

Social Studies Curricula: Interpreting and Using African Primary Source Documents

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Abstract:

While many U.S. residents like *listening* to African stories, *hearing* African stories is difficult because designing effective curricula and teaching about African contexts appear to be a major challenge in U.S. social studies education. Drawing on postcolonial theory, we analyzed the discourses of two contemporaneous historical documents to demonstrate the complexities in meaning-making processes inherent in the indigenous Yoruba social practices in the southwestern part of Nigeria. Differential complex perspectives on Yoruba social practices are evident in both colonialist- and native-authored historical documents from the same time period, when colonialist authority had been established but indigenous cultural practices were evident and continuing. The colonialist-authored historical document indicates misunderstanding of the meaning of some Yoruba social practices. The native-authored historical document provides underlying meanings for social practices and ties portrayal of social practices to indigenous ways of being. The discussion calls attention to how colonial legacies influence meaning-making, meaning made from and knowledge made available by historical documents, as well as ways forward in addressing contemporary discourse on Africa in U.S. social studies curricula.

Key words: primary sources, historical documents, African contexts, indigenous Yoruba, postcolonialism, social studies curricula, social practices

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Introduction

In 2017, one of the authors—a Nigerian—was in a third grade classroom in the USA to facilitate a social studies lesson set. The theme to be examined for a couple of weeks according to the school’s curriculum was culture and diversity. As the class began, he asked an exploratory question: “Who among you know my home country?” Many students responded: “Africa.” He followed up by asking if any of the students would like to tell the class what they know about Africa. Some of the students’ responses included: “Africa has lots of animals.” Other students also mentioned that it has “snakes and cows,” and one student responded, “Africa has somebody who don’t have clothes on.” Following these responses, a student opened his bag and handed out a booklet used for social studies. About two weeks earlier, the state’s adopted social studies textbook *World Communities* (American Legacy Publishing, 2017) was distributed to the students at the school. The book included a segment titled “Culture and Diversity: A Look at Africa.” It was then that the co-author realized that this text likely was a source of the ideas the students had expressed about African contexts.

A similar discourse unfolded at a recent summer camp held in 2019 for upper elementary to middle school students aimed at promoting cultural understanding of non-Western nations at which one co-author volunteered. Students in one of the sessions analyzed cultural artifacts from the Yoruba ethnic group, including a talking drum, artworks, currency, and indigenous beads. As the activities were about to start, a student asked, “Is Wakanda real in Africa?” Following the activities, another student approached the co-author and asked, “Do you have houses in Nigeria as here [in Alabama]?” House and family pictures the co-author had recently taken in Nigeria were shown to the students as a response to their inquiries. A student responded, “Ooh, Wow! I thought Africa was in an island or something.”

The above discussions represent first-hand experiences of evolving evidence indicating that the content of U.S. world history/culture and geography texts largely misrepresents non-Western people, places, and cultures in African contexts (Allimadi, 2005; Blakley, Rogers, Watson-Currie, & Jung, 2019; Kunihiro, 2007). Scholars have noted an ideation about a particular entity – Africa in this case – that students may construct depends on the language-in-use, discourses and larger social dynamics, also known as Discourse. (Gee, 2012; Rymes, 2016; Snow, Richford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). On one hand, small “d” discourse involves “language-in-use,” as Rymes (2016, p. 5) puts it. It describes how both concrete and abstract forms of language (e.g., written, visual, spoken, and symbolic signs) are constructed and enacted about issues on Africa, for example, in

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curricular materials to which U.S. students are exposed. On the other hand, Gee (2012) describes capital “D” Discourse as:

ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading, writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities (or “kind of people”) by specific groups... Discourses are ways of being “people like us.” They are “ways of being in the world.” They are socially situated identities. (p. 3)

The ideas students take into their mind are socially constructed, and the internalized ideas guide their actions instead of reality (Goffman, 1974; Snow et al., 1984). African contexts are, therefore, conceived here as both distinct and collective discourse and Discourse (hereafter referred to as D/discourses) in any form as they relate to indigenous African people, places, environments, sociocultural practices, political arrangements, and economic structures as well as ways of being. It is in social studies that students are expected to methodologically pursue knowledge to learn about people, traditions, places, and views different from their own (National Council for Social Studies [NCSS], 2013; Ukpokodu, 2010). An exciting development is the inclusion of themes on African contexts in the U.S. K-12 social studies curriculum and an emphasis on using primary sources (Cleary & Neumann, 2009; Eamon, 2006). The misrepresentation, however, of African contexts in U.S. social studies curricula today is in no way different from myths about African contexts reported by scholars (e.g., DeShazer & Toler, 1998; Ukpokodu, 1996). Designing effective curricula and teaching about African contexts appears to be a major challenge in U.S. social studies education.

