

Attempts to promote social cohesion: School history curricula in post-colonial South Africa and Zimbabwe

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Despite extensive research into the function of education in promoting social cohesion, the role of the history curricula in promoting solidarity in South Africa and Zimbabwe remains under-researched. Understanding the history curriculum attempts made at the policy level to promote social cohesion by two postcolonial Sub-Saharan countries could unlock useful policy and practice implications for those who seek to mitigate conflicts in heterogeneous societies. Using document analysis, we draw from journal articles and policy documents to explore the attempts made by Zimbabwe and South Africa in history curricula reforms to enhance social cohesion, given the contemporary upsurge of intolerance, exclusion, and discrimination in Sub-Saharan Africa. Findings suggest that while the attempts by South Africa and Zimbabwe to promote social cohesion in the global village are evident, conflicts that emanate from some interferences and manipulations in policy formulation by politicians remain a challenge. We recommend that Sub-Saharan countries craft their history curriculum with minimal interference from politicians, if we aim to propagate social cohesion to improve a sense of belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition, and legitimacy among citizens. Our study contributes insights into how countries can reform and implement history curricula to establish and entrench social cohesion at their level.

Introduction

The tide of intolerance, discrimination, racist violence, xenophobia, and border closures against refugees in Sub-Saharan African countries is a good reminder to insert values in the education curricula that encourage social cohesion (UNESCO, 2021). Social cohesion means the ties or the glue that holds societies together. The social cohesion function of education is at the heart of each nation's education system, and one of the main reasons why nations invest in public schooling. Recent studies suggest that countries that tend to splinter, use public education to reduce the risk of that happening (Westheimer, 2022). While several attempts have been made to conceptualise social cohesion and its measurement in Africa (Burchi & Zapata-Román, 2022; Njozela, Shaw & Burns, 2016), other studies explored the nexus between education and social cohesion (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo & Smith, 2017b; Sayed, Badroodien, Hanaya & Rodríguez, 2017). Increasingly, studies across the globe have focused on the potential of the education system to enhance social cohesion (Kuppens & Langer, 2019). As confirmed by Hamber (2007) education shapes cohesion by teaching people about diverse cultures and bringing them into contact with people of divergent backgrounds. However, Bush and Saltarelli (2000) reported that rather than promoting social cohesion and peace, education can also be used as a tool to separate people. They contended that education can be used to drive a wedge between people instead of bringing them together because:

Curriculum packages that espouse tolerance and egalitarianism, but that are delivered within educational structures that are fundamentally intolerant and inequalitarian cancel out much of the potential positive impact (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. 34).

However, previous studies in Africa have failed to consider how specific subjects in the educational curricula promote social cohesion while those in Europe cited history and social studies (Heyneman & Todoric-Bebic, 2000). Our study aims to interrogate the attempts made in the education policy of Zimbabwe and South Africa to promote social cohesion from 1980 and 1994 to date, using the history curriculum as a case. By interrogating the attempts made by the two countries in the history curricula, our article provides insights into what could be the source of the conflicts in the two countries. We hope that the lessons of experience will be incorporated into the current efforts by African countries to design and implement ways of promoting social cohesion. The insights will help curriculum designers, policy makers and history teachers see the need to transform both the history curriculum and their practices to tame conflict in their countries. Given this, though limited, we believe this study is unique in that it offers some important insights into what we must do in the history curriculum and its implementation to promote social cohesion.

Literature review

Social cohesion

Literature notes that the term social cohesion remains a vague and contested concept with little consensus on how to define or measure it (De Berry & Roberts, 2018; Fonseca, Lukosch & Brazier, 2019). As such, it is loosely understood as the quality of relationships between different groups of people, and between those groups and the institutions that govern them (Holloway & Sturridge, 2022). While a variety of definitions of the term social cohesion have been suggested, this study will employ the definition coined by Émile Durkheim, a French sociologist, who defined social cohesion as the interdependence of individuals within a society and identified it as the absence of latent social conflict and the presence of strong social bonds (Fonseca et al., 2019). In concurrence, Jenson (1998) following the Government of Canada's Policy Research Sub-Committee, had conceptualised it as the ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges, and equal opportunity within the country, based on a sense of trust, hope and reciprocity among all citizens.

