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Exploring the Environmental in South African Educational History
Explorer l'environnement dans l'histoire de l'éducation en Afrique du Sud
Explorando lo medioambiental en la historia educativa de Sudáfrica

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article prend une petite partie de l'histoire de l'opposition en Afrique du Sud – les initiatives éducatives des acteurs sociaux en exil – pour montrer que les idées sur l'éducation environnementale étaient présentes en exil autant que dans le mouvement anti-apartheid interne de l'Afrique du Sud. Il s'appuie sur une historiographie sud-africaine qui problématise les notions universalisantes de « développement » tirées des discours de modernisation coloniale et liées aux modèles de développement occidentaux. Il se concentre sur l'inclusion des études sur le développement et de l'éducation environnementale dans le programme d'études du Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) du Congrès national africain (ANC), en exil, dans les années 1970. S'appuyant sur des sources primaires provenant des archives du mouvement de libération de l'Université de Fort Hare, l'article soutient que, même si le programme faisait partie d'un discours développementaliste plus large émergeant dans l'après-Seconde Guerre mondiale, le programme d'études s'inscrivait dans le cadre d'un discours développementaliste plus large émergeant dans l'après-Seconde Guerre mondiale. il visait - contrairement au programme de l'apartheid qui cherchait à construire et à souligner la différence - à contrer les discours racistes coloniaux et à inclure l'éducation environnementale dans le programme à la suggestion de l'UNESCO. Cela pourrait être considéré comme une des premières formes d'éducation « décoloniale ». Cette étude de cas est importante pour approfondir la compréhension de l'histoire de l'éducation environnementale dans les pays du Sud.

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Exploring the Environmental in South African Educational History

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Abstract

This article takes a small part of South Africa's oppositional history – the educational initiatives of social actors in exile – to show that ideas about environmental education were present in exile as much as in South Africa's internal anti-apartheid movement. It builds on a South African historiography that problematises universalising notions of 'development' drawn from colonial modernisation discourses and tied to Western models of development. It focuses on the inclusion of Development Studies and environmental education in the curriculum of the exiled African National Congress's (ANC's) Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) in the 1970s. Drawing on primary sources in the University of Fort Hare's Liberation Movement Archives, the article argues that while the curriculum was part of a wider developmentalist discourse emerging in the post-WWII era; it aimed - unlike the apartheid curriculum which sought to construct and underline difference - to counter colonial racist discourses, and included environmental education in the curriculum at the suggestion of UNESCO. It could be seen as an early form of "decolonial" education. This case study is significant for deepening understanding of the history of environmental education in the global South.

Keywords: environmental history, environmental education, South African history of education, anti-apartheid education in exile, UNESCO

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Explorando lo medioambiental en la historia educativa de Sudáfrica

Resumen

Este artículo toma una pequeña parte de la historia opositora de Sudáfrica –las iniciativas educativas de los actores sociales en el exilio– para mostrar que las ideas sobre educación ambiental estaban presentes en el exilio tanto como en el movimiento interno contra el apartheid de Sudáfrica. Se basa en una historiografía sudafricana que problematiza nociones universalizantes de "desarrollo" extraídas de los discursos de modernización colonial y vinculadas a los modelos occidentales de desarrollo. Se centra en la inclusión de Estudios de Desarrollo y educación ambiental en el plan de estudios del Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) del exiliado Congreso Nacional Africano (ANC) en la década de 1970. Basándose en fuentes primarias de los Archivos del Movimiento de Liberación de la Universidad de Fort Hare, el artículo sostiene que si bien el plan de estudios era parte de un discurso desarrollista más amplio que surgió en la era posterior a la Segunda Guerra Mundial; su objetivo -a diferencia del plan de estudios del apartheid que buscaba construir y subrayar la diferencia- contrarrestar los discursos racistas coloniales e incluyó la educación ambiental en el plan de estudios a sugerencia de la UNESCO. Podría verse como una forma temprana de educación “descolonial”. Este estudio de caso es importante para profundizar la comprensión de la historia de la educación ambiental en el Sur global.