Publishers of U.S. social studies curriculum materials, like the one referenced above, claim to align their textbooks’ content about African contexts to the wishes of the states to promote adoption of their curriculum materials. Operational efficiency may be considered more important than content accuracy (Marmer, Marmer, Hitomi & Sow, 2010; Odebiyi & Sunal, 2020; Seker & Ilhan, 2015; Tarman & Kuran, 2015). In introductory sections, publishers often also claim to base the curriculum text in primary source material. Overemphasizing primary sources in social studies, however, may be one of the key factors generating U.S. students’ miseducation about African contexts. For instance, Medina and colleagues’ (2000) and Cleary and Neumann’s (2009) studies of teachers’ and students’ interactions with primary sources on U.S. history indicate that achieving the teaching of critical reasoning in social studies does not occur in a vacuum; it requires the capacity to situate historical interpretations in contexts. Many teachers and students in the U.S. may lack the capacity to situate historical interpretation in context, as the study indicates further; hence, overemphasizing primary sources could cause teachers and students to

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inappropriately read primary source documents and reach superficial and subjective conclusions about historical events and processes (Cleary & Neumann, 2009; Medina, Pollard, Schneider, & Leonhardt, 2000). If so, then the misrepresentations of themes related to African contexts may partly be due to those primary source materials. Teachers and scholars have criticized social studies curriculum materials such as textbooks for inaccurate and insufficient content in meeting students' needs to develop historical thinking and global competence (Brown & Hughes, 2018). Based on such criticism, it has been concluded that misrepresentations found in some social studies textbooks have led to teachers' use of primary sources as either a main source of information or as a supplementary curriculum material to augment textbook contents (Brown & Hughes, 2018). Scholars have advocated for the use and reiteration of primary sources in social studies education to promote historical critical thinking, to enhance inquiry for multidimensional perspectives, to uncover personal misconceptions of social events, and to question historical knowledge (Cleary & Neumann, 2009; Morowski & McCormick, 2017; Stanton, 2012). Curriculum developers, teachers, and scholars share a key epistemological and pedagogical value: Incorporating primary sources is necessary to promote inclusive accounts in social studies education. Unfortunately, available evidence indicates that the use of curriculum resources presumably developed using primary sources or the direct use of primary sources as a supplementary curriculum material to teach about indigenous contexts may be counterproductive. As scholars have argued, the uncritical use of primary sources may inhibit the development of students' historical thinking if their content is misinterpreted, because the interpretation of primary sources about indigenous contexts in U.S. classrooms may lack the complexities in knowledge structure exhibited in indigenous communities (Kincheloe, 2001; Stanton, 2012; Wineburg, 2001). Teachers, scholars, and curriculum publishers in the U.S. may (un)consciously use a dominant historical narrative lens to interpret primary sources on African contexts. It is imperative to demonstrate how teachers, publishers, or scholars' epistemic repertoire may influence meaning in historical inquiry through primary sources and how misinterpretation may reinforce the unsatisfactory portrayal of African contexts in social studies curricula.

There is an increased interest in *listening* to African stories rather than *hearing* them, as Stanton (2012) puts it. Although valuable research has been undertaken with primary historical sources and their immense value has been advocated by scholars in social studies, less has been done to make visible the colonial legacy existing in the meanings conveyed by these historical documents. More exploration is needed of the nature of the primary historical sources upon which U.S. publishers and educators draw to craft narratives and teach about complex African contexts,

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which possesses inter/intra group uniqueness. The purpose of this work is to draw the attention of social studies educators and curriculum developers to the dynamics found in the discourses of two contemporaneous historical documents. Examining how primary source discourses may be misinterpreted and how such examination might guide evaluation of primary sources and promote careful and critical use of curriculum materials on themes related to African contexts. We analyze two historical documents, one authored by a British colonialist and the other by a Nigerian native from the Yoruba ethnic group in about 1920. In 1901, the British Protectorate was established; by 1920, British colonial authority had been established over Yoruba lands, but indigenous culture and practices were evident and not strongly effected by British cultural practices. Here, we consider the Yoruba ethnic group in West Africa, primarily Nigeria, in terms of social practices. To create a direction for this work, we asked two questions:

1. Within the study's two contemporaneous historical primary source documents, how were Yoruba identity and social practices portrayed?
2. What are the implications of the two primary source documents' demonstrated meanings for social studies curricula?

Theoretical Framework

This study is situated within postcolonial theory, demonstrating the influence of historical antecedents in the interpretation of historical sources on African contexts in social studies education. The notions around postcolonial theory or postcolonialism are highly contested in the literature. Its central tenet in education, however, focuses on the advancement of critical discussion and reflection on, and resistance to, colonial legacies in practices within the field of education as they relate to who authors knowledge and social identity and for whom they are authored (Rizvi, Lingard, & Lavia, 2006; Shahjahan, 2014; Takayama, Sriprakash, & Connell, 2017). Postcolonialism in education is well discussed in comparative and international education, as well as in emerging works in indigenous studies. The theory draws attention to collective colonial formation, positing that contemporary knowledge, social identity performance, and meaning-making have European colonialist legacies related to colonized experiences of slavery, migration, representations, race, and differences (Rizvi, Lingard, & Lavia, 2006; Tikly, 1999). The reflections of Edward Said (1978, 1993) on the connections between Western practices of patronizing representation of non-Western culture suggests that Western systems of cultural description are contaminated with ideologies of appropriation, projection, and domination.