In the African context, social cohesion is nationalism which is a process that assists in fostering in people a sense of belonging to the same community and the feeling that they are members of that community. Building on this, social cohesion in this study is a collective attribute, a communal togetherness in a collectivity of people (Holloway & Sturridge, 2022). Conceived this way, social cohesion has two main dimensions: first, reducing disparities, inequalities, and social exclusion; and second, strengthening social relations, interactions, and ties. It also involves tolerance of and respect for diversity at both institutional and individual levels. Taken together, in this collective framing, social cohesion is, therefore, a social glue or bond that accentuates mutuality, affinity, shared aims, togetherness and civic (Fonseca et al., 2019), or put differently, it is what keeps society together.

Social cohesion in educational programs

Social cohesion has gained currency in the world, specifically in Africa because African countries, as they recover from colonisation and tragic pasts of violence and/or conflict, are grappling with the project of social integration (Potgieter & Zulu, 2015). Despite the evidence available which points out that the Southern African countries are more developed than other regions in Africa, they nevertheless currently experience persistent challenges related to intolerance and exclusion (UNESCO, 2021). Such happenings are a threat to global peace of and many studies submit that education has the potential to shake off the constraints of conflict (Heyneman & Todoric-Bebic, 2000; Kuppens & Langer, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). Increasingly, studies have focused on the potential of the education system to enhance social cohesion, particularly so in multi-ethnic societies (Kuppens & Langer, 2019). As argued by Westheimer (2022) education, after all, is one institution that commands the attention of nearly the entire population for at least 10 formative years and as such challenges to social cohesion highlight the need for young people to be exposed early on and throughout their educational pathways to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions consistent with social cohesion. However, while education is credited for promoting social cohesion, it is also criticised for being a wedge between the ruling class and the working class. As argued by Bush and Saltarelli (2000) the negative face of education shows itself in the uneven distribution of education to create or preserve privilege, the use of education as a weapon of cultural repression, and the production or doctoring of textbooks to promote intolerance.

Numerous strategies drawn from education have been used to foster social cohesion across the globe. For example, in Chad, Ghana, Mozambique and the United Republic of Tanzania, the school system is assigned a central role in creating a unified sense of nationhood, using a central language of instruction and centrally prescribed textbooks and curricula (Heyneman & Todoric-Bebic, 2000), though this approach limits diversity in voices, engagement in its plurality and reconciliation. In other nooks of the world such as Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa, and Kenya, three strands of education, namely multicultural, citizenship, and peace education, have been used not explicitly to promote social cohesion (Kuppens & Langer, 2019). More examples can be drawn from Rio Negro Province in Argentina where a history course is included, wherein students jointly work on a project called 'Adolescents Here and There, then and Now' whose goal of the exercise is to discover the diversity of their origins and to explore cultural diversity in past and present generations of Argentinians (Braslavsky, 1993, p. 48 in Heyneman & Todoric-Bebic, 2000).

Our study interrogates the attempts by South Africa and Zimbabwe in the history curricula to enhance social cohesion; provides insights into what could be a source of the conflicts in the two countries and proffers some suggestions thereof. Hereunder, we offer what inspires the study to use the history curriculum as a case.

History curriculum and social cohesion

Our study examines the Form 5-6 Zimbabwean History curriculum and the Grade 10-12 South Africa History curriculum. We picked these levels because they are the last phases

before the students enter into tertiary education where the history curriculum is not available to most students, except to a few based on their choice. After tertiary, the students go into a world where conflicts exist. We selected the history curriculum for our research because it covers the study of history, the nation and its peoples, other countries and their cultures, and the interaction between people and their settings. We have previous experience with investigation of history curriculum in South Africa, from the perspective of multilingual societies (Chimbunde, Lekhethe & Moreeng, 2024). Additionally, school history raises informed citizens who can make sense of the world and meaningfully contribute to society. As argued by Awgichew and Ademe (2022) history is critical in promoting social cohesion and can convey collective historical memory, create peaceful socialisation in the society, and play a critical role in shaping the nation-building process and producing communities that are aspired for.