Palabras clave : historia ambiental, educación ambiental, Historia de la educación en Sudáfrica, educación contra el apartheid en el exilio, UNESCO

Explorer l’environnement dans l’histoire de l’éducation en Afrique du Sud

Résumé

Cet article prend une petite partie de l’histoire de l’opposition en Afrique du Sud – les initiatives éducatives des acteurs sociaux en exil – pour montrer que les idées sur l’éducation environnementale étaient présentes en exil autant que dans le mouvement anti-apartheid interne de l’Afrique du Sud. Il s’appuie sur une historiographie sud-africaine qui problématise les notions universalisantes de « développement » tirées des discours de modernisation coloniale et liées aux modèles de développement occidentaux. Il se concentre sur l’inclusion des études sur le développement et de l’éducation environnementale dans le programme d’études du Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) du Congrès national africain (ANC), en exil, dans les années 1970. S’appuyant sur des sources primaires provenant des archives du mouvement de libération de l’Université de Fort Hare, l’article soutient que, même si le

programme faisait partie d'un discours développementaliste plus large émergeant dans l'après-Seconde Guerre mondiale, le programme d'études s'inscrivait dans le cadre d'un discours développementaliste plus large émergeant dans l'après-Seconde Guerre mondiale. il visait - contrairement au programme de l'apartheid qui cherchait à construire et à souligner la différence - à contrer les discours racistes coloniaux et à inclure l'éducation environnementale dans le programme à la suggestion de l'UNESCO. Cela pourrait être considéré comme une des premières formes d'éducation « décoloniale ». Cette étude de cas est importante pour approfondir la compréhension de l'histoire de l'éducation environnementale dans les pays du Sud.

Mots-clés : histoire environnementale, éducation environnementale, histoire sud-africaine de l'éducation, l'éducation anti-apartheid en exil, UNESCO

Introduction

This article is a modest effort within the relatively minor field of history of education in South Africa to take up new themes relating to a present deeply impacted by climate and environmental issues. While some attention has been paid to how environmental issues became significant inside South Africa, less attention has been given to how the African National Congress (ANC) in exile included environmental education as part of the conception of a new curriculum for South Africa. The article will examine this, as well as another innovation in the curriculum of the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) established by the ANC in Tanzania in 1978, focused on the subject of Development Studies.[1] South Africa is an interesting case as it illustrates the response of a significant part of Africa, disproportionately affected by ecological disruptions over time, to environmental concerns. The "environment" can be understood as a complex and contested "context" and as the relations between all living and non-living things.[2] In this article, the focus is on the latter. Together elements of the Development Studies

[1] The African National Congress (ANC) became South Africa's ruling party in 1994. It was founded in 1912 as a platform to unite Africans to fight for African rights against economic exclusion and political disenfranchisment. It gradually transformed into a liberation movement and was propelled into exile when it was banned in 1960. Thirty years later, in 1990, it was unbanned and its imprisoned leader Nelson Mandela was released along with other political prisoners. The ANC founded the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) in exile in Tanzania in 1978. It aimed to provide education to growing numbers of young people who had left the country seeking to join the liberation movement (see later). See Thula Simpson, *The ANC and the Liberation Struggle in South Africa: Essential Writings* (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2019); see also "Nelson Mandela Foundation: Documents," *Nelson Mandela Foundation*, accessed January 14, 2025, https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/site/q/03lv02424/04lv02730/05lv03188/06lv03189.htm.

[2] See for example Noah Sobe and Jamie Kowalczyk, "Context, Entanglement and Assemblage as Matters of Concern in Comparative Education Research," *World Yearbook of Education 2018: Uneven Spaces – Times of Education: Historical Sociologies of Concepts, Methods and Practices*, ed. Julie M. MacLeod, Noha Sobe and Terri Seddon (London: Routledge 2017) for discussion of the complexity of context.

curriculum and proposal for environmental education show engagement in exile, before the ending of apartheid, with this relationship. Since the history of education is a sub-field within history and education, it will be necessary to provide a brief overview of themes in environmental historiography as well as environmental education.

Environmental History and History of Education

Changes and developments in environmental history are an important point of reference for historians of education. The field of environmental history has a long history in South Africa. Recent overviews have traced its broad outlines, changes over time, and differing schools of thought.[3] The history of relations between humans and animals is small but growing.[4] But environmental history really gained momentum only in the early part of the twenty-first century, along with "the intensification of movements for social and environmental reparation in Africa."[5] The field has offered "a robust critique of colonialism, capitalism and apartheid," including of the role of science in "buttressing settler power and affirming white national identity."[6]

Before this, "a strong tide of environmental determinism prevailed."[7] Seen as the "geographic expression" of the biological determinism of social Darwinism, it was displaced only in the latter part of the twentieth century when social historians began to explore new themes. Here I want to mention four.