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The growing evidence from studies in indigenous, non-Western contexts reveals complexities and challenges. There is a crisis of meaning-making within primary source interpretation reinforced by inherent power hierarchies. Stanton's (2012) demonstration of how primary sources in social studies represent indigenous discourses gave an example of such taken-for-granted hierarchies of power influencing primary source interpretations in K-12 social studies education. The study describes how educational practices such as interactions with primary sources in social studies teaching and research often perpetuate colonial antecedents. Such educational practices overgeneralize misunderstanding, promote misinterpretations, and promote historical inaccuracies to make the historical narratives favor the dominant group (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; Krueger, 2019; Shear & Krutka, 2019; Stanton, 2012). Many students and teachers have difficulty with the appropriate use of historical evidence and with researching historical documents on Africa. Diversity and dynamic historical and cultural knowledge expression are characteristics of Africa, yet popular external ideas and school curriculum materials about the continent are stereotypic and inaccurate (Kunihira, 2007; Myers, 2001; Odebiyi, Keles, Mansouri, & Papaleo, 2018). A postcolonial perspective is needed allowing for radical rethinking, resistance, and critical responses to understand social studies educators' interactions with those D/discourses in primary sources reinforcing colonial legacies (Krueger, 2019; Seker & Ilhan, 2015; Shahjahan, 2014; Tarman & Kuran, 2015).

As a theoretical framework, postcolonial theory is relevant to our study as it makes visible the inherent cognitive structure created by colonialists about African contexts found in contemporary texts and discourses. The theory provides a lens with which to evaluate social identities in African contexts, to engage with complexities involved in suppressed indigenous interpretation of social practices, and to rethink social studies education for global social justice in an era when the achievement of such appears more difficult than ever (Hickling-Hudson, 2006; Roy, 2016; Tikly, 1999). Postcolonial theory represents one of the critical theories with which to challenge and disrupt the colonial narrative in U.S. social studies curricula that reifies the normative othering of African people, places, and social practices (Krueger, 2019; Odebiyi et al., 2020; Shear, 2016; Shear, Knowles, Soden, & Castro, 2015; Shear & Krutka, 2019).

Methodologically, postcolonial theory was valuable as we sought to analytically demonstrate the dimensions in meaning-making from, and meaning made of, indigenous Yoruba social practices presented in both the colonialist and native historical documents. Borrowing from Subedi and Daza (2008), postcolonial theory represents a praxis providing the analytical framework we use to highlight the centrality of including and contemplating both older colonial and anti-colonial

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perspectives in the examination of texts. The evaluation of primary historical documents via a praxis lens may create a pathway to thoroughly decolonize, re-narrate, and reconceptualize curriculum materials used to teach about African contexts in U.S. classrooms (Battiste et al., 2002; Crossley & Tikly, 2004). We analyzed and interpreted the two selected historical documents with a critical perspective to demonstrate how contemporary educational practices may be legitimizing the colonial ideology of African contexts. We considered how colonialists' perspectives on Africa may be found in U.S. social studies curricula when historical documents or curriculum materials developed with uncritical interpretation are employed.

African Contextual Representations and Social Studies Education

The development of adequate and accurate knowledge of the world and of the ability to use such knowledge is central to improving democratic ways of life and participating as a member of a global community (NCSS, 2010; Sunal & Haas, 2011). There is a pressing need for educators to help students develop the knowledge needed to navigate the world of civic life as well as the ability to separate evidence-based claims from parochial opinions (Allimadi, 2005; DeShazer & Toler, 1998; Harushimana & Awokoya, 2011; NCSS, 2013). The extent to which these aims have been achieved in social studies research, teaching, and learning is questionable, most especially as it relates to the teaching of African social practices.

Africa is the second largest continent in the world, but many Americans—including students and teachers—think Africa is a country (Kunihira, 2007). Such an example of the misconception of Africa as a country rather than a continent was also evident in the third-grade students' response to one of the author's questions at the beginning of this article. Olujobi (2005) estimated that there are around 2,000 languages and dialects spoken in Africa; examples include Afrikaans, French, Arabic, Edo, English, KiSwahili, Yoruba, Hausa, Malagasy, Spanish, and Xhosa. The existence of multiple languages reflects the complexity involved in understanding and teaching about African contexts, showcasing how her inhabitants have allowed Western/Colonialist elements of culture to co-exist with indigenous ones to advance daily life endeavors. These languages may be adopted for public official business. There are also varieties of spiritual beliefs and sub-cultures. Instead of using diversities in different subcultures to help students make historical connections, the continent is often characterized as forbidding, ferocious, diseased, isolated from the rest of the world, and simply "a dark continent," as McCarthy (1983) put it. The complexities of the African continent are not considered in common and often erroneous popular perceptions. Instead, popular representation favors Western countries under the pretense of objectivity in historical inquiry (Allimadi, 2005; Odebiyi et al., 2020; Odebiyi, Keles, Mansouri, &

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Papaleo, 201; Stanton, 2012). These perceptions have the tendency to veil teaching, learning, and research about issues related to Africa.