Theoretical framework

The study is based on the work of Fraser (2005), who submitted that social cohesion needs to uphold representation, recognition, redistribution, and reconciliation. These attributes apply to the field of education in general and history curriculum in particular. The theoretical and analytical framework was further developed by Novelli, Lopes Cardozo and Smith (2017b) who coined the term “4Rs” to represent the four dimensions, recognition, redistribution, representation, and reconciliation that are combined (Sayed et al., 2016). The first dimension, recognition, is the acceptance and affirmation of variety and identities concerning gender, language, politics, religion, ethnicity, culture, and ability within societal systems. On the other side of the coin, the absence of these would constitute misrecognition (Novelli et al., 2017b). Redistribution occurs when diverse groups in society, especially disadvantaged and less fortunate populations, have equitable and non-discriminatory access to resources. Seen that way, inequality and discrimination would be characterised as maldistribution. The ability or inability to engage in governance and decision-making about the distribution, use, and allocation of material and human resources at all societal levels is defined as representation; failure to do so would constitute misrepresentation. The fourth component is reconciliation, which entails addressing the wrongs done in the past, dealing with the material and psychological fallout from conflict, and building trustworthy relationships in contrast to inflicting pain (Sayed et al., 2016).

The framework recognises the multiple dimensions of inequality and injustice underpinning contemporary conflicts and examines divisions within the society through the interconnected dimensions of the macro context of global and national political economy and at the level of history curriculum interventions within the society. The framework fitted well into the study because we were able to use these dimensions to explore what attempts were made in the post-colonial history curricula in post-conflict environments to promote social cohesion. The policy documents were interrogated using these dimensions to discern whether the dimensions were evident and being promoted or otherwise. Thus, we juxtaposed what is in the policy documents with the tenets of the framework to check whether the documents were consistent with what the framework articulated.

Methodological approach

Using document analysis, our approach draws from journal articles and policy documents in the public domain to analyse the attempts made by Zimbabwe and South Africa in history curricula reforms to enhance social cohesion, given the upsurge of conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa. Our study offers a historical analysis of the history curriculum policy documents used in the two countries. As for Zimbabwe, history syllabi and policy documents written in and after 1980 were purposively studied. This was followed by a review of journal articles and documents which speak to the history curriculum in Zimbabwe post-1980 to date. In South Africa, the history curriculum review included all policy documents on curriculum reforms which included Outcomes Based Education (OBE), Revised National Curriculum statements (RNCS) and Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS). Like in Zimbabwe, journals and documents published in 1994 and thereafter were sampled for content analysis.

We searched the literature in different electronic databases, for instance, ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR and Science Direct, using the phrase “*Attempts to promote social cohesion: School history curriculums in post-colonial South Africa and Zimbabwe*” as search words. The employment of documents to generate data was beneficial because written documents are non-reactive data sources that could be read and reviewed several times, remaining unchanged by the researchers’ bias and influence (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). This improves the trustworthiness of the study, as findings can easily be replicated using the same documents (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data analysis is informed by a multidisciplinary framework of redistribution, recognition, representation, and reconciliation (Novelli, Lopez Cardozo & Smith, 2017b) and thus data were themed.

Findings and discussion

Attempts in the post-colonial history curriculums in South Africa

Document analysis shows that in 1994 democratic South Africa embarked on a series of educational reforms meant to build social cohesion and entrench the values of the new constitution (Chisholm, 2004; Maluleka, 2023; Tibbitts & Weldon, 2017). With the vision of the rainbow nation, there was evident political resolve to restructure the curriculum, harmonise messaging, de-racialise, and purge the polarising apartheid political climate at the time the Africa National Congress (ANC) became the ruling party. The idea of the rainbow nation emerged with the presumption that a new South Africa was going to emerge, one that would reject the racist and racialised logic of apartheid and promote diversity, social justice, and democratic tolerance as its cornerstones (Hlathswayo, 2021). The initial attempt at curriculum reform saw the approval of the Interim Core Syllabus (ICS), sometimes known as the interim syllabi, which sought to exclude any openly sexist and racist content from school history.

