



Perspectives on Education in Africa

SCHOOLS AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES IN FRENCH-SPEAKING AFRICA

**POLITICAL CHOICES, MEANS OF TRANSMISSION
AND APPROPRIATION**

Edited by Linda Gardelle and Camille Jacob



Schools and National Identities in French-speaking Africa

Schools and National Identities in French-speaking Africa showcases cutting-edge research to provide a renewed understanding of the role of schools in producing and reproducing national identities. Using individual case studies and comparative frameworks, it presents diverse empirical and theoretical insights from and about a range of African countries.

The volume demonstrates in particular the usefulness of the curriculum as a lens through which to analyse the production and negotiation of national identities in different settings. Chapters discuss the tensions between decolonisation as a moment in time and decolonisation as a lengthy and messy process, the interplay between the local, national and international priorities of different actors, and the nuanced role of historiography and language in nation-building. At its heart is the need to critically investigate the concept of “the nation” as a political project, how discourses and feelings of belonging are constructed at school, and what it means for schools to be simultaneously places of learning, tools of socialisation and political battlegrounds.

By presenting new research on textbooks, practitioners and policy in ten different African countries, this volume provides insights into the diversity of issues and dynamics surrounding the question of schools and national identities. It will be of particular interest to scholars, researchers and postgraduate students of comparative and international education, sociology, history, sociolinguistics and African studies.

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Perspectives on Education in Africa

The African continent is in a crucial moment of its history. If conflicts, political disappointments, developmental difficulties and poverty issues of Africa are well disseminated by the international media, it should not gloss over the fact that Africa is also a very dynamic continent, with a promising demography and hopeful economic growth.

Education could be viewed as at the heart of the challenges facing Africa. Schools could offer the promise to achieve the goals of the development, both in social aspects as well as economic and political. Since independences in the 1960's, the number of schoolchildren has multiplied by 40 in sub-Saharan Africa. Many states in Africa, from North to South, are faced with the emergency of mass-schooling while many problems remain: shortage of basic facilities, infrastructure, lack of teaching and learning materials, shortage of qualified teachers, distance between home and schools in rural areas, hunger and poor nutrition, difficulties for schooling in areas affected by conflicts and schooling for girls. Development and improvement in the higher education and vocational training is also a key challenge for African countries, many of which are witnessing the massive student mobility (with its crucial problematics of "brain drain" but also "brain gain"). Some countries stress the need to privatize education to try to achieve international targets. Many of them rely on international support to reach the goals. All these challenges, however, should not obscure the dynamism of African students, the growth of the quality of education in some African countries, such as Morocco, and other visible examples across the Continent.

In focusing on education, the purpose of the proposed *Series* is to examine an institution that is regarded as fundamental in helping African countries face major challenges across the Continent. "*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world*" said Nelson Mandela. This *Series* will seek to offer tools for analysing, for understanding and for decision-making concerning contemporary issues of Education in Africa.

A basic assumption of the *Series* is that the perspectives on education in Africa should not be observed, analysed and strategized from outside Africa. The *Series* will primarily draw on local knowledge and experience within Africa with the potential to decolonize African education and provide insights by which indigenous knowledge can be promoted and developed. This does not rule out considering perspectives from outside the Continent, especially in the context of globalization but these will not dominate. This *Series*, however, will also promote interactions between African and non-African scholars in order to explore the implication for education in Africa. Yet the focus will always be on education in and for African people, the way such education can be enhanced, the factors that influence it and future directions in which it can develop.

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Schools and National Identities in French-speaking Africa

Political Choices, Means of Transmission
and Appropriation

Edited by
Linda Gardelle and Camille Jacob

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National identities and the curriculum: socio-cultural legacies and contemporary questions

Camille Jacob & Linda Gardelle

Introduction

This volume focuses on the role of schools in producing and reproducing national identities in French-speaking Africa. At the heart of all chapters is the need to critically investigate the concept of “the nation” as a political project, and how discourses and feelings of belonging are constructed at school. Historically throughout the world, schools have been given a key role in nation-building. Is this the case in contemporary African countries, and if yes, how, with what objectives and with what tools?