The study of history-related topics, research on analysis of documents, and acquainting students in the U.S. with historical evidence on African cultures has never been more important. There is ample evidence that Western discussion up until this century overlooked important issues such as complexities in various social, cultural, and philosophical capitals, progress, and achievements among African nations. One example is the strong correlation between people's culture, adaptations, and interpretations of what constitutes development (Blakley et al., 2019; Fafunwa, 1974). The deriding of African people and people of African ancestry is rooted in colonialists' lack of understanding of the complex culture, trade, and written documents of African origin and government structure (Allimadi, 2005).

Contemporary writers, journalists and reporters perpetuate the image of Africa created by the colonialists, making it hard for Americans to understand African history from African perspectives (Hawk, 1992; Wallace, 2005). Worse still, research reports (e.g., al-Kaleem, 2001; Allimadi, 2005; Chavis, 1998; Ken-Foxworth, 1985) reveal that the most prevalent ways people learn about Africa are through oral stories from people who visit periodically, as well as news from various media. More often than not, the stories are prejudiced and lend support to a Eurocentric perspective. Evolving evidence suggest that most international travelers and popular guidebooks perceive African regions as dangerous locations to be avoided, Asian regions as equally risky locations but exotic and worth experiencing, and Europe and North America as safe (e.g., Carter, 1998). This kind of one-dimensional representation and stereotypical imaging can cause an internalization of a negative conception of people, places, and social practices in African contexts.

In some cases, African history is aggregated. In spite of the historical and cultural diversities of African culture and the increase in African-born immigrants, little is taught or learned about African cultures in U.S. schools (Hamza, 2005; Harushimana & Awokoya, 2011). Little is also researched about Africa. It has been argued that African history is not taught in American schools because most of it is oral, which is subject to the death of the authority telling it and thus becomes unknown (Shelden, 2015). Little is known about African histories, cultures, and achievements because they have been absorbed in the larger context of Black race in America (Arthur, 2000; Harushimana & Awokoya, 2011). These insights raise concerns about how well U.S. or other Western educated individuals would be able to align differences in Western and African ideologies and practices and promote meaningful learning for students from both sides.

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Gross misrepresentation of indigenous meanings in Western educational materials, including U.S. textbooks, is evident (Battiste et al., 2002; Eraqi, 2015; Krueger, 2019; Myers, 2001; Odebiyi et al., 2020; Shear et al., 2015; Stanton, 2012). A recent content analysis by Odebiyi and colleagues (2018) of the state of Alabama's ninth-grade history textbooks reveals that people, practices, and products of three non-Western nations—Nigeria, Iran, and Turkey—are misrepresented. The textbooks perpetuated the imperialist stereotypic ideologies about Nigeria in the classrooms. Nigeria was misrepresented in the same set of Alabama history/culture and geography textbooks from the three most popular U.S. curriculum publishers. They portray Nigeria and Nigerians' lived experiences mostly within deficit narratives of poverty, conflicts, and environmental degradation. A follow-up visual and textual analysis (Odebiyi et al., 2020) indicates that when Nigerians' efforts to provide for their families, such as in street vending, are mentioned in U.S. history/culture and geography textbooks, for instance, the visual and textual narratives convey a representation of Nigerians as struggling and somewhat desperate individuals rather than hardworking entrepreneurs. These visuals and texts also aggregate Nigerian lived experiences and trivialize indigenous cultural practices. Such curriculum material may be detrimental to students' development in global competence. This becomes a concern about the sources upon which social studies education curricula materials are developed, about what is taught and learned in Western classrooms, and about its implications.

Since teachers and learners use a conventional repertoire to interpret and make sense of educational documents, historical documents become socially situated products that hold power for teaching, learning, and perspective formation (Coffey, 2014). Evidence suggests that teachers and students rely on curriculum materials produced by business establishments and interest groups (e.g., publishers, foundations, etc.). Publishers, in turn, rely on archival documents, popular conceptions, and adulterated research findings suiting their motives instead of using scholarly research to produce educational materials used in schools (Myers, 2001; Odebiyi et al., 2020).

Social studies educators support teaching students with primary historical sources as early as at the elementary school level. Advocates have supported teaching with primary historical sources for a variety of reasons including enhancing students' understanding of history, providing students with direct access to historical participants' experiences, and helping students construct history and construct/confront their own knowledge from their interaction with primary historical sources as part of the curriculum (Brown & Hughes, 2018; Cleary & Neumann, 2009; Eamon, 2006; Sunal et al., 2011; Stanton, 2012).

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There are concerns that teachers are struggling with their own critical reflection on moral and ethical decisions relating to primary sources and to understand the construction of historical narratives in the classroom (Brown & Hughes, 2018; Morowski & McCormick, 2017). Teachers may also have limited knowledge of how to help students give value to the voices of different people, demonstrate respect for differences, combat inequality, and exercise global citizenship (da Silva & Fonseca, 2010). These challenges may be more pronounced when it comes to teaching about African nations (Allimadi, 2005; Blakley et al., 2019; Myers, 2001). It is this concern that prompted us to interrogate the two selected documents, one written by a colonialist and the other by a native author, for insights on constructed meanings that form the basis for various D/discourses on people, places, and cultures in curriculum materials with the Yoruba as a case.

