bryman (2004:542) explains, is an “approach to documents that emphasizes the role of the investigator in the construction of the meaning of and in texts.” When used to analyse documents it allows the researcher(s) to construct categories or themes out of the data which can then be interpreted in the light of the research questions. The unit of analysis in the study comprised the two post-independence history syllabi, namely 2166 and 2167 and excluded the prescribed textbooks. School syllabi in Zimbabwe are sanctioned and produced by the Ministry of Education (MoE) through its Curriculum Development Unit (CDU). To this extent it can be argued that “they carry the imprimatur of the state,” (Hein and Selden, 2000:4) and can be taken to reflect the overt and covert mechanisms that the state employs to influence national identity and consciousness. In this sense school syllabi in Zimbabwe constitute “legitimated text created under state supervision,” (Korostelina, 2011:2) and by which the desired historiographies of the nation-state are canonized and purveyed. For these reasons school syllabi were considered critical and adequate for the analysis of what it is that the history curriculum wants the students in Zimbabwe to think and be.

The analysis of the documents proceeded in iterative stages with the first being the creation of categories into which the syllabi data could be categorized into units of analysis. This was followed by textual analysis which involved the interpretation of the texts and formulation of themes on the basis of the research questions and the concerns of history teaching as presented in the literature (see Seixas 2009a, Bertram 2009; Seixas 2009b). The next stage was explication which involved explaining and clarifying the material in order to draw comparisons and parallels between the emerging data and the theories of school history as practised elsewhere. Through analyzing the content of the syllabi the themes which the data lent itself to, were developed and examined to identify the symbolic meanings and definitions of Zimbabwean subjectivity on the basis of Habermas’s (1984) notion of dominant discourses and Ellsworth’s (1997:2) modes of address. As political and pedagogical devices, modes of address have transformative potential when deployed in critical educational discourses. They help unearth the discourses that are used to establish the subjectivities and identities that are nurtured through the teaching of history. In this context how learners could be encouraged to recognise the historically and socially, situated nature of the knowledge they are taught and the forms of identity promoted were also of particular interest to us for establishing whether or not traditions of critical pedagogy could

supported.

### **The context of history teaching**

To understand the context of History education in Zimbabwe, it needs to be located in relation to the nation-state the government envisaged for the country. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2011:9) until 1980 'Zimbabwe' was a politically imagined reality and not a nation-state. Therefore, at independence there was a need for the reconstruction of curricula to make it reflect what Falola (2005:508) calls the "ideology to remake nations." Mavhunga (2008:30) argues that "Africanizing the school curriculum" was thus undertaken as part of what Powell (2003:152) calls "an ongoing project to dismantle the cultural and epistemological heritage of Eurocentrism" and ensure that "the school curriculum can carry a truly African history for the consumption of the African pupil," (Mavhunga, 2008:43). The country had inherited the Rhodesian history syllabus 2160 which was based on the United Kingdom system of Ordinary Level Examinations which were set and marked by Cambridge University Examinations Syndicate. This syllabus placed equal emphasis on European and Central African history - a practice that became unacceptable after independence (Barnes, 2007:638). In keeping with traditional classical British education it had prioritized the recall of facts over critical thinking. To address the problem two major curriculum changes in the teaching of secondary school history were introduced as part of a broader national agenda to localize curricula and the examination. The history curriculum reflected the ideology of the state to familiarize students with what the new political authorities felt needed to be celebrated.

The first syllabus reform, 2166, launched in 1990 was concerned with both substantive and procedural knowledge in almost equal measure. It drew from the notions of 'new history' as it had developed in England in the 1960s and 1970s. Its novel approach was the emphasis on the students' engagements with the processes of how historians work. For example, the second aim (2.5.2) stated the need to "develop a national and international consciousness" among the pupils while also emphasizing that pupils should be able to "carry out simple research into aspects of local and national history using primary and secondary sources" (Syllabus 2166: 2). The remainder of the aims included the need to:

3:3 analyse, interpret and evaluate evidence, or weigh evidence, detect bias, points of view, opinions and value judgments;

3.4 assess the significance and the relevance of information, draw reasoned conclusions, make reasoned deductions and inferences;

3.5 empathize with the past and interpret events and decision-making of a particular period in the light of information and conditions prevailing at that time. (Syllabus 2166, 1996:2).