Curriculum 2005 (C2005), an outcomes-based education program, was then adopted in 1997 to create an inclusive school history (Maluleka & Ledwaba, 2023). The curriculum developers were tasked to create a curriculum for school history that was based on

perspectives of the past other than those of colonialism and apartheid. Curriculum 2005 was revised after showing some limitations towards embracing diversity and gave birth to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) that was first implemented in 2002, though it incorporated sensitive and divisive historical topics into its curriculum. However, it is important to note that the concepts of social transformation, human rights, inclusion, and environmental and social justice informed the creation of both the C2005 and the RNCS (Maluleka & Ledwaba, 2023). The latest reform attempt saw the adoption of the CAPS in 2011 which replaced the RNCS. All the effort in these revisions was meant to promote social cohesion for South African people. As reflected in the preface of the RNCS document which reads:

This curriculum is written by South Africans for South Africans who hold dear the principles and practices of democracy. It encapsulates our vision of teachers and learners who are knowledgeable and multi-faceted, sensitive to environmental issues and able to respond to and act upon the many challenges that will still confront South Africa in this twenty-first century (DoE, 2002, p.1).

This is also reflected in an extract from the CAPS document which reads:

Healing divisions of the past, establishing a society based on democratic values, social justice, and fundamental human rights. Lay foundations for a democratic, open society where the government is based on the will of the people and equal exercise of law. Build a united, democratic South Africa (CAPS, 2011, p. 1).

Drawing from the above CAPS document together with the earlier versions of the revisions supported by the South African Constitution, we acknowledge that several of the policies related to social cohesion have said all the right things. This, of course however, does not mean that the policies and their rationales were actively implemented or pursued. As submitted by Maluleka (2023) and Novelli et al. (2017a) the policy shifts post-apartheid for a new curriculum intended to give rise to a constitutional democracy where a learner is an empowered active citizen in a harmonious community. However, further analysis replicated that while South Africa pursued the goal of the rainbow nation through foregrounding social differences, the attempt at social cohesion with cultural diversity was made more challenging by the presence of ethnic and linguistic minorities, regional claims to autonomy or cultural identity, the influx of migrants and socio-economic conflict (Novelli et al., 2017a). However, against such a backdrop, four curriculum revisions were made aimed at building national identity and unity through national symbols and philosophies. However, there is a broad consensus that the rainbow nation in South Africa and its attempt at social cohesion is in trouble (Hlathswayo, 2021), given the occurrence of the 2015/2016 nationwide student protests which re-ignited calls for the transformation of education and schooling in post-apartheid South Africa against a pervasive coloniality and its power matrix that continues to regard Africans as non-beings or non-human (Maluleka, 2023).

When the history curriculum was reformed, added content was located within a framework of social cohesion in that it made provision for diverse memories and narratives, recognising South African diversity and attempting to redress the invisibility of the formerly marginalised and subjugated voices (DoE, 2003). The CAPS in its preamble articulated that:

The national curriculum in South Africa is the culmination of efforts over seventeen years to transform the curriculum bequeathed by apartheid and thus built the curriculum on the values that drew from the country's Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) which explains in part that they are to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental rights; create a democratic, unified South Africa that can occupy its proper position as a sovereign state in the international community (CAPS, 2011, p. i).

In the context of the history curriculum, CAPS averred that history must support citizenship within a democracy by:

... upholding and educating the public about the principles outlined in the South African Constitution; and reflecting the perspectives of a broad social spectrum so that race, class, gender, and the voices of ordinary people are represented (CAPS, 2011, p. 8).

Along these lines, the reinstatement of history in the curriculum was regarded as a way of promoting social integration (DoE 2000) because one dimension of social cohesion speaks to respect for and affirmation of diversity and identities in societal structures and identifies the multiple dimensions of inequality and injustice underpinning contemporary conflicts and examines divisions within the society. We also gather from documents that in 2001-2002, history was revised into the national curriculum.