Method

A Brief Description of the Yoruba Ethnic Group

The southwestern part of Nigeria is the homeland of the Yoruba ethnic group. The group has a population of approximately 40 million, an equivalent of 21 percent of Nigeria's population by ethnic grouping, which makes it one of the largest ethnicities in Africa (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018). The ethnic group also spreads to parts of the Benin Republic and Togo in Africa. As a result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, this ethnic group's descendants are now found in places such as Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba, and Brazil. Given the strength and spread of this ethnic group, our study addresses issues around a cross-cultural misunderstanding, confusion, and contradiction about the group in terms of identity and social practices.

Methods of Inquiry

This study is a text and problem-based qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) of two historical documents to explore Yoruba social categories such as identity, indigenous and spiritual education, and cultural orientations. As noted, there are many languages and cultures in Africa, so it is not possible to investigate all of them. One ethnic group (the Yoruba) was selected because of familiarity with it and also because of its historical prominence across centuries in the history of Africa.

To answer the research questions, we identified two contemporaneous historical documents. One of the documents was written by a native of the Yoruba ethnic group, Samuel Johnson, and published in the year 1921 (hereafter referred as the Native Document) while the second document was authored by G. W. Prothero for the British colonial authority in the year 1920

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(hereafter referred as the British Document). We selected the two historical documents because while colonial authority was established, it was still fairly recent. We purposively selected primary documents that speak to the overall themes of identity and social practices in an African context from different perspectives. The documents were retrieved from the United States Library of Congress archive. We choose the U.S. Library of Congress as the archival source of our documents in consultation with university research librarians. It is an internationally referred archival source of a large number of documents for students, teachers, researchers, curriculum materials publishers, and media, among others.

We designed a code dictionary through a combination of inductive and deductive approaches, to identify a set of important elements to look for in the primary documents with respect to the chosen concepts and categories for analysis, which are the social practices. We specifically mined the construed meaning of each document on the related issues and selectively coded for them. We modified the code dimensions to accommodate variation in the ways each document reported on these issues. The document written by the native was examined in terms of how the native conceived of the social categories and of how they were practiced. Our choice of the term “native” to refer to the Nigerian author is informed by the notion that the author is indigenous to the Yoruba ethnic group who occupied a portion of Nigeria before the arrival of colonialists. We refer to the British colonialists by their nationality, as “British Nationals,” as they hold permanent allegiance to Britain of which they were colonial stewards. Therefore, the Yoruba author is described by his indigeneity and the British colonialist author by his allegiance as a British National. The British colonialist document was analyzed in terms of how it perceived the concepts vis-à-vis the practices of the indigenes. We sought to understand the documents’ inherent social power and implications for meaning-making in teaching, learning, and social D/discourses. We established the reliability of the coding by applying a percentage of accuracy inter-coder reliability technique on 20 percent of each document.

We examined the historical documents through paragraph-by-paragraph, unit analyses and open and axial-cross coding approaches (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2004; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017). We independently coded the documents, then cross-examined until 100 percent agreement was reached, systematically classified, and assigned codes to each historical document’s text/content features that portray the concepts and categories under investigation. Emerging patterns from each document were noted as well as what is included or excluded and variations by primarily looking for the ideas representing social practices representing the meta-codes. The same process was repeated for both the pilot and the main content analysis.

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Overarching themes used for the discussions were generated based on the meta-codes. The discussions of our findings follow Coffey's (2014) analytical strategies considering: 1) language and form; *what do the documents say?* 2) purpose and function; *what do they do?* and 3) intertextuality and authority; *how are the documents related?* This framework helped us put in context the meaning-making process from the documents as a curricular resource and their implications for teaching and learning.

Discussion: Complexities Underlining Indigenous Yoruba Social Practices

Based on the content analysis, as guided by the research questions, the findings indicated complexities and variations in representations of the Yoruba ethnic group based on the identified social capitals. Our analysis revealed that aspects of the indigenous Yoruba identity and social practices interweave many cultural repertoires. As depicted in the native document, it is the collection of these aspects that informs practice and behavior, cultural product, and a sense of purpose for the indigenous Yoruba community. For example, consider the following excerpt:

The Ori (head) is the universal household deity worshipped by both sexes, it is the god of fate... good or ill fortune attends one, according to the will or decree of this god; and hence it is propitiated in order that good luck might be the share of its votary. (Native Document, p. 27)

The indigenous document incorporates the view that teaching and learning within an indigenous Yoruba context involves a systematic understanding of existing ideology, the notions of existence and essence, and their connections to daily lived experiences, as well as views on the life beyond, the metaphysical state, and transmigration. This complexity is further explained in the native document thusly:

[Yoruba] also believe in a future state, hence the worship of the dead, and invocation of spirits as observed in Egungun (*translate as Masquerade*) festival. A festival in which masked individuals impersonate dead relatives... they also believe in the doctrine of metempsychosis, or transmigration of souls, hence they affirm that after a period of time, deceased parents are born again into the family of their surviving children. (Native Document, p. 26, emphasis added)