Syllabus 2166 also made provision for substantive knowledge in the following ways: first the grand narrative of doctrinaire Marxism-Leninism was made central to the teaching of history as it unequivocally stated that, pupils were to develop ‘historical skills and tools of analysis within the conceptual framework of historical and dialectical materialism,’ (Syllabus 2166, 1996: 2). This was supported by the stipulation of content that was framed along historical materialism and the development of societies. The topics included: Development of Early Societies in Central and Southern Africa; Industrialization and World Crisis. Section B focused on the study of Imperialism, capitalism and resistance in Zimbabwe, 1890–1950; the Rise of Nationalism in Zimbabwe to 1980 as well as Nationalism and imperialism (colonialism in Zaire or Ghana; Algeria or Kenya). Section C focused on Revolution and socialist transformation (Marxist ideas; Russian and Chinese revolutions to present day) as well as World anti-imperialist struggles and neocolonialism (Namibia, Tanzania, Algeria, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, South Africa, Palestine, Cuba, Vietnam, Zimbabwe) (Syllabus 2166, 1996:5). The following section looks at substantive and procedural issues in Zimbabwean history syllabi and relates them to what the curriculum wants the students to think and be.

### **Substantive and procedural knowledge in history syllabi**

Levesque (2008:30) has argued that it is ‘impossible for students to understand or make use of procedural knowledge if they have no knowledge of the substance of the past.’ His and Bertram’s (2009) notions of substantive and procedural knowledge in the teaching of history are thus useful to examine what the history syllabi in Zimbabwe wished the students to think and become. Substantive knowledge in history is concerned with what historical knowledge is about – what Levesque (2008:29) calls the ‘content’ of history. Procedural knowledge, on the other hand, focuses on the concepts and

vocabulary that provide “the structural basis of the discipline,” (2008:20). As he explains, these are the conceptual tools needed for the study of the past as a discipline and the construction of the content of historical knowledge. The procedural and substantive issues with history teaching reflect what for Seixas (1999:328) are two critical aspects of doing the discipline of history: first is the critical reading of texts, both primary sources and secondary accounts of the past; and second, is the construction of historical accounts by the students themselves. The two, when engaged with in a pedagogical relationship, are likely to promote what Parkes (2007:384) calls “critical pedagogic practice” that is antithetical to the silencing and homogenizing tendencies of a mono-perspectival approach to school History. Therefore, as to what Syllabus 2166 wanted the learners to think and be, it may be inferred that the syllabus envisaged history teaching as a mode of inquiry that would involve learners in critical thinking and multiple interpretations of history within the context of a historical materialist approach.

The successor syllabus, 2167, which is operational today, is radically different from its predecessor. It is however structured thematically as is the case with Syllabus 2166 and there is due emphasis in the opening statements that “topics and areas must, therefore, be studied in relation to the major historical themes and not a series of isolated narratives.” Its aims include the need to help learners:

- develop an interest in and enthusiasm for the study of historical events
- develop an understanding of local, national and international historical events
- develop skills and appropriate tools for analyzing historical events; and,
- understand and appreciate population, democracy and human rights issues as well as the responsibilities and obligations that accompany them.

The syllabus is divided into two parts and has 15 themes. Part one is entitled Southern Africa and has 11 themes, all on Zimbabwe except the last, which is on the struggles for majority rule and democratization in Mozambique and South Africa. Part two is entitled World Affairs and focuses on international developments from 1900, with the notable inclusion of China. However, rather than celebrate a comprehensive heritage of Zimbabwe, the new syllabi tended to focus on those aspects that the ruling party wishes to celebrate. In the attempt to build a nation-state out of a medley of rather disparate ethnic groups, brought together by colonial adventurism which carved nation-states for political expediency (Kössler, 2010:29) three political approaches were

followed. They shaped curriculum policy in general and the teaching of history in particular. First, according to Muzondidya and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2007:276) were “the coercive mobilisation and nation-building projects of the early 1980s till the end of the first decade which paid little attention to the ethnic configuration of the inherited state, as well as the structures and institutions which enacted and reproduced ethnicity.” As regards curriculum policy this implied the wholesale removal of racist terms in history syllabi and their replacement with Afrocentric terms. For example, the term tribe was deemed to be a colonial relic that accentuated divisions among Africans. It was replaced with ethnicity albeit without efforts to explain how ‘tribe’ now renamed ‘ethnic group’ would position students differently in relation to the images on which the new nation-state was being crafted.