First, there was an emphasis on racialised state regulation of the environment, land dispossession and alienation, struggles over resources, and the deep links between colonialism and apartheid and the history of soil and wildlife conservation, pest eradication and other conservation interventions such as in the Kruger National Park.[8]

Second, new approaches have highlighted connections with, and differences from, environmental histories in the global North. While work in the global North has focused largely on wilderness and urban history, South African environmental history "has looked more at rural struggles over resources, the role of racialized legislation in

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[3] Jane Carruthers, "Towards an Environmental History of Southern Africa: Some Perspectives," *South African Historical Journal* 23, no. 1 (1990):184–195; Sandra Swart, "South Africa's Environmental History: A Historiography," in *The Great Convergence: Environmental Histories of BRICS*, ed. S. R. Rajan and L. Sedrez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 319–348; Graeme Wynn, Jane Carruthers, and Nancy J. Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Justice: Southern African Histories* (Ohio University Press, 2022).

[4] Albert G. Way and others, "Roundtable: Animal History in a Time of Crisis," *Agricultural History* 94, no. 3 (2020): 444–484; Sandra Swart, "Writing Animals into African History," *Critical African Studies* 8, no. 2 (2016): 95–108; Lance Van Sittert and Sandra Swart, "Canis Familiaris: A Dog History of South Africa," *South African Historical Journal* 48, no. 1 (2003): 138–173.

[5] Wynn, Carruthers, and Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Justice*, 5.

[6] Swart, "South Africa's Environmental History: A Historiography," 336, 345.

[7] Swart, "South Africa's Environmental History: A Historiography."

[8] William Beinart, *The Rise of Conservation in South Africa: Settlers, Livestock, and the Environment 1770-1950* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

dispossession and alienation from the environment and … historicized environmental justice."[9]

Third, historians have also placed environmental activism under the spotlight. The human exceptionalism and sustainable development frames which shape much activism are questioned. As Wynn, Carruthers and Jacobs pointed out in 2022, South African activism has been "unrepentantly anthropocentric" and has not been "tightly bound to what has come to be termed 'ecological justice'… and concern for the rights of non-humans."[10] Instead, they have placed human rights and democratic accountability at the centre of their concerns. The idea of "sustainable development" has also been criticized "as a vacuous idea" "that is a mere Trojan horse for a commodified environment."[11] These historians recognise that a new layer of crisis has settled over the legacy of colonialism and underdevelopment in Africa: the planetary phenomenon of accelerating climate change "fueled by war….an acute threat to humans and their environments, especially in the global south" – and this requires that responses be multi-faceted and focused.[12]

Fourth, the de-colonial turn and emphasis on Indigenous knowledges provides new possibilities for addressing the need, as Chakrabarty has put it, "to connect deep and recorded histories and put geological time and the biological time of evolution in conversation with the time of human history and experience."[13] It has entailed a shift of emphasis to the pre-colonial. The term "pre-colonial" or "pre-capitalist" has been questioned and problematized. "Pre-" and "post-" (colonial/capitalist) assume the centrality of colonialism/capitalism to history. Instead, there is a preference for talking about the "deep past."[14] The "deep past" has been seen as key to a critique of prevailing logics of modernity. It is also seen as a resource for alternatives to the present and for using oral history and Indigenous knowledge to discover suppressed histories of relationships between people and the environment.[15] New technologies currently used in archaeology have enabled the observation of settlement remains long predating the colonial. New notions of archive, such as the idea of the "ritual archive" promoted by

[9] Swart, "South Africa's Environmental History: A Historiography."

[10] Wynn, Carruthers, and Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Justice*, 17, 18.

[11] Wynn, Carruthers, and Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Justice*, 21.

[12] Wynn, Carruthers, and Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Justice*, 26.

[13] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), 8.

[14] See for example June Bam, *Ausi Told Me: Why Cape Herstoriographies Matter* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2021).

[15] Wynn, Carruthers, and Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Justice*, 31; Cynthia Kros and others, "Exploring the Archive of the Times before Colonialism," in *Archives of Times Past: Conversations about South Africa's Deep History*, ed. Cynthia Kros and others (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2022), 16 ; June Bam and Allan Zinn, "Whose History Counts? A Conclusion," in *Whose History Counts : Decolonising African Pre-Colonial Historiography*, ed. June Bam, Lungisile Ntsebeza, and Allan Zinn (Stellenbosch: African SUN Media, 2018), 199–207.

Falola, have gained traction.[16] These propose that African cultural and religious experiences, practices and languages can be sites of research. As such the idea challenges reliance on conventional written archives for knowledge of African experiences. New feminist work has emerged within the last two years drawing on the ritual archive and deep listening to critique older, colonial, and more recent, Marxist historiographical representations of the pre-colonial.[17] Thus June Bam has argued against the erasure of Khoi-San histories in dominant historiography through attention to the rituals, language and memories of female "knowledge-bearers".