The idea of a shared sense of belonging to a national community can be addressed in many ways. This volume explores how national identities are constructed, transmitted, understood and negotiated in the curriculum. Using the curriculum as a focal point entails investigating ideological and political aims, and the organisation and selection of knowledge at various levels of decision-making, as well as what happens in the classroom, in terms of transmission, pedagogy, and reception. The curriculum involves multiple actors: political and institutional decision-makers, education and administrative officials, teachers, pupils, but also external actors (trade unions, media, parents, etc.) who influence in one way or another, at one stage or another, the creation of education policies, their implementation and their reception. How are such identity-building processes understood by different actors, what do they mean politically, and what do they look like in practice? Between essentialist understandings of identity as fixed, objective and unchanging, and constructivist approaches foregrounding the “building” of the nation, what interpretations are at work in French-speaking Africa today? In a time where quantitative and qualitative studies point to the increase in scepticism towards and distrust of the state, this volume interrogates the links between schools and the (re)production of discourses of national identity. Depending on contexts and locations, what forms of collective consciousness and group identities are being transmitted in schools? In contemporary African countries, how is a sense of shared belonging constructed? How is this collective identity understood, prescribed, transmitted?

Africa as a continent remains too often conceptualised as a monolith, despite the wide variations in colonial and post-colonial state-building experiences and wildly differing social, economic, political and cultural situations. In terms of nation-building, these simplifications ignore the diversity of education systems, language policies, and practices around the research and teaching of history (Auerbach 2018, Bassiouney 2017, Bertho, Martineau, Pauthier & Piton 2019, Cross & Ndofirepi 2017, Diallo 2016, Kadri 2014, Moore 2006, Taleb Ibrahim 1997), as well as how links with neighbours and the former coloniser(s) are envisaged (Diallo 2016, Erfurt 2018, Evrard 2018, Kane 2016). This volume aims to go beyond a narrow focus on “problems” of state- and nation-building in Africa, which mostly reduces countries to case studies of application of Western-centric theories rather than envisage knowledge from and about the continent as a source of theory-building (Chakrabarty 2000, Makalela 2018, McKinney 2016, Omobowale & Akanle 2017, Richardson 2018, Shanyanana & Waghid 2016, Wai 2018). While the term “French-speaking Africa” is problematic, erasing the multilingual and translanguaging realities and reproducing a Euro-centric lens, there is comparatively less published in English on countries which were not formerly colonised by Britain, and the particularities of French and Belgian colonial rules and continued French influence can be helpful in providing an initial focus.

This volume provides an in-depth and interdisciplinary understanding of the role of schools in the various processes of identity-building. It showcases recent research from and about countries considered as “French-speaking”, either as individual case studies or through a comparative framework. It brings together scholarship from emerging and established authors regarding how national identities are constructed, reproduced and questioned by multiple actors through the prism of education policy and the school system. In order to investigate these issues, multiple angles of analysis are used: at the macro-level, in order to examine how institutions (governments, policy-makers, but also scholars) understand the links between identities and schools, and at the micro-level, from the point of view of what is actually happening on the ground. The chapters which follow include historical overviews as well as studies in today’s classrooms, drawing on archival research, content analysis, interviews, or ethnography, and covering ten countries across the continent. In this chapter, we locate the conclusions reached by contributors to this volume within the scholarship on national identities and the curriculum. We also provide an overview of some of the key debates and avenues still left to research on the differentiated role of schools in nation-building across time and space, the tensions and/or synergies between multiple identities and actors over time, and the legacies of colonisation and decolonisation.