The second approach employed in the second decade of independence was the ‘politics of silence’ (Muzondidya & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007:276) which represented a deliberate refusal to engage with those aspects of the past which are deemed ‘ugly history’ (Muponde, 2004:175). With regard to the curriculum it meant excluding from syllabi those issues that would have called into question the hegemonic nature of the state. This silence enabled a wave of mass popularity for the government as it masqueraded as if it were based on a national consensus with homogeneous assumptions and aspirations. The last approach which became particularly pronounced after 2000 involved the reimaging of the nation-state on a selective primordial past that frames the modern Zimbabwean state as the successor state to the Munhumutapa kingdom (Muzondidya & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007:276). It also revived reference to the country’s citizens as settler and indigene (Muponde, 2004:176) thus reviving the racial and ethnic bifurcations which had characterized the Rhodesian state. The wars of liberation renamed the Chimurengas acquired new symbolisms and define legitimacy as to who could/could not rule the county (Muponde, 2004:176). The curriculum was to be buttressed by a new history syllabus (2167) which drew from a patriotic historiography which, according to Ranger (2009:69) is an ‘extreme version of nationalist history’ that is averse to critical academic history. This rebranding of the nation-state caused a representational problem. It is discussed below.

A comparative analysis of the two syllabi reveals that the higher order cognitive skills of “new history” that are central in Syllabus 2166 have been replaced in Syllabus 2167 by what Bertram (2009:50) calls the “great tradition” approach to school history. This approach perceives history as “a body of



knowledge, which is clearly defined, chronologically organised and framed by high politics,” (Bartram, 2009:50). Thus, Syllabus 2167 is associated with what Ranger describes as “state produced history” which in his view is an extreme version of nationalist history in which the linearity of the existence of the nation is extended from the First Chimurenga, through the Second to the Third Chimurenga (Ranger, 2009:69). This history is averse to critical academic history as it regards critical questions as disloyal (Ranger, 2004).

The above assertions are authenticated by the downgrading of the study of primary sources which is strongly associated with procedural knowledge historical evidence to an optional topic that can be avoided altogether in the examinations. Therefore, teachers are not likely to teach what students can avoid answering in the examinations. In Syllabus 2166 the study of primary sources was mandatory as it constituted an examination paper worth 33% of the final examination mark. In practice, this implies that students may forego the fundamental elements of the discipline such as critical engagement, understanding why historical interpretations differ, and reconciling the values of the past with the present. This practice negates the goals of school history which should provide students with the ability to approach historical narratives critically (Seixas, 1999). The failure to provide students with these skills is, as Matereke (2011:3) argues, likely to breed children who are not only ill-prepared to deal with pluralism and diversity within the confines of their nation state but who are also too parochial to confront and negotiate the kaleidoscope of political communities, cultures and identities that characterize an increasingly cosmopolitan world.

### **Rebranding of the nation-state and the representational problem**

Zimbabwe needed to be rebranded as an inclusivist nation-state in contrast to the bifurcated Rhodesian state. For its reconstruction the disparate ethnic groups needed to see themselves as belonging to a unitary state. A “national history” was necessary to promote national coherence and forge a sense of “Zimbabweanness”. This had to be achieved without compromising disciplinary concerns of the subject. For example, Syllabus 2166 ensured that substantive issues in history would be adequately addressed from an appropriate ideological standpoint, which is socialism. It was essentially about, in Schubert (2010:57) words: “addressing who we are and might become—not merely about the acquisition of detached knowledge, skills, and dispositions”. Thus Syllabus

2166, the first post-independence syllabus, declared unambiguously that the purpose of teaching history was to enable pupils to ‘acquire an informed and critical understanding of social, economic and political issues facing them as builders of a [Socialist] developing Zimbabwe’ (Syllabus 2166, 1996:2). The ‘Socialist Zimbabwe’ aspect was later in 1996 following the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe in 1989.