Despite that, success in social cohesion after several attempts to align the history curriculum to national interests proves to be elusive. We submit in agreement with Hlathswayo (2021), Maluleka (2023) and Novelli et al (2017a) that while the education system reform processes were implemented; with a renewed emphasis on the history education curriculum during that period up to 2013, societal challenges such as inequality, violence and poverty were and are still spilling in the country. That demonstrates the failure to embrace all the dimensions of social cohesion which rest on cooperation, trust, representation, and reconciliation. Several studies report that in apartheid South Africa, the power reflected in the history curriculum was defined by Afrikaner nationalist historians who sought to justify white supremacy and Afrikaner control of the country (Chisholm 2004; Novelli et al., 2017a). In agreement, Tibbitts and Weldon (2017) affirmed that the apartheid curriculum was underpinned by a racist and religious-nationalist (Calvinist Christianity and the Boer nation) ideology that sought to naturalise the unequal wider social relations in society, legitimise racial segregation, privilege the Afrikaner nation and its history and discredit black and alternative historical perspectives. That negated social cohesion because isolation, exclusion and illegitimacy were promoted by such a curriculum.

However, the CAPS documents transformation was made on the content, going from the Afrikaner nationalist view to one that focused on the struggle history, African history, and global history. History curriculum of that time, as shown in the CAPS document, aimed towards "reducing discrimination based on race, class, gender, and ethnicity to advance human rights and peace and xenophobia" (CAPS, 2011, p. 8). This shows that the focus was more on political history and subsequently these issues were not entirely unifying, as Afrikaners felt left out of the history of South Africa. Furthermore, some critics bemoaned

an inadequate picture of South African history that emphasised Western growth and history, rather than the realities of the nation and the continent.

Novelli and Sayed (2016) noted and contended that there were problems with the way the African National Congress (ANC) presented the history of the fight against apartheid and with the focus placed on individuals and symbols as opposed to the battle of the masses. Other critics also felt that the historical content supports the political ruling party and does not recognise the contributions of other political parties in the country. However, the history curriculum for Grades 10-12 in South Africa has this topic: *'The end of the Cold War and a new global world order 1989 to present'* which tallies with one of the aims of the history curriculum as shown on the CAPS document which reads *'preparing young people for local, regional, national, continental and global responsibility'* (2011, p. 8). Such snippets show that South Africa as a country was aware of its diverse ethnic groups and was therefore taking strides by allowing all citizens to enjoy all attributes embedded in social cohesion such as belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition and legitimacy rather than isolation, exclusion, non-involvement, rejection, and illegitimacy (Hamidi, 2015).

Despite such efforts in the educational policy to promote cohesion, we argue along with Matema and Kariuki (2022) that educational reforms in South Africa have not yet emerged as the cohesive society envisioned at independence over two and a half decades ago because of persistent social movements, routine xenophobic violence, continuous service delivery protests and growing unemployment, widening racial inequalities and pervasive race wars on social media, among other things. In agreement, Dahlberg and Thapar-Björkert (2023) reported that in 2008, there was an outburst of xenophobic attacks in South Africa, which started with mobs of South African nationals attacking foreign nationals in Johannesburg. The xenophobic attacks resurfaced in 2015, 2017 and 2019 and spread around the country killing and displacing many. These attacks illuminate the cleavages that characterise South Africa's socio-political landscape and signpost the need for cohesion.

To respond to the upsurge of conflicts, in 2015, the South African government proposed to make history education compulsory at a high school matriculation level (Novelli, et al., 2017a). This proposal included the consideration of incorporating elements of the history syllabus into the subject of *Life Orientation*. Such attempts were meant to instil values of cooperation and social cohesion and to purge social misfits in society. That proposal tallies with the dimension of social cohesion which advocates for the involvement of all members of society in governance and decision-making concerning the distribution, utilisation, and allotment of human and material assets (Holloway & Sturridge, 2022). However, that has not been realised, as argued by Mlambo and Masuku (2023) that although South Africa is recognised as a rainbow nation with many diverse cultures and customs, it is hidden beneath ethnic and tribal emotions that have stifled the idea of unity and social cohesion. Interestingly, colonial history in Zimbabwe showed similarities with the one offered in Apartheid South Africa. This was because, the history curriculum placed equal emphasis on European and Central African history, focusing on Western culture and politics and denigrating African culture (Barnes, 2007; Dube & Moyo, 2022). Below, we discuss the attempts made in the history curriculum in post-colonial Zimbabwe to promote social cohesion.