This quotation showcases indigenous identity and the repertoire of associated social practices, highlighting ideology, spirituality, and existence and essence. However, the Western document minimizes and does not understand this complexity and reports that “the people of the southern

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provinces are pagans” (British Document, p. 20) and “similar institutions have been created among the pagan tribes” (p. 22). The danger apparent in this kind of British documentation is that the content may mislead readers such as curriculum publishers, students, and teachers who rely on authority-sanctioned documents to conclude that the indigenous group had no pre-existing belief systems. As Wallace (2005) noted, contemporary writers and reporters perpetuate the image of Africa created by colonialists. Although the colonialists are now dead, the impact of their writing (such as that examined in this study) lingers. This situation has created a structural and ideological colonialism perpetuating a stereotype, causing miseducation in schools, and limiting various possibilities for providing accurate contextual meanings (Myers, 2001).

The identity of an individual member of the Yoruba ethnic group is viewed in the society from within the larger communal ideology, not as a distinct individualistic entity who acts in a compartmentalized form as in a society with a Western orientation. The native document displays communal norms and the understanding of meaning-making as ideologically diverse from that found in Western nations, as described in the following:

...letters are not known and the language not reduced to writing, the aged are the repositories of wisdom and knowledge, hence the younger generation regard their seniors as guides and prophets, and their vast stores of experience serve as keys to unlock many a doubtful point in the affairs of the young. (Native Document, p. 37)

This shared understanding explains why the young have high regard for elders and attribute extraordinary role power to them. It also indicates that real education includes interconnectedness between holistic meaning-making and the communal norm (al-Kaleem, 2001; Chavis, 1998; Odebisi, Sunal, & Ogodo, 2018). Our analysis shows that the native document portrays social practice organized such that every member of the community will be functional within his or her ability and contribute according to his or her position within a communal pyramid and sustained role identity, a form of shared leadership found among indigenous communities in the Americas (e.g. Stanton, 2012). The Yoruba ethnic group uses this shared understanding as a means to develop a skilled, cooperative, and morally upright individual who will conform yet not be subservient to the order of the society. The nurturing of the young to become *omoluabi*—a responsible person in the society—is the overall underlying dimension of Yoruba social practices (Akinwale, 2013; Fafunwa, 1974). When this underlying dimension is missed, a deficit appears, as is evident in the U.S. public’s (including students’ and teachers’) understanding of social practices in African contexts. Such a deficit has been identified as stemming from the evasion or denial of indigenous frames of meaning-making in the use of

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primary sources (Battiste et al., 2002). Historical antecedents thus become a fundamental component of historical texts that cannot be abstracted from the purported understanding we want to help students create from the primary source.

Beyond the Surface: Identifications in Social Practices and Knowledge Suppression

Our analysis reveals contradictory perspectives of indigenous people's social practices in terms of meaning made in the native and British documents. The understanding of Yoruba social practice varies by experience in the documents. The document written by the native ties social practices to cultural meanings and motivations beyond the surface while the British document interprets the same as a convention. Consider this statement: "Great regard... has always been paid to personal cleanliness, and this tribe [Yoruba] is especially remarkable. The men are always shaved and hence when appearing unshaven, unwashed, and with filthy garments on, *you may safely conclude that they are mourning*" (Native Document, p. 101, emphasis added).

Among the indigenous Yoruba, beliefs are tied to identity performance beyond the immediate meaning. Such a connection is found in the instance of mourning. A person who is mourning may appear unclean as a symbolic expression of grief. In addition, the death of an individual is considered a loss for the whole community. The Yoruba exhibit strong communal identities as a way of being (Fafunwa, 1974; Mazrui, 1987). Drawing from our lived experience in Nigeria, especially among the Yoruba, as a practice, it is common to see immediate family members of the deceased, neighbors, and even local passersby sympathize by weeping uncontrollably in public and forgoing key daily activities such as dressing up. Every member of the community would typically make the house of the deceased their new home, supporting the family day and night as a form of solidarity. Such social practice is more intense especially when the deceased is considered a young person. In this instance, immediate family members hardly eat, sleep or change clothes, to the extent that playing music or making any form of noise might be forbidden within the period; as the loss is collective, so is the mourning. It is considered a big loss with conversations attributing the death to a punishment from the superior being. Members, therefore, humbly appeal to the superior being for such a sad occurrence not to befall the community anymore. In its description of Nigeria's "geography, physical and political conditions" (British Document, pp. 1-13) focusing on the general sanitary conditions (pp. 8-9) of the Yoruba in the Southwest, the British document's narratives missed the social conditions such as mourning that may result in lack of cleanliness among the Yoruba at certain points in time. Instead, the document portrays lack of cleanliness as a norm among the Yoruba populace. Due to a lack of understanding of this deeply-held cultural meaning, the British interpretation of such

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appearance as social practice was instead narrated within a broader public health assumption. The narrative reads:

Partly owing to the neglect of necessary sanitary precautions, the native death-rate is high...Yellow fever and plague sometimes occur in the south...The native population has been encouraged to adopt better methods of sanitation... Over so large an area... and with a population varying in civilization, progress must necessarily be slow. (British Document, pp. 8-9)