The successor syllabus, 2167 launched in 2001, states in its preamble the need to help learners ‘acquire an informed and critical understanding of social, economic and political issues facing them as builders of a developing nation’ (Syllabus 2167:2) and excludes the call for a materialist approach to nation building. This marked a fundamental difference between the two syllabi as Syllabus 2166 became closely associated with a patriotic history. This historiography of the nation as Ranger (2004) argues, assumes the immanence of a Zimbabwean nation expressed through centuries of Shona resistance to external intrusion and re-incarnated by means of the alliance between mediums and ZANLA guerrillas in the second chimurenga of the liberation war. This is manifest in the representation of the ‘Zimbabwe’ nation-state as an unproblematic historical entity with a primordial identity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011) whose political constructedness was not open to critical academic history. The preponderance of Shona mythologies as the foundation myths of the new nation-state at the expense of other ethnic groups is not problematized. For example, there was so much emphasis on Shona luminaries such as Mbuya Nehanda, Chaminuka and Sekuru Kaguvi as part of what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2011:45) calls “Shona triumphalism”. In his view, heroism in public discourse and narrative of the nation was attributed to only those who participated in the liberation struggle from the ZANU side and names of historical figures from Shona ethnic groups such as Nehanda were elevated into guardians of the nation. This results in what Brewilly (2009:21) calls the “naturalization” of the nation-state as students are required to function as builders of a nation-state whose constructedness and complexities they are not called upon to unpack and understand. Neither are they required to understand how they are positioned and shaped collectively and individually in terms of race and ethnicity within this entity called Zimbabwe. This approach is typical of what Bertram (2008:55) calls “the presentation of the historically contingent as natural and inevitable.” For Popkewitz (2007:65) it reflects how school subjects as “alchemies --- transmogrify disciplinary thinking into normalizing pedagogies for making the child who [s]he is and who [s]he should be.” It is in this sense that the history curriculum can be

seen as a political performance through which representational practices are deployed to forge forms of consciousness that are amenable to the hegemonic to the nation-state project.

### **Content selection and identity politics**

The selection of content in both history syllabi focuses on Zimbabwe with the obvious intention to promote an awareness of the country's past. Syllabus 2166 however had a more internationalist outlook in that it propounded a comparativist approach with thematic issues guiding content organization. The emphasis was on comparative analysis in order to allow pupils to develop an internationalist world outlook while also understanding the role of their country in a global context. On the other hand, Syllabus 2167 eschews the comparativist approach (Barnes, 2007) as out of its fifteen themes eleven are on Zimbabwean history specifically. The rest are split on the struggles for majority rule and democratization in Mozambique and South Africa, and then, World Affairs which includes the two world wars. In Syllabus 2166 students had studied the industrial development of such diverse countries as the USA, UK, Japan, and Russia whereas in Syllabus 2167, only China is now studied. Such privileging of content with regard to what the curriculum wants the students to be and to think can be teased out as follows: First is the overt intent to focus on the country's history with the token inclusion of the histories of other countries. This practice is not unique to Zimbabwe as Wang (2008:743) argues that all nation-states place great emphasis on teaching their national history with the aim of consolidating the bond between the individual citizen and the nation-state. It may thus be argued that the history curriculum in Zimbabwe wants the students to be well versed with the story of the nation in order to tighten the tenuous bonds of nationhood – to be achieved through a singular focus on the nation's past. Second is the ideological disposition in which the content is selected and reframed. For ideology, not only guides the interpretation of the content but in the first place determines the content that gets selected. Thus Syllabus 2166 had foregrounded Marxism-Leninism as its ideological thrust and privileged the study of revolutionary struggles in The Third World with topics on Cuba and Vietnam included for study. In ideological terms, Syllabus 2167 appears to embrace a Pan Africanist identity although apart from Southern Africa the rest of the continent is ignored. For example, the privileging of Chinese history in the syllabus coinciding as it does with the country's 'Look East Policy' vindicates Parker's (2004) assertion

that those who have the power to control the official historical narrative in support of a dominant ideology of the state, exercise this power through the content that gets selected and deselected.

### **History examinations and identity politics**

The historical sensibilities promoted by the school curriculum are often reinforced by the nature of the school examination system. Examinations in Zimbabwe are centrally designed and run by the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC) which falls under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. This provides the state with sufficient leverage to influence what it wants the students to think and be. For example, Syllabus 2166 examined students' procedural knowledge through Paper One which required the analysis of primary sources to make reasoned judgements. The paper accounted for 33% of the total marks. Thus students were engaged in a critical reading of primary documents such as cartoons, treaties, photographs with the ability to interpret these in their historical context and to detect bias and prejudice (Barnes, 2007). In addition, essay writing was examined in Paper 2 of the examination and comprised 67 per cent of the final mark. Overall, students were examined not only for their ability to recall facts but more importantly on application and interpretation of skills. This form of examination was consistent with the democratic principles that the state had adopted at independence.