Post-colonial history curricula in Zimbabwe

The document analysis revealed four major phases in the evolution of history curricula in Zimbabwe from 1980 to 2023. The pre-1980 syllabus was used in the first full decade of independence, sometimes supplemented with newer and more Africa-focused texts (Dube & Moyo, 2022). This suggests that what was propagated by the pre-colonial curriculum policymakers continued to gain supremacy against what the nation envisaged. The idea of social cohesion remained far-fetched as reflected by the horrific violence in Zimbabwe after 1980, to be sure, but the murderous excesses of the national army in Matabeleland in the Gukurahundi period were state sponsored rather than inter-communal (Barnes, 2007). No direct attempts were therefore witnessed in the post-colonial history curriculum to enhance social cohesion in the first decade of political independence in Zimbabwe. Rather than carrying forward the post-colonial country's vision of peace, freedom, reconciliation, social cohesion, solidarity, resilience, and development for the generations to come as observed by SADC (2020), it entrenched division and conflict and thus put asunder the concept of social cohesion.

Considering this view, we argue that in the first decade of independence, schools continued to teach history according to Syllabus 2160, which had been in use since the mid-1970s (Barnes, 2007). Consequently, this was frustrating to many who eyed social cohesion based on the premise that it emphasised European and Central African history focusing on Western culture and politics while demeaning African culture, society and political initiatives that had the potential to entrench social solidarity. The syllabus was not progressing social cohesion since the history curriculum failed to articulate issues to do with recognition which are embedded in social cohesion, as there was no respect for and affirmation of diversity and identities regarding politics, ethnicity, and culture (Novelli et al., 2017b).

The first phase of the history curricula revolution came in 1991 and was coined Syllabus 2166. When the syllabus was released in 1992, it avoided the blatant intolerance of the Rhodesian era, but it did not confront race issues properly. As evidenced in the preamble of the history curriculum which stated:

This syllabus covers the historical development of Zimbabwe and the World's economic, social, and political systems. It ensures the sustenance of nationalism and patriotism through an appreciation of Zimbabwe and other countries' struggles for political and economic emancipation (MoPSE, 1991, p. 3).

A look at Syllabus 2166 shows that its philosophical focus was Marxism-Leninism, and it gave special weight to the study of revolutionary uprisings in the Third World. Like its predecessor 2160, Syllabus 2166 showed deficiencies in promoting social cohesion because, rather than embracing reconciliation - a dimension of social cohesion - it failed to deal with past events, injustices, and material and psychosocial effects of conflict, as well as developing relationships of trust and thus continued to inflict pain upon the society. The history curriculum documents are silent on these aspects. As observed by Dube and Moyo (2022) the emphasis of the 2166 syllabus was on a class-based explanation of historical change that had a potentially ambiguous relationship with the concept of reconciliation.

Such issues of class and race distorted the Zimbabwean history and thus presented all whites as members of the capitalist ruling class and all Africans as members of the working class, thus contributing to social intolerance.

From document analysis, it emerged that Syllabus 2167 was hurriedly introduced with a much more utilitarian bent as a post-colonial history for Zimbabwe (Dube & Moyo, 2022). The preamble of Syllabus, 2167 launched in 2001, articulated:

The need to assist learners in gaining an informed and critical understanding of social, economic, and political issues facing them as builders of a developing nation (ZIMSEC, 2001, p. 1).

As such, it supports a Pan-Africanist identity, even though the remainder of the continent is ignored, except for Southern Africa. That absence of the other parts of Africa in the history curriculum tells a story in the context of social cohesion because that shows a lack of representation, a feature which is another facet of social cohesion (Holloway & Sturridge, 2022). We argue representation that is engrained in social cohesion allows learners to feel like they are part of the same community and have a sense of belonging as they feel like they fit together in a group. The Syllabus 2167 did not allow that, as evidenced in the documents analysed. In confirmation, Dube and Moyo contended that a critic might well claim that Syllabus 2167 amounted to a return to the ruling-class-glorification styles of the Rhodesian-era textbooks of the 1970s. As confirmed by Barnes (2007) who concurred with Moyo (2014), Syllabus 2167 was crafted in a hurry by a government that considered itself under siege from both Western and local forces. Justifiably, the focus of the syllabus was aggressively anti-West and driven by a resurgent and virulent nationalism (Barnes, 2007). Seen this way, we argue that Syllabus 2167 was politically influenced and thus was bent to serve the interests of the ruling party of that time, hence sacrificing the idea of social cohesion which celebrates diversity.