The field of Southern African history is thus alive with debate about the broader questions posed by colonial violence, the global pandemic, and the climate crisis. Post-anthropocentric approaches have a clear place within it. At some remove, both critical realist or "ecological modernization" approaches (the term used by Trædal, Eidsvik, and Manik 2022), as well as post-humanist approaches are deployed in the field of environmental education.[18] Neither pays great attention to history. Among critical realists, historical themes are present, but research focuses primarily on changing contemporary policy and practice in educational curricula and projects.[19] History is included mainly to situate, contextualise and distinguish contemporary interventions from approaches and projects such as conservation, dominant in the past, and to provide a sense of the historical development of movements and ideas concerned with the environment since the democratic transition in 1994. Questions are rarely asked of the past, which is seen mainly as backdrop. However, in charting the shift from conservation to environment and then to sustainability projects, these studies have

[16] Toyin Falola, "Ritual Archives," in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy*, ed. Adeshina Afolayan and Toyin Falola (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2017): 703–728.

[17] Bam, *Ausi Told Me*; Himal Ramji, "Producing the Precolonial: Professional and Popular Lives of Mapungubwe, 1937–2017" (unpublished Master Thesis, Faculty of Humanities, 2020).

[18] Leif Tore Trædal, Eidsvik Erlend, and Manik Sadhana, "Discourses of Climate Change Education: The Case of Geography Textbooks for Secondary and Higher Secondary Education in South Africa and Norway," *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift – Norwegian Journal of Geography* 76, no. 2 (2022): 94–109, https://doi.org/10.1080/00291951.2022.2062044. For post-humanist approaches, see for example Matthew J. Zylstra, Andrew Knight, Karen Esler and Lesley le Grange, "Connectedness as a Core Conservation Concern: An Interdisciplinary Review of Theory and a Call for Practice," *Springer Science Reviews* 2, no. 1–2 (2014): 119–143; Lesley Le Grange, "The (Post) Human Condition and Decoloniality: Rethinking and Doing Curriculum," *Alternation* 31 (2020): 119–142; Lesley Le Grange, 'Environmental Education After Sustainability', in *Post-Sustainability and Environmental Education*, ed. Bob Jickling and Stephen Sterling (Springer International Publishing, 2017), 93–107.

[19] Rob O'Donoghue and Eureta Rosenberg, "A Review of the Staging and Enactment of Environment and Sustainability Education in South Africa: An Illustrative Case Study," in *World Review: Environmental and Sustainability Education in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals*, ed. Marco Rieckmann and Rosalba Thomas Muñoz (CRC Press, 2024): 25–26); Leon Tikly, *Education for Sustainable Development in the Postcolonial World: Towards a Transformative Agenda for Africa* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2020); Eureta Rosenberg and others, "Building Capacity for Green, Just and Sustainable Futures – a New Knowledge Field Requiring Transformative Research Methodology," *Journal of Education* 65 (2016): 95–122; Eureta Rosenberg, Presha Ramsarup, and Heila Lotz-Sisitka, *Green Skills Research in South Africa: Models, Cases and Methods* (Routledge, 2019).

provided rich insights into the range, scope and limitations of underlying conceptions and approaches of such projects.[20] A central dimension of the work in this school is exemplified in the language of "sustainability" and work on, with and around UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals.[21] But given the questions posed in the critical historiography, the relationship between development and education merits further discussion.

This article attempts to build on the new thrusts in southern African historiography and environmental education by undertaking a case-study analysis of the Development Studies curriculum and inclusion of environmental education in the curriculum of SOMAFCO. It argues that despite being couched in "developmentalist" language, the Development Studies curriculum differed from the "colonial developmentalist" discourse of apartheid's Bantu Education system. Healy-Clancy has argued that the latter was based on a foundational myth of "*improvable* otherness".[22] Framed in historical materialist terms, the Development Studies curriculum, by contrast, sought development on a universal basis, similar to but also different from the universalist developmentalism of organisations such as UNESCO at the time. UNESCO was also an important influence on the ANC in ensuring that environmental education became part of its agenda. In a context where developmentalism and the role of UNESCO as "the conscience of humanity"[23] is increasingly criticized, this article highlights how some strains of "developmentalist" ideas contested rather than confirmed colonial/apartheid constructs and also how UNESCO introduced the idea of environmental education to the ANC.