It is significant to note that the above goals are under threat with the launch of Syllabus 2167 whose examination questions privilege recall type of questions as opposed to essay writing and analysis of historical issues. For example, out of the 25 marks allocated to each examination question an unassailable 17 are allocated to recall and description compared to just 8 for interpretation and analysis. A typical examination question is as follows:

17(a). Name any three leaders of the delegation to the Lancaster House Conference of 1979 and their respective organisations. [6]

(b). Outline the events that took place between the signing of the Lancaster House Agreement and 18 April 1980. [11]

(c). How important were the Commonwealth forces in ensuring the success of the elections in 1980? [8]

(Source: ZIMSEC Question Paper 2167/1 2009).

In analysing such forms of examination questions, Moyo and Modiba (2011:149) assert that ‘to have 8 out of 25 marks allocated to interpretation and analysis implies that the teaching of history as a means to engender, as stipulated in Syllabus 2167, critical thinking in learners has receded to the background’. In their view, this is likely to entrench a more traditional approach to teaching history, where students need to master the facts of history in order to pass. This is because a fact-based approach is likely to be limiting in terms of the different perspectives that learners could develop during lessons. As a result school history tends to be viewed as a finished product that is not open to critical scrutiny by the learners.

It is our view that the privileging of simple recall answers in Syllabus 2167 examinations may not be incidental but part of a strategy to ensure that school history remains susceptible to the machinations of those with a vested stake in the status quo. It is a reincarnation of rote learning practices that were encouraged by a colonial regime that was determined to perpetuate its rule through the mental subjugation of Africans (Mavhunga, 2008). That such practices have found their way back into post- independence curricula is evidence of the resilience of colonial educational practices. More importantly, however, it is evidence of failure to deliver an education for liberation that the people of the post-colonial state yearn for. As the Habermasian (1984) theory of Communicative Action reminds us, ideology arises from, and, indeed, often creates distortions in patterns of communication and by extension in educational practice. It explains the representation problem in curriculum and the ways in which curriculum can be the basis of the negotiation of the representation problem. In distinguishing between instrumental and communicative rationality, Habermas develops what he calls “knowledge as critique” - a heuristic to understand the dynamics of knowledge production and the construction of meaning. Drawing from Marxism and Critical theory he sees education as both part of the apparatus of the state and also as highly critical of it (Fleming, 2010:121).

As a representation, curriculum becomes inscribed with symbolic realms of national identity and representation that are supposedly shared by the nation. Applied to the focus of this paper, the theory allows the history curriculum to function as an instrument of hegemony in the Gramscian sense. Master narratives are deployed as the common sense that defines what is real for all. From the above assertion two critical implications for history education can be identified. First, the theory provides a framework for rethinking education

as involving communicative action and a plurality of actors, that is, all social layers and interests are involved. Second, it highlights the contingency of all knowledge and the centrality of individuals as knowing subjects capable of reflecting in ways that are likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action in particular contexts. When applied to pedagogical practice, the theory enables us to re-imagine schools as historical and structural embodiments of forms and culture that are ideological in the sense that they signify reality in ways that are often actively contested and experienced differently by various individuals and groups. Our concern is with the latter as we reframe knowledge as critique to reimagine curriculum as a “discursive practice producing subjects and subjectivity, or forms of social identity” (Green, 2010:452).