Documents analysis shows that the latest revision of the history curriculum in Zimbabwe is the 2015-2022 History syllabuses. The declared aims of the current syllabus among many other aims is to:

Develop an interest in the study of history; develop appropriate skills and tools of analysing historical transformations of society; develop a sense of patriotism through appreciation of history; acquire an understanding of the similarities, differences, and common experiences of the peoples of Africa and the world (MoPSE, 2015, p. 2)

Given the above extracts, it is revealed that the policymakers had a slant towards social cohesion. Consequently, more has been achieved in enunciating new policy statements in promoting social cohesion rhetoric than in implementing or institutionalising change. For the current 2015-2022 history curriculum, nationalism and patriotism have emerged as essential objectives guided by the philosophy of Ubuntu (Chimbunde & Moreeng, 2023) which is a global concept. That supports the idea of social cohesion because the history curriculum contains content that is centred on Zimbabwe with the clear goal of raising knowledge of the history of the nation.

Other snippets of the history curriculum that show remarkable effort by the policy makers in promoting social cohesion in Zimbabwe is reflected in the aims of the history curriculum for form 5 to 6 which states that it promotes:

In learners the importance of protecting the territorial integrity, sovereignty of Zimbabwe and African states as well as the need for a harmonious relationship with the rapidly evolving international community (MoPSE, 2015, p.3).

The above extract demonstrates the willingness of the Zimbabwe community through the history curriculum to belong to the international community because it embraces inclusion and belonging which are attributes of social cohesion. However, following Dube and Moyo (2022), we argue the history curriculum that run from 2002 to 2014 as traditional history or big story history (patriotic history) was anti-West while embracing China as the new grand narrative. This was because the syllabus was crafted in a hurry by a government that considered itself under siege from both Western and local forces (Moyo, 2014; Barnes, 2007). Despite the history curriculum reforms, political violence spread across Zimbabwe in 2000 when land invasions displaced white commercial farmers and in 2008 many opposition party members were killed for their honest error.

The lessons from the two countries

Our study unravels the mystery of how attempts by postcolonial South Africa and Zimbabwe strove to promote social cohesion, given that the two nations are shaking off the constraints of colonisation, characterised by division and conflicts premised on race and class struggles. The research has established two important threads from post-colonial South Africa and Zimbabwe's attempts to promote social cohesion.

First, we observed that history curricula are credited for entrenching social cohesion in a society that is conflict and division-ridden, although some interferences by politicians dilute and usurp the strength endowed in its structure. While the history curriculum is regarded as crucial in fostering social cohesion in a country with a divergent history where the knowledge and values being transmitted remain contested, the only hiccup becomes a social construct created by politicians who sometimes interfere with the traits of the discipline in its approach to the curriculum and in the retelling of the past. We argue along with Giroux (1997, p. 5) that history education provides a vehicle for the development of a 'collective critical consciousness, and through developing historical consciousness those who study history are enabled to live together in a heterogeneous society.'

Considering the above, we recommend that the history curriculum be crafted by curriculum designers who are apolitical and neutral so that the politicians' influence and their voices are not fully depicted in them. Despite that the hands of the ruling politicians must be tied when it comes to reforming the history curriculum if we are to achieve social cohesion, we argue that whilst the history curriculum in schools is an essential contributor to social cohesion, it is far from being a sufficient action. Many other advances and actions are needed, in concert. We contend that despite some interferences and manipulations in policy formulation by politicians, curriculum policy and reforms are strong positive influences for

social cohesion. However, not strong enough to sustain social cohesion, because that is undermined by youth unemployment, poverty, health system deficiencies, inadequate resourcing for the education system, and bad government. This is so because the dimensions of social cohesion, namely recognition, redistribution, representation, and reconciliation, are fraught with challenges that emanate from diverse sources. We argue that history curricula which are inclusive and respectful of internal diversity are one among many key interventions for countries emerging out of conflict, as celebrated by the tenets of social cohesion.