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[20] Rob O'Donoghue, "Environment and Sustainability Education in a Changing South Africa: A Critical Historical Analysis of Outline Schemes for Defining and Guiding Learning Interactions," *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education* 24 (2007): 141–157; Rob O'Donoghue and Eureta Rosenberg, "A Review of the Staging and Enactment of Environment and Sustainability Education in South Africa: An Illustrative Case Study," in *World Review: Environmental and Sustainability Education in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals*, ed. Marco Rieckmann and Rosalba Thomas Munoz (2024), 22–39.

[21] See for example Heila Lotz-Sisitka, Eureta Rosenberg, and Presha Ramsarup, "Environment and Sustainability Education Research as Policy Engagement: (Re-) Invigorating 'Politics as Potentia' in South Africa," *Environmental Education Research* 27, no. 4 (2021): 525–553; Rob O'Donoghue, "Environment and Sustainability Education in a Changing South Africa: A Critical Historical Analysis of Outline Schemes for Defining and Guiding Learning Interactions," *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education* 24 (2007): 141-157; Rob O'Donoghue and Eureta Rosenberg, "A Review of the Staging and Enactment of Environment and Sustainability Education in South Africa: An Illustrative Case Study," in *World Review: Environmental and Sustainability Education in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals*, ed. Marco Rieckmann and Rosalba Thomas Munoz (2024), 22–39; Leon Tikly, *Education for Sustainable Development in the Postcolonial World* (London: Routledge Taylor& Francis, 2020).

[22] Meghan Healy-Clancy, "Mass Education and the Gendered Politics of 'Development' in Apartheid South Africa and Late-Colonial British Africa," in *Empire and Education in Africa*, ed. Peter Kallaway and Rebecca Swartz, (New York: Peter Lang, 2016), 185.

[23] Yoko Mochizuki and Edward Vickers, "Still 'the Conscience of Humanity'? UNESCO's Vision of Education for Peace, Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 54, no. 5 (2024): 721–730.

Since South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994, the availability of the archives of liberation movements to researchers has opened one more window on how and what kind of alternatives were developed in exile conditions.[24] Shortly after 1994, the archives of the South African diaspora in exile were repatriated to and are now housed at the University of Fort Hare. It includes the papers of the Pan Africanist Congress, the African National Congress, the Black Consciousness Movement and the Non-European Unity Movement. The archives of SOMAFCO (the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College) of the African National Congress are part of these. They roughly cover the period 1977 to 1990. SOMAFCO was an educational institution that made an organised, sustained effort to provide an alternative to apartheid education in exile. The institution does have its historians.[25] What has not received detailed attention is the Development Studies curriculum or proposals for environmental education. These were innovations that could be seen to have been decolonial in intent. There are detailed records of the curricula offered in the SOMAFCO archives, as well as the discussions around their construction in minutes of meetings. This article will provide a brief background to the establishment of the school, and the discussion and debate around the Development Studies curriculum. In addition, it suggests that there is another history of environmental education, in addition to the dominant conservation history and its projects under apartheid and opposition to them within the country. This hitherto undocumented history sits side-by-side with the documented NGO history; and appears to have some continuities with the present. Like many contemporary initiatives in environmental and sustainability education, the role of UNESCO was significant.

Apartheid Curriculum and Emergence of SOMAFCO

The idea of adapted rather than universal education was the foundation of colonial and apartheid curricula, and the subject of a substantial literature.[26] How curricula differentiated according to perceived racial and gendered "needs," natures, and futures, and demonstrated similarities as well as differences, have been exhaustively

[24] Lucius Bavusile Maaba, "The History and Politics of Liberation Archives at Fort Hare" (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2013), http://hdl.handle.net/11427/11121, accessed April 18, 2024.

[25] Seán Morrow, Brown Maaba, and Loyiso Pulumani, *Education in Exile: SOMAFCO, the ANC School in Tanzania, 1978 to 1992* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004), https://www.hsrcpress.ac.za/books/education-in-exile, accessed May 9, 2022; Rajuvelu (Sam) Govender, "The Struggle for the Curriculum at the ANC's Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Tanzania, 1978–1992," *Southern African Review of Education with Production* 18, no. 1 (2012): 24–38, doi:10.10520/EJC123753; Linda Chisholm, "Political, 'Refugee' and Peoples' Education in South African Exile Politics 1978–1995," *Paedagogica Historica*, (forthcoming).

[26] Rebecca Swartz, *Education and Empire – Children, Race and Humanitarianism in the British Settler Colonies, 1833–1880* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2019); *Empire and Education in Africa*, ed. Peter Kallaway and Rebecca Swartz (New York: Peter Lang, 2016).

researched.[27] Nature Study, for example was inscribed in the curricula for both black and white primary school teachers, along with languages, arithmetic, geography, history, hygiene, school organisation and infant method. Guidelines were developed for teachers specifying teaching about mammals, birds, plants, geography, and soils – using local specimens and conditions as much as possible. But the purposes of "nature study" for Africans, consistent with the wider colonial project, was defined as being part of a "civilizational" project, and was seen as especially useful to counter fears and beliefs in the supernatural.[28] What the "Nature Studies" curriculum meant in practice across different schools and contexts deserves more detailed research.