Schools and national identities

Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1986) played a key role in conceptualising the nation as an

“imagined community”, brought together through shared discourses of history and memory. These shared narratives, in Sean Wilentz’s words ‘master fictions’ (1985), give shape to the idea of a “nation”. They are not fixed, but rather are brought to the political fore at certain moments in history: in several European countries during the 18th and 19th centuries, as a reaction to French imperialism; in Africa, in the fight against colonialism and at independence; in Central Asia around the fall of the USSR, etc. These discourses give meaning to social relations (Castoriadis 1975), and therefore the way they are expressed and their political importance depend on contexts, periods and perceived difficulties experienced by societies.

For political elites, creating a shared memory is key to forging a sense of national identity and anchor their states. This collective memory can take different forms, from heroic tales to history textbooks and artistic production, and schools have often been a key location for the production of national identities and collective memory. From Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm (1990) to Cornelius Castoriadis, Sean Wilentz, Andy Green and Gérard Noiriel, many authors focusing on the construction of European nation-states in the 18th and 19th centuries have emphasised the crucial place of the education system in these processes. Nation-building and economic growth are also intertwined through the education system, and the role of schools in the economic development of some Asian countries has been discussed over the past three decades. For Green (2013), the rapid economic development of the Asian Tigers (Hong Kong, Singapur, South Korea, and Taiwan) is due to the growth of the education system both in quantitative and qualitative terms, with citizenship now an important part of the curriculum (Kennedy 2005). In Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries, the consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dismantling of the USSR have led to new research on national identities and the role of the education system in their production and evolution. There has been a boom in studies on the growing internationalisation of education and education policies, and at the same time a growing interest in the question of identities in schools, focusing on a local, regional or national level (Lessard 2009, Swing, Schriewer & Orivel 2000). In Africa, important research has been conducted by African and non-African scholars, in English and in French, and across various disciplines (Education, Sociology, History, Anthropology), and is referenced throughout this volume.

Schools represent ideal spaces within which to investigate the interactions between the local, regional, national and international in understanding the (re)production of and challenges to the state’s discourses about national identities. Schools are a catalyst for questions, tensions and convergence over who belongs, and who gets to define the Other. Concerns over how to organise and plan what to teach are not new, but the formal study of curricula and their development, adaptation and implementation dates back to the second half of the 20th century (Audigier, Crahay & Dolz 2006, Jackson 1992). After Durkheim’s *L’évolution pédagogique en France* (1938), what would come

to be termed the “sociology of the curriculum” appeared in the UK in the 1970s with the works of Basil Bernstein (1971) and Michael Young (1971). Studying the curriculum, from primary to higher education, its evolution in terms of policy-making and implementation, and the values and messages it carries, is particularly enriching in seeking to understand not only the purpose assigned to the education system by the state but also how the links between past and present are constructed explicitly, what should be salient in shaping citizens’ notions of themselves within the wider community, and how the future is envisaged by the state. The teaching of History, Geography, Literature, Citizenship, as well as languages (foreign and/or national) and sometimes Religious Studies, allow for the transmission of specific political and ideological discourses, the foregrounding of certain representations, and a particular way of imagining collective identification and belonging.

As Gamble (2017) underlines in the case of the colonial period, debates over education can be used as a focal point from which to understand the mechanisms of state-building as well as contested narratives of citizenship and belonging. This volume shows that this remains true of the contemporary period and that studying the curriculum allows for a comprehensive approach in understanding the role of schools in identity-building and wider social dynamics. This analysis of the curriculum can happen at different levels (Bernstein 1971, Forquin 2008, Mangez 2001, M. Young 1971):

- prior to enactment, examining how political and ideological objectives are debated and defined and how policies are talked about;
- as these policies go through various institutions, to understand how content and competences are selected, structured and organised;
- and finally in the classroom, as they are implemented, negotiated, appropriated.

Nevertheless, there have historically been few investigations into textbook content, and even fewer regarding classroom interactions, which renders nuanced and historically-informed analysis difficult. By showcasing research on textbooks, policy-makers, and practitioners in ten different African countries across the 20th and 21st centuries, this volume aims to provide insights into the diversity of issues and dynamics surrounding the question of schools and national identities.