Second, the study revealed that while the attempts by South Africa and Zimbabwe to promote social cohesion among people in the African continent and the global village are evident, divisions, conflicts, isolation, exclusion, and non-involvement remain a challenge. This is confirmed by Mlambo and Masuku (2023) who contended that the events of post-1994 have done little to consolidate unity and cohesion among the South African Black population and that in Africa one cannot speak of social cohesion unless the tribal and ethnic sentiments are addressed. We therefore argue that, despite the rebranding of history curriculum reforms, post-colonial South Africa and Zimbabwe continue to face persistent challenges related to conflicts fuelled by isolation, exclusion, non-involvement, rejection, and illegitimacy. What is worrisome from an educationist's perspective is the dissonance between what is spelt out in the curriculum policy documents and the results we see happening in the countries after the implementation of the policies. We then argue that a well-crafted and designed history curriculum remains a paper exercise unless what is intended with the documents is realised. What then is wrong within these two countries remains a question for further research.

Findings in our study point to the fact that the policies in the studied countries are encouraging, albeit implementation may be compromised, because we argue that the policy documents show that history can be used to address issues of social cohesion through its aims, objectives, the content and most probably the teaching skills underpinning the curriculum, as well as the philosophy of the curriculum. We note that the teaching of history in both countries encourages learner-centredness and the use of multiple perspectives which allow for different interpretations of diversity. Based on these assumptions from the study, we invite further research to confirm or reject them.

Conclusion

This comparative study offers useful policy and practice implications for countries that seek to achieve social cohesion and mitigate conflicts and division in society through the history curriculum. We partly blame politicians who sometimes meddle excessively in curriculum revision and design to safeguard their beliefs and interests. Based on our findings and discussion, we believe that the difficulties of social cohesion and living together in this world underscore the necessity for young people to be exposed to a history curriculum congruent with democratic life, from an early age and throughout their educational trajectories. We recognise that achieving social cohesion in post-conflict societies is a contested terrain because the journey to integrate and foster inclusivity between those perceived to be victims

of the past and those perceived to be perpetrators of injustice necessitates more than a simple compromise (Potgieter & Zulu, 2015).

Taken together, we argue that postcolonial governments with diverse cultures must commit to carrying forth the ideals of peace, freedom, reconciliation, social cohesion, solidarity, resilience, and development for not only the present but future generations. As a result, we anticipate that education officials around the world will respond with urgency and clarity of purpose to promote social cohesion. We believe that by providing learners from varied groups with equal learning opportunities, the education system may promote social cohesion and so contribute to the development of a common sense of belonging that is entrenched in social cohesiveness. We conclude that social cohesion is a property of a society and not an individual characteristic; hence it must be encouraged, fostered, or protected through policies and practices in the history curriculum.

Although our study has highlighted crucial concerns that governments must consider when constructing history curricula, it is limited by the geographical location in which it was performed. Two sub-Saharan African countries constitute a small sample of postcolonial states. However, this is a useful foundation for future studies to evaluate attempts made in history curricula in other post-colonial governments, to either affirm or reject the findings made in this study. This is valuable for both post-colonial governments and countries and governments that are not in a post-colonial circumstance, but have features in common with the post-colonial context, such as the history wars in Canada, Australia, and America (Wikipedia, 2024).

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Appendix A: Systematic literature review inclusion criteria

- For both countries electronic databases namely ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR and Science Direct were used to search for relevant literature.
- The phrase “*Attempts to promote social cohesion: School history curriculums in post-colonial South Africa and Zimbabwe*” was used as search words.

For Zimbabwe

- History syllabi and policy documents written in and after 1980 were purposively studied.
- Journal articles and documents which speak to the history curriculum in Zimbabwe post-1980 to date were selected.

For South Africa

- Policy documents on curriculum reforms which included Outcomes Based Education (OBE), Revised National Curriculum statements (RNCS) and Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) were picked.
- Like in Zimbabwe, journals and documents published in 1994 were retained for analysis.

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