### **The curriculum as discursive practice that produces subjectivity and social identity**

The issues of identity and subjectivity embedded in s theory can be better understood by drawing on Ellsworth’s (1997) theorization of teaching as a mode of address. The concept of modes of address has its origins in film and media studies where critical media scholars employ it to ask the question: “Who does this film address you to be within networks of power relations associated with race, sexuality, gender, class and so on?” (Ellsworth, 1997:1). Taken as a heuristic that is related to power dynamics, modes of address clarify the taken-for-granted assumptions that define relations between the social and the individual, (Ellsworth, 1997:22). As Terry (1997:277) argues, education programmes designed to enhance forms of life free from ideology must emphasize communication (both linguistic and symbolic) which is safeguarded from manipulation for strategic ends. Ideology has often been used to influence a general population so as not to see any alternative reading of the text. Thus the challenge for teachers is to work with the curriculum in ways that alert students to the risks which may result from the hegemony of education by narrow forms of nationalism, market forces and other supposed norms of social behaviour or of cultural expression. For as Ellsworth (1997:47) asserts, most curricula address students as if their pedagogies are coming from “nowhere within the circulating power relations” yet the terms of their address attempt to place students within relations of knowledge, desire and power. In this sense, modes of address can be a provocative and productive tool for those interested in pedagogy, as they “shake up solidified and limiting ways

of thinking about and practicing teaching” (Ellsworth, 1997:2). Thus when applied to textual analysis, such as is the case with history curricula herein, they free us from being condemned to “assume a fixed, singular, unified position within power and social relations’ and thus open possibilities ‘to address audiences or students in a way that doesn’t require them to assume --- and respond to the address being offered” in predictable ways (p. 9). In this way, modes of address remind us that the pedagogical encounter is not a neutral undertaking but one that is immersed in representations of the world, not as it is, but as the curriculum would want the students to see the world. Such representation is contained in the metaphors that abound in curriculum, and within these metaphors are ingrained assumptions, explicit or not, about what reality is and what is taken for granted. Modes of address help illuminate the ways in which these metaphors serve as arbitrary terms to legitimate forms of discourse that may be exclusionary of the lived realities of others. In this sense the curriculum becomes a site where otherness is framed according to dominant discourses.

The above issues are evident in school history examinations in Zimbabwe as linguistic meanings and metaphors are embedded in the questions that asked in order to promote a particular view of the reading of the country’s history. As Moyo and Modiba (2011) argue, metaphors such as ‘The Chimurenga’ predispose students towards a particular state of mind or consciousness towards the wars in the same manner that the metaphor, ‘War on Terror’ works on the consciousness of the U. S. citizens. This abuse of metaphor abounds in school syllabi as regards the land question in Zimbabwe. Examination questions are phrased in seemingly formal, non-judgmental language, and yet, the particular phraseology is likely to evoke a particular consciousness in learners, as they have to respond to a single reading and interpretation of a historical event. A typical examination question on the land reform after 2000 is presented below:

19. (a) State any six reasons for the Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwe from the year 2000. [6]

(b) Describe the methods used to acquire and re-distribute land in Zimbabwe from the year 2000. [11]

(c) Did the peasants benefit from this Land Reform Programme? Explain your answer. [8]

(Source: 2006 O’ Level examination Paper One).

As argued by Moyo and Modiba (2011), “benefit” as a metaphor in the question serves as a phrase that points to what should be imagined as an outcome of the land reform policies. This being what the history curriculum in effect wants the students to think and be. It is against this backdrop that it becomes imperative for teachers to confront, deconstruct, and transfigure the taken-for-granted assumptions that are embedded in metaphors that get legitimated as official knowledge through school syllabi. This teachers can do through critical modes of address which as Margonis (2011:275-6) argues, do not merely communicate a content from one person to another. Rather, they set meanings in circulation in a particular intersubjective space. It is in this manner that language, power and identity become salient factors in the problem of representation in curriculum (Habermas, 1984). As a theory concerned with meaning in situated and historical beings who are capable of change and reflection, Habermas’s theory allows us to focus attention on metaphors in curriculum, the subjectivities that they engender and how through deliberation consensus is achieved. For Habermas, communicative action implies that participants are not primarily oriented to their own individual successes. Rather, they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of actions on the basis of common situations (1984:286).

### **Curriculum as a rationalizing technology**

The Chimurenga wars have been used in the words of Seixas (2009a:719) as “the gold standard [and] as an instrument to shore up the coherence of the national story, the valourizing of national heroes, and the significance of the nation on the international stage.” The aim is to produce an uncritical and patriotic citizenry that lacks exposure to alternative histories of the nation-state and its contested past. The rhetorical assertion, the future of our children, as Clark (2008) shows with reference to Australia is often deployed as a rationalizing technology to justify what is selected as official history. The historical sensibilities of nation-state that the syllabus seeks to promote are illustrated by the deliberate exclusion of what is perceived as “ugly history” (Muponde 2004:175) in the form of the atrocities that claimed over 20000 lives in Matabeleland and the Midlands. At the same time, fairly recent events as the land reform have become part of school history that is regularly examined in state sanctioned public examinations (see Moyo and Modiba, 2011). Such content selection reflects what the nation-state desires to forget



and expunge from the national psychic and what it wishes to remember and celebrate. This is the arrogance of curriculum in that it presumes to know what it wants the students to know and remember and what it wants them to forget.