In French-speaking Africa as elsewhere, policies with an overt focus on national identity have not always been at the forefront of education reforms, and at times both their purported ends and their methods have been heavily criticised. In Senegal, the ideological and political aims of “la négritude senghorienne” was particularly criticised in the 1980s (Ly 1981), as was the concept of “ivoirité” in the 1990s in Côte d’Ivoire (Akindes 2003). “Africanising” the curriculum was shaped by domestic and international political and economic constraints, giving rise to “French-style” education

systems after independence as well as innovations such as Côte d'Ivoire's "télévision scolaire" (Desalmand 2004, Manière 2012). The political dimension of the education system can be sometimes exacerbated through struggles between political parties or power relations within society, as demonstrated by Laurence Proteau in Côte d'Ivoire (1996), Yann Lebeau in Nigeria (1996), Pascal Bianchini in Senegal and Burkina Faso (2004), and Mamadou Yéro Baldé in Senegal (this volume). At the same time, this does not mean that the curriculum is always used as a key site of top-down imposition of national identities, as Daher Ahmed Farah shows for Djibouti (also in this volume). There is a paradox between the education system as an institution at the heart of political struggles, and the curriculum itself that is not always politicised to the same extent. In any case, the results of policies are not always those expected, as described in the case of Casamance by Céline Labrune-Badiane (this volume). A fine-grained analysis of role of the curriculum and multiplicity of actors involved, either directly or indirectly, is therefore essential to better understand the role of schools in producing a sense of national belonging.

Inclusion, exclusion and multiple identities

The role of schools in national cohesion has been highly contested, as has the definition of "national cohesion" itself (R. Young 2015, pp. 77–84). The beneficial role of the education system in driving economic growth and a supposed "harmonious" society has been emphasised (Baudelot & Leclerc 2005, Durkheim 1938, Kennedy & Lee 2010, Schnapper 2000), although "harmonious" can sometimes be a shorthand for "unitary". Nonetheless, social realities are complex and the education system also represents a pivotal element of mechanisms of elite closure, and often contributes to reproducing rather than challenging exclusion and inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron 1964, Dubet, Duru-Bellat & Vérétrout 2010, Green 2013). The construction of an inclusive definition of the nation is not always (if not rarely) the priority for political elites. In Mali, for instance, the drive under President Alpha Oumar Konaré to create a sense of national identity based on shared cultural and artistic heritage led to the exclusion of some of the population from the curriculum. The negative portrayal or outright erasure of North Mali's Tuareg populations from textbooks (for instance, in French and History textbooks), compounded by structural and short-term difficulties, contributed to making identification with the Malian nation far from straightforward (Gardelle & Adam 2017). Valuing or devaluing certain groups within society, a way of life, a language, a profession, has an impact on individuals, as these discourses shape the construction of social meaning and representations.

At independence, school systems were seen as crucial in order to shape citizens attached to the nation as put forward by the state, whatever the historical political legacies that regimes were drawing on. With language seen as key to

how people defined themselves and related to the world, writing and teaching African languages became part of the debate around building a sense of national identity after independence (see, for instance, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 2005[1981], Sylla 1997). In some cases, representations of languages as unitary, distinct and linked to identity became portrayed as a key unifying trait for the nation (e.g. Arabic for Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria) (Saraceni & Jacob 2019). The colonial language was associated both with cultural alienation, and thus antithetical to the building of a strong national identity through schools, and crucial for "modernisation", the precursor to today's "development". In others, the former colonial language was reinvented as a "neutral" language of national unification, at the expense of African languages (Boutin 2008, pp. 63–38, Diallo 2018, pp. 14–24, see also Boutin 2019). More recently, the binary of describing former colonial language in postcolonial contexts as either liberating or oppressive has been shown to continue reifying language, as well as ignoring how practices are localised and entangled within complex discourses of class, whiteness and gender (Pennycook 2010, Tupas 2015).