Lack of cleanliness can be found among some Yorubas, and indeed in Nigerian society. So also has environmental sanitation been a historical issue in major cities in parts of Asia, Europe, and the Americas. This lack of sanitation observable among some people in these societies does not reflect the general practice of the whole society. The native document clarified why appearance in dirty garments may be observed among the Yoruba as a social practice of mourning, which is both relative to a community and also temporal. The British document's narratives, although not a direct reflection on specifically observing a person or a community that is mourning, portray a lack of cleanliness as the norm among all the Yoruba and essentially a cause of high death rate. Yoruba were judged by extraneous consideration of foreign yardsticks that failed to situate behaviors and appearance within underlying cultural beliefs and social contexts. The instances of support and provision of solace for the family of the deceased were not emphasized in the colonialist's account. Rather, a generic narrative was offered, and core indigenous social practices were veiled by an interpretation of them as a neglect of sanitary precaution. This misconception is dangerous to the teacher, to learning, and to educational writing about people, places, and culture because inaccurate meaning is being made and reported to inform readers' knowledge construction.

There is also a conflicting portrayal of administrative structures and preservation of cultural uniqueness. The native documents portray indigenous identity and social practices as characterized by being with the community, a form of social and collective identification (Brubaker, 2004; Cheek, Smith, & Tropp, 2002). Our analysis indicates that members of the indigenous community focus on continuity of communal pre-existing bonds, common interests, and preservation of uniqueness. Indigenous social practices cover a wide range of thoughts, such as functionalism, integrated knowledge, culture and personality, evolution and ethnosience. The British document acknowledges the same, but it appears that the author of the British document wanted these practices to be associated with a Western style. As insightful as the underlying meaning of the indigenous social practices and identity performances are, this shared

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understanding was understood in part, yet misconceived, and its importance erased in another part of the Western document analyzed. Consider the following British view:

The large area and population... render native administration of highest importance...With a view to supplying in some measure the lack of a legislature for the whole area... The native government is assisted in carrying out the function of governing ...the former independence as had to be curtailed, as the native government failed to avoid internal disorder. (British Document, pp. 21-22).

Our analysis showed that indigenous practices are mostly relational in arrangement and collective in performance (Cheek & Bridges, 1982; Cheek et al., 2002), but the British documents considered the indigenous governing structure unorganized. The reason for this Western document's differential view is arguably that it results from the lack of understanding by the colonialists of how indigenous society works and of the symbolic importance of practices within the society. It may, however, be a blatant attempt to wield power and misrepresent other world regions (Seker & Ilhan, 2015; Tarman & Kuran, 2015).

We observed that the meaning of social practices in Africa may have suffered suppression because works related to African themes experienced suppression. The original manuscript written by the native examined in this study was withheld from publication by colonialists. The document was not made available to the public until after the death of the native writer. The following is an excerpt from the forward of the native document:

A singular misfortune, which happily is not of everyday occurrence, befell the original manuscripts of this history, in consequence of which the author never lived to see in print his more than 20 years of labour... The manuscript was forwarded to a well-known English publisher through one of the Missionary Societies in 1899 and—*mirabile dictum*—nothing more was heard of them! (Native Document, ix)

The availability of the native document provides a counter-narrative and a form of resistance to the account of the dominant colonial culture distortion of indigenous social practices (Rizvi, Lingard, & Lavia, 2006). As the native document expressed, "This seemed ... so strange that one could not help thinking that there was more in it [indigenous document] than appeared on the surface, especially because of other circumstances connected with the so-called loss of the manuscript ..." the publisher expressed "he was prepared to pay for them!" (ix). These quotations indicate that the historical document is political, as it suppresses native knowledge as represented by Yoruba social practices. Such political underpinnings imply a concern for what

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historical documents are available if educators are to craft narrative through historical inquiry for African contexts. In addition, the nuance of misconstruing meanings and suppression of documents speaks to sustaining the colonial legacy, as it appears the dominant cultural norms may be threatened (Nieto, 2004).

Putting it all together: The Emergent Curriculum and Indigenous Approaches to Meeting Societal Needs

The findings from our analysis revealed that understanding the ways in which the Yoruba ethnic group—and, perhaps, other indigenous groups—meet the needs of their society would require a high degree of openness to inquiry, development of historical thinking, and native-based analyses for meaning. We found from our analysis that the ways the Yoruba meet their needs are associated with 1) ideology, essence, and existence; 2) spirituality and deification; 3) status, respect, hierarchy, and recognition; 4) role assignment, familial duties, and civic responsibilities; and 5) communal affinity and life as embodiment of physical and metaphysical entities. These cultural elements exemplify the uniqueness of local practices as the Yoruba ethnic group ascribes symbols to what they value and nurtures deeply held beliefs that are more complex than our contemporary view of such practices (Akinwale, 2013; Fafunwa, 1974; Odebiyi, Sunal, & Ogodo, 2018). Combining our lived experience with the ethnic group and research insights, we maintain that the combination of the cultural elements stated above still forms the basis for which the indigenous Yoruba ethnic group meets the needs of the society in contemporary times. Therefore, any contemporary educational intervention, reports, research, or attempts to make sense of the indigenous Yoruba and other indigenous African groups would need to pay attention to these themes and others from literature to ensure social justice and counter the dominant inaccurate account for the common good.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated how the interactions of the power hierarchy with reality may shape the content and interpretation of primary source documents. As curriculum publishers claim to develop content on Africa using primary sources, problems and limitations arise that may not be acknowledged. Primary sources, as we found in our study, may well be a potential source promoting colonialist thinking about African contexts. As the analysis demonstrated, indigenous peoples' identity and social practices might be misconstrued if used directly and without deep consideration of other source materials, particularly those by indigenous contemporary authors.