In the history curriculum in Zimbabwe there is deliberate representation of, for example, the Chimurenga wars as the defining moments of the country's history. For example, the topic, The Second Chimurenga in Syllabus 2167, is synonymous with the study of the rise of African Nationalism with clear attempts to present it as a continuation of the First Chimurenga whose heroes are venerated as having prophesied the reemergence of the struggle after the 1896/97 wars. Similarly, the horrors of colonialism are invoked in the representation of whites and the British in particular as the enemy that had to be defeated through armed struggle. Participation in the Second and now the Third Chimurenga has therefore, become a rationalizing technology which confers legitimacy on the country's leaders, and at the same time binds the rest of the populace to what Seixas (2009a:719) calls a never-ending collective debt to those who sacrificed for the collective good. Such practices serve to close spaces for alternative readings of the nation's past, and become a rationalizing technology for the policing of how students think and what they want to be. Such practices, as Klein (2010:614) argues, amount to a deliberate molding of historical facts into emotionally appealing narratives that exclude other perspectives.

The exclusion of other perspectives in the study of history is likely to deny students the opportunity to understand the mutability and contestedness of history in ways that highlight its representational metaphors as politically constructed and historically contingent. This understanding is, in Habermas's view, the sine qua non for deliberative democracy by which students can learn to live together and yet hold differing views. As to what the students should be as they study history Seixas (2000:20-21) argues that the task for students "is not so much to arrive at a 'best' or most valid position on the basis of historical evidence as to understand how different groups organize the past into histories and how their rhetorical and narrotological strategies serve present day purposes." Such an approach provides learners with the kind of complicated and compassionate process of understanding, the kind of knowledge that they need to make sense in terms of our contemporary world (Sandwell, 2007:27). We argue that the history curriculum in Zimbabwe wants the students to be an uncritical citizenry without the conceptual tools

to understand their place as historical beings with an agency of their own. This is not surprising as Ellsworth (1997:7) argues the terms of a curriculum are ‘aimed precisely at shaping, anticipating, meeting, or changing who a student thinks she is.’

### **Content of school curricula the social reproduction of national identities and the promotion of nationhood**

The selection of content in history curricula Zimbabwe is tied to what Clark (2009) calls the national story in that it seeks to propagate a particular narrative that reimages the nation in positive light. In her view there is a wide spread popular understanding that history education comprises the essential facts about the nation and should [thus] play a positive and uplifting role in national life. In Australia the metaphors ‘Black armband’ and ‘History wars’ gained currency as symbolic representations of a contested past (Parkes, 2007). The metaphors became tied up with what the state wanted the students think about the past. In Zimbabwe, the history curriculum, as discussed in this paper, fits neatly the metaphor “whipping into line” the recalcitrant citizens (Materike, 2011:1) as the history curriculum is deployed to coerce students into an assumed common nationhood. It is imperative that students in Zimbabwe be taught those aspects that would empower them to rethink and use the past responsibly instead of shying away from it. This would help them achieve a state of mind that allows them to realize their own particularity in time, as players in a continuous process of historical meaning making. Yet, the selection of content as argued above reinforces ways that deny students critical historical engagement with their past and present.

### **Troubling the taken-for-granted assumptions as the foundations of critical pedagogic practice**

The above questions of what content to include in school history open up the possibility of deliberation in a pedagogical relationship as they lead to discourses that offer oppositional practices and fresh objects of analysis. Through such analysis teachers and students come to understand how they are themselves positioned and produced as subjects in and by the representational practices they work with. This will help to free them from the arrogance of state sanctioned prescriptions of who they are and should be and provide

them with alternative ways of perceiving what is real and valid in their world. To achieve this, history teachers need to foreground their pedagogies in a critical-emancipatory praxis that is informed by the Habermasian notion of knowledge as critique. This can only begin when both teachers and students critically deconstruct what it is that the curriculum wants them to be. It occurs when the history curriculum is treated as a political performance which must be appraised beyond the written surface of its textuality as to uncover the unconscious and constraining representations in it. In this way teachers are likely to contribute new sentences, not oft-repeated ones, to that unending dialogue between the present and the past which is history.