These colonial patterns were continued into the apartheid period after 1948, enforced with greater vigour and fewer resources to expanding numbers of school students in urban and rural schools throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[29]The history of conservation projects during this time found some echo in better-resourced white schools. The unequal curricula and imposition of an onerous language policy in schools were at the heart of protests that erupted with great force in the 1976 Soweto youth revolt. The "environments" of significance were those of overcrowded and poorly-resourced schools, limited economic futures and repressive political conditions. The exiled South African liberation movement, the African National Congress (ANC) founded the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) in Tanzania in 1978. This was in direct response to the youth revolt, that was met by brutal repression on the part of the state. Many young militants fled the country through underground networks, reaching the ANC in exile in other African countries.

From the 1960s, the ANC had established a foothold in countries to the north of South Africa to continue the struggle for liberation in South Africa. After the white supremacist National Party came to power in 1948, it introduced a series of tougher segregationist measures than existed before and detained and banned members of the internal opposition.[30] Lissoni has shown how the armed resistance movement emerged in the context of the exile of liberation movements between the 1950s and 1970s.[31] By 1976, when radicalized school students started arriving in great numbers in search of

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[27] Linda Chisholm, "Transnational Colonial Entanglements: South African Teacher Education College Curricula," in *Transnational Perspectives on Curriculum History*, ed. Gary McCulloch, Ivor Goodson, and Mariano González-Delgado (London: Routledge, 2020), 163–181.

[28] Cape of Good Hope Department of Public Education, "The Teaching of Nature Study," in *The Native Primary School: Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers* (Cape Town: Cape Times Limited, 1929), 258–272.

[29] Jonathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa 1940-1990* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1999).

[30] Deborah Posel, "The Apartheid Project, 1948–1970," in *The Cambridge History of South Africa Volume II 1885–1994*, ed. Ross, Robert, Anne Kelk Mager, and Bill Nasson (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 319–369.

[31] Arianna Lissoni, "Transformations in the ANC External Mission and Umkhonto We Sizwe, c. 1960–1969," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, no. 2 (2009): 288–301.

military training or educational opportunities, the ANC had already established structures and a network of operations to facilitate such processes in several African countries, most notably Tanzania and Zambia. These structures were strengthened as the needs expanded after 1976.

SOMAFCO, as Morrow, Maaba and Phulumani have shown, was a unique experiment.[32] Funded by a number of foreign donors, it was established on an abandoned sisal plantation granted to the ANC by the Tanzanian government at Mazimbu, 50 km north of Morogoro. Founded on an original site consisting of a "series of tumbledown estate houses and overgrown land", the ANC built the SOMAFCO up into "a large educational institution" that included "a farm, a hospital, primary and nursery school, cultural and sports facilities, a furniture factory and extensive housing" with a population ultimately numbering around 3,500.[33] Four years after its foundations were laid, the Dakawa Development Centre was established in 1982 as a reception centre for SOMAFCO. Morrow describes the inhospitable surroundings in which both SOMAFCO and Dakawa started. The Dakawa site was "undeveloped, isolated, without access to electricity or sweet water and building stone, malarial, flat, and therefore a difficult site on which to install piped water and a waterborne sewerage system."[34] The population here rose to "as many as 5,000."[35] While both faced challenges, those at Dakawa were more profound.

SOMAFCO and Dakawa were autonomous institutions. Dakawa was focused on orienting and screening youth from different backgrounds and academic levels of education, while SOMAFCO offered formal instruction. The Dakawa Development Centre was thus organised around basic education, agriculture and small-scale industry, mainly to meet the needs of the institution, and make it self-sufficient in food, whereas SOMAFCO ran as a secondary school. Dakawa in addition became the "place of punishment" for students from SOMAFCO, as well as the place to which pregnant teenagers were sent.[36] "The Charlottes", as the Charlotte Maxeke Centre for pregnant teenagers was known, as well as the Raymond Mhlaba Rehabilitation Centre for the mentally ill, or those considered otherwise in need of rehabilitation, gave the Centre a dark reputation as a "dumping ground" for undesirables, more akin to a penal settlement than an educational centre.[37] To the Rehabilitation Centre, for example, were sent those

[32] Seán Morrow, Brown Maaba, and Loyiso Pulumani, *Education in Exile: SOMAFCO, the ANC School in Tanzania, 1978 to 1992* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004), https://www.hsrcpress.ac.za/books/education-in-exile, accessed May 9, 2022.