Nonetheless, many studies into national identities across the continent not only take the monolithic nation-state as a given but also take ethnic conflict as an obvious and inevitable result of artificial colonial borders. This ignores the fact that "ethnic groups" are themselves imagined communities, with colonial-era scientific "exploration" entailing the labelling and categorisation of groups according to linguistic criteria inherited from Europe, often resulting in the creation of ethnolinguistic groups considered an objective "reality" to this day (Irvine & Gal 2000, van den Avenne 2017). The delineation of ethnic groups based on linguistic features (often the most common criteria used by researchers to categorise people) and the Eurocentric expectation of a monolingual ethnolinguistic group sharing an ancestral language have been challenged (Lüpke 2017, building on Mufwene 2017; cf. also Lüpke & Storch 2013). Nevertheless, few studies have explored how concepts of "ethnic identity" are de/re-constructed in schools alongside national identities.

In addition, transnational forms of belonging have always been an integral part of the questions around nation-building across the continent, from pan-African ideals to the *'umma* (أمة) and historical and contemporary attempts at regional integration (Mali Federation, ECOWAS). Nonetheless, dual citizenship remains viewed with suspicion, from the legal impossibility of holding multiple citizenships (e.g. Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Malawi) to preventing bi-nationals from accessing key political posts (e.g. Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana). Ahmed Sékou Touré and Thomas Sankara's open political support for pan-Africanism was in marked contrast to Léopold Sédar Senghor's priorities for Senegal, and textbooks do not always foreground an "African identity" (Djané, this volume, Sow 2012). How are national and transnational forms of belonging present in the curriculum, and how has the balance between the two evolved over the past six decades?

Furthermore, processes such as globalisation, the internationalisation of education and services, and new forms of mobility can be seen as challenging monolithic top-down discourses of national identity. While some see the disappearance of the nation-state, replaced by transnational networks and spaces (Toynbee 1972), others contend that porous borders should not be equated to an undermining of the state (Dufoix 2010, Meyer 2013). Especially within the context of intensified transnational flows of people and ideas, the internationalisation of education systems, the NGO-isation of social services and increased mobilities worldwide (cf. for instance, Sabaratnam 2017), it is crucial to understand whether schools still play the same role in the construction of national identity that they did at independence, and how their role has changed across time. Other actors (social media, diasporas, religious institutions, cultural and political non-profit organisations, etc.) play a role in the construction and transmission of values, ideologies and feelings of belonging to a community. Boulay & Freire's (2017) collection underlines the importance of cultural production and interactions between the local, the national and the international in political struggles and in reshaping narratives of identities, especially in the case of the Sahrawi (Solana 2017). Is the education system still envisaged as crucial in producing a shared and unique discourse of belonging, and how do other influences participate in the elaboration, complexification or questioning of a national narrative? How have transnational forms of belonging found an expression within the classroom and in policy, and how has this changed over time?

Decolonising, nation-building, and legacies

Studying the curriculum allows for a lens through which to analyse how various actors understood decolonisation, and the tensions between decolonisation as a moment and decolonisation as a process (Jansen & Osterhammel 2017, pp. 1-34). Did decolonisation entail decolonising textbooks, staff, teaching practices, education paradigms, at what point in time and to what extent? How are these initiatives remembered today, if at all? What are the legacies of decolonisation as moment, and as process? The use of binary concepts such as colonial/post-colonial or resistance/collaboration has been challenged by field research over the past decades (Clancy-Smith 1994, Scott 1985). Similarly, as Pascal Bianchini (2004) points out, the simplistic and misleading dichotomy often drawn between "traditional" and "modern" schooling has obscured the ways these education systems have been appropriated by local actors, and instead reifies traditional education as "natural" and unchanging. How has analysing national identities in the curriculum changed, and to what extent have frameworks inherited from the former coloniser or the Global North(s) more widely influenced research and policy?

At independence, many African states aimed to nationalise their education system and decolonise the writing and teaching of their national histories,