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Stubert and Ayers (1994) talked about young children who run ahead of their parents while constantly looking back because, essentially, they are following. Sometimes, the most useful knowledge about indigenous African contexts is already there, and we must follow ahead to tap into this complex knowledge of ways of being in African contexts and make it public to inform our practice. The same analogy may apply to scholars, teachers, and curriculum developers in social studies, encouraging them to follow ahead to learn an enduring way to lead us into the future of postcolonial discourse in research and teaching about Africa. Educators must engage in deep reflection and learn from complex epistemology underlining the meanings of events documented in historical primary sources as they interact with social studies curriculum on African contexts. One of the major challenges of historical inquiry on indigenous communities is assuming that most primary source documents represent neutral knowledge for all indigenous communities (Battiste et al., 2002; Krueger, 2019; Roy, 2016; Tikly, 1999). Most basic forms of African educational practices and systems have their origin in the colonial era. Emerging evidence on primary historical sources used to teach indigenous themes in U.S. social studies indicates unsatisfactory narratives and monolithic interpretations of history (Crossley & Tikly, 2004; Stanton, 2012). These concerns are reasons to suspect primary historical sources used in teaching themes on African nations in U.S. social studies.

Considering today's classroom diversities across the globe, it is important that educators and researchers strengthen their analytical knowledge of groups' distinct dynamics. The need to bridge cultural traditions to educate a socially and globally competent individual, especially in an era of global interdependence, alerts educators to the need to dissect the source(s) of some curriculum materials used in classrooms. A comparative examination of meaning-making and meaning made from primary historical documents may promote adaptive teaching that helps students construct distinctive knowledge, since curriculum materials are integral drivers of educational agendas. Many more curriculum materials may contain inaccuracies. There is a need to pay attention to the source(s) used for constructing curriculum materials for students. There also is a need for teacher professional development, enabling them to learn and teach about regions beyond their own. The study provides insights and a starting point for educators in regard to the source of misconceptions in the curriculum materials they use in their classrooms. It also highlights the importance of leveraging the cultural capital of natives as a foundation to improve students' civic competence in understanding culture, change, and continuity (NCSS, 2010).

Through comparisons, this study clarified cultural misrepresentations and misperceptions about a case ethnic group. This analysis provides a basis for teachers to become educational researchers

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in their own classrooms questioning the authority of curriculum content. We challenge educators and curriculum publishers to confront misrepresentation, stereotypes, and confusion about people, places, and cultures beyond their own geographical boundaries. Educators need to critically re-examine the ways in which indigenous examples are utilized to teach fundamentals of subjects in schools (Myers, 2001).

We hope that demonstrating how colonialist versus indigenous historical primary sources differentially represent the meanings of social practices may inspire careful consideration of similar sources in social studies research, curriculum implementation, and advance critical theorization (Gaudelli, 2013; Hickling-Hudson, 2006). Rather than telling a *cute* story about African contexts in social studies classrooms, effort should be on the critical examination of historical primary source documents and leveraging indigenes as consultants. Through such a lens, historical narrative may create potential for teaching with primary sources that is sensitive to and responsive to the meaning the sources convey as well as to multiple alternative understandings of the meanings of social practices. The complexities in meanings conveyed by primary documents may afford students the opportunity to think through history from multiple perspectives and develop critical reasoning (Medina et al., 2000). The different world regions are so complex and vast that no one teacher can do it all well. There is a need for awareness among teachers and a follow-up on it if possible. Discussion about reconceptualizing the selection and use of primary historical sources thus becomes essential.

Some questions arise from this study warranting further research: How accessible are African social practices to educators, students, and publishers? How might K-12, especially young learners, construct colonialists' thinking or lack thereof when they interact with U.S. social studies curricula addressing African contexts? How sophisticated is Western authors' knowledge about African social practices if teachers and publishers are to write about it such that different perspectives would be entertained? What efforts would be necessary for a teacher to become more aware of African social practices and then work on different perspectives in practice? How much of what is known now is taught and researched?

Our study considered just one group within Africa, so readers are cautioned to avoid applying all findings to all groups. Based on insights from this study, whether in teaching, learning, or educational research, none of the above cultural repertoires is more or less important than another. They should be considered holistically if successful curriculum design, effective teaching and meaningful learning, and responsive research are goals. In order to avoid the risk of producing world citizens without adequate knowledge of the world itself, researchers have to

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pick up the challenge and schools must acquaint students with reality by studying different groups and allowing for different perspectives on the same narrative.

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