[33] Seán Morrow, "Dakawa Development Centre: An African National Congress Settlement in Tanzania, 1982-1992," *African Affairs* 97, no. 389 (1998): 499.

[34] Seán Morrow, "Dakawa Development Centre: An African National Congress Settlement in Tanzania, 1982-1992," *African Affairs* 97, no. 389 (1998): 500.

[35] Morrow, "Dakawa Development Centre," 501.

[36] Morrow, "Dakawa Development Centre," 504.

[37] Morrow, "Dakawa Development Centre," 505–506.

who had been sent back from training in the USSR or one of its satellites such as Bulgaria, having failed to adjust or learn the language. The social problems experienced at both, including, for example, criminality and dagga (cannabis) smoking, were more pronounced at Dakawa than SOMAFCO. Yet, despite the difficulties, the school became a laboratory for a future South Africa, a place where the future could be anticipated, and a curriculum developed that countered the Bantu Education of apartheid.

Curricula at SOMAFCO and DAKAWA

The curriculum at SOMAFCO, so Govender has argued, was from the outset an academic one, with the "school routine reflect(ing) an uncritical adoption of the norms of a mass education and a conventional pedagogy."[38] A meeting in April 1979 on the curriculum to be adopted decided that priority would be given to "English, Mathematics, Physical Science, Biology, Geography, History, Development of Societies, Agricultural Science and Physical Education. Subjects like Administration and Practical Skills, Vocational Training, foreign and African languages would also be considered."[39] Students were entered for the London University General Certificate of Education (GCE) O-Level examinations; [40] a proposal to enter students for the East African Examinations was rejected as it required Kiswahili. This then restricted secondary school options to "English Language, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Geography on the basis of a prescribed syllabus over which SOMAFCO would have little control."[41]

Education for Production, a socialist form of education prominent Tanzania, and represented by the idea and practice of polytechnic education in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), was promoted throughout its existence from 1978 to 1990 to make the school self-reliant and self-sufficient. It aimed to overcome the division between mental and manual labour and integrate academic and productive work by exposing students to some vocational skills. However, although the idea was popular among some dealing with SOMAFCO, and although small industries (tailoring, engineering, welding) had been established to assist in the construction and maintenance of the school, students shunned it and it generally became the punishment for misdemeanours.[42] By 1981, all that remained of it in the curriculum was Agricultural

[38] Govender, "The Contestation, Ambiguities and Dilemmas of Curriculum Development at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, 1978–1992," 201.

[39] Govender, "The Contestation, Ambiguities and Dilemmas of Curriculum Development at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, 1978–1992," 187.

[40] Ordinary (O) level examinations were taken at the age of 16, A-levels at the age of 18.

[41] Govender, "The Contestation, Ambiguities and Dilemmas of Curriculum Development at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, 1978–1992," 190.

[42] Morrow, "Dakawa Development Centre"; Seán Morrow, Brown Maaba, and Loyiso Pulumani, *Education in Exile: SOMAFCO, the ANC School in Tanzania, 1978 to 1992* (HSRC Press, 2004); Rajuvelu

Science and involving students in manual work.[43] It was only at the Dakawa Development Centre, established as an orientation and screening centre for newcomers, and to support the school as a farm and maintenance centre, that the principle was adopted. However, here too the idea faltered – conditions at the Centre were unhealthy overall, buildings and staffing inadequate and there was, as a consequence, little actual skills training. As the security detachment of the ANC took charge, it developed the reputation of not only being the "dumping ground" for the school's problem cases" including those with drug, alcohol-abuse and mental health issues, but also a prison for mutineers at the military camps, dissidents and suspected infiltrators.[44]

One of the most significant attempts at curriculum innovation came in the primary school between 1980 and 1982. Influences as widely diverse as A.S. Neill and Makarenko were drawn on. The school initially promoted progressive principles of primary school education, a radical child-centred education, then also being imparted to white nursery and primary school teachers in South Africa. After the departure of its founders, the Bells, in 1982, the pre-primary school was reorganized along conventional lines.

SOMAFCO and Dakawa were founded to respond to increasing numbers of South African youth streaming into exile and to provide an educational alternative to the schooling and education they received in apartheid South Africa. The institution followed an academic curriculum based on the British O-levels, but also tried, with limited success, to incorporate innovations, such as combining academic education and vocational training and integrating progressive principles into primary schooling. The Development Studies curriculum and proposal for environmental education were similarly innovative.