In addition, history teachers ought to be empowered with the conceptual knowledge to embed a well-framed conception of historical thinking into their teaching (Siexas, 2009b:2). This requires that teachers be well-versed with notions of doing the discipline of history. They have to promote an inquiry model to school history and reframe the curriculum as a site for the reconstruction of meaning and not the perpetuation of taken-for-granted assumptions that resonate with the ideological proclivities of the powerful. As Seixas (2009b:30) concludes, understanding the nature of historical interpretation and the use of historical evidence – thinking historically – would provide a starting point. When this happens the curriculum “becomes recognizable and intelligible as a social institution, and as a social practice caught up in the (re)production of shifting networks and formations of power, knowledge and desires,” (Green and Reid, 2008:21). In this way education becomes, as Peters (2008:20) argues, a way of reaching beyond the “confines of the modern state and the project of nation building to establish an orientation to the Other in cultural and political terms.” It is herein that lies the representational practices that shape who we are and might become as we engage with a curriculum that is concerned with addressing who we are and not merely the cognitive mission of schooling.

Zimbabwe is a nation-state that is in need of a history curriculum that will not presume to know what its students want to be and to think. The recent struggles for democratisation have rendered the school curriculum a contested terrain of memory and history with the epistemological concerns of the subject, such as doing the discipline of history, relegated to the background. There is, therefore, need for democratic voices in the country to commit to a genuine pluralistic reading of the country’s historiography. What must not be overlooked by the makers of a new curriculum for a democratizing Zimbabwe

is the need to create that necessary balance between syntactic knowledge and substantive knowledge in history curriculum policy. Thus by engaging critical modes of address in lessons teachers will be able to help learners to know why they are doing. In this way, teachers can make the curriculum documents “behave” in unpredictable and complex ways. As those tasked with developing a new history curriculum for the country they will do well to remember the advice of Roth (2006:588) that:

*We as educators have to abandon the idea of furthering a common identity through education, and view the development of criticality, and hence democratic competence, differently. Instead of focusing on epistemic aspects only or on identifying subjects who are in power, or on the objectifying and structuring economic or governing principles that allegedly regulate social relations, or on the impossibility of education in the revolutionary sense, we can entertain the necessary conditions of understanding.*

It is in the light of the above assertions that modes of address become critical heuristics that would sensitize teachers and students to the (mis) representational practices by providing a language with which to rethink the relations between power and knowledge; student and curriculum; and between the centre and margins. It is on the basis of this understanding that we can begin to ask new and deeper questions about how the curriculum wants students to think and be. In the pedagogical relationship the question to ask becomes “What do you think about it?” (Roth, 2006:581) rather than, what is this?” Further questions to ask may include “How do we understand this?”, “What can or should we do about it?”, and “How do we legitimize our action’ along different dimensions of citizenship?” (Roth, 2006:588). Similar questions are suggested by Biesta (2006:28) as follows: “What do you think about it?; Where do you stand? and How do you respond?”

## **Conclusion**

This paper has looked critically at the problem of representation in the history curriculum in Zimbabwe with regard to the production of subjectivity and identity in the quest for nationhood. The politics of (mis)representation have been shown to be at the heart of curriculum practice in this country as content selection is skewed towards promoting a particular group. In an important way, both syntactic and substantive knowledge in the teaching of history have been manipulated to make students be what the state wants them to think and be. As a rationalizing technology of control, the examinations

reinforce the limited goals of history teaching by privileging simple recall questions over those that require critical engagement with the past. The paper concludes that modes of address are an example of critical pedagogic practice that can transcend the narrow specifications of what a nationalist curriculum wants students to be. It is hoped that this paper has laid the foundations on which history curriculum planners and teachers can begin to dialogue about history teaching as a political performance through which students can be led to discover that knowledge functions as a form of technology of domination, control or liberation and that through such interrogation they can begin to ask questions that are likely to lead to their emancipation.

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