Development Studies Curriculum

Development Studies occupied a prominent place in the SOMAFCO curriculum. It could be interpreted as an early attempt at decolonising the curriculum, albeit within a modernizing, developmentalist and anthropocentric discourse. But it also offered an analysis that enabled critical engagement with environments, multiply conceived. By 1981/1982, the curriculum offered Development Studies in Forms I, II and III and

Govender, "The Contestation, Ambiguities and Dilemmas of Curriculum Development at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, 1978–1992," 206–220.

[43] Govender, "The Contestation, Ambiguities and Dilemmas of Curriculum Development at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, 1978–1992," 214.

[44] Morrow, "Dakawa Development Centre"; Govender, "The Contestation, Ambiguities and Dilemmas of Curriculum Development at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, 1978–1992," 251.

Development of Societies in Forms IV and V.[45] The approach underlying it was rooted in a form of historical materialism focused on African and South African societies that situated these histories in a longer history of the planet and humanity and in so doing also explicitly addressed questions of the physical and social environment, including race and racism.[46]

The curriculum outline for Forms I–III specified what is to be taught. Its outline highlights its humanist and anti-racist assumptions. “Differences between human and non-human forms of life” are dealt with in Form I and are conceived as part of a section on the origins of humans and species of humankind. Friedrich Engels’ *Dialectics of Nature* is provided as a key point of reference. Engels’ somewhat fragmented text applies dialectics to nature and explores the relationship between nature and society. Although we cannot be certain how exactly it was used, it is recognized within the Marxist canon, of which its authors were a part, as “open(ing) a place through which ecological crises” [could] be understood as rooted in ‘“the alienated nature of capitalist social relations.”[47] This is significant, as it suggests an approach to the relationship between living and non-living.

The section on race and ethnicity is significant for how it challenged the racist ideological underpinnings of apartheid. It specifies examination of the unitary origins of humans. Universalist assumptions suffuse the approach. Notes for teachers indicate that the approach to be taken should explain that the classification of “races” based on some form of external features such as skin colour is “misleading and scientifically inaccurate.” In addition, the notes (presumably to the teacher) specify that s/he should explain that “races,” always in inverted commas to signify non-recognition of the reality of race and universalism of humanity, “do not form distinct biological units.” “Racism & the fallacy of racial determinism” are to be discussed. And “the idea of one race – the human race” must be emphasized. The notes on the treatment of ethnicity include examining “differences between human groups based on ethnicity, or culture, language and tradition” and takes South Africa as a case-study.[48] Although these ideas were

[45] ANC SOMAFCO Papers, Fort Hare, Box 12, Folders 75-78, SSS/012/070A/1501.82, ANC SOMAFCO Handbook 1981/82, 5.

[46] ANC SOMAFCO Papers, Fort Hare, Box 12, Folder 75-78, SSS/012/0700/5, Jack Simons and Bridget Strachan, “Memorandum Presentation Suggested History Syllabus for Forms I–III (Amalgamation of History and Development of Societies Syllabus) at ANC Workshop on Curriculum Development held at SOMAFCO, Mazimbu, Tanzania, January 4–8, 1982.

[47] John Bellamy Foster, "Engels’s Dialectics of Nature in the Anthropocene," *Monthly Review*, Nov (2020), https://monthlyreview.org/2020/11/01/engelss-dialectics-of-nature-in-the-anthropocene/, accessed January 11, 2025, citing Paul Blackledge, *Friedrich Engels and Modern Social and Political Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019), 16.

[48] Op cit., 10.

framed within an historical materialist approach, they share something with the position on race developed by UNESCO at the time.[49]

The notes in the section headed *What is Society?* again emphasizes human society as being worldwide, and "interdependent." They also underline cross-examining the categories of "traditional" and "modern" in the analysis of societies, and South Africa in particular, where the use of these terms was loaded and racialized. A universalist approach thus supported a curriculum intended to counter the dominant colonial and racist narratives to which students were exposed in South Africa.

Notes for Form II go on to a more classical stage-ist developmentalist approach. These entail study of the basic conditions of human society and the nature of social organisation including the concepts of production and reproduction, the development of societies in historical perspective (early communism, slave society, feudal, capitalist, socialist and communist society.) Importantly the notes specify that there is "No rigid pattern. Not all societies pass through these stages. Give understanding of concepts with examples."[50] Form III looked at early civilisations and the concept of what a civilization was. Forms I-III examined world history up to 1400, while Forms IV and V covered the history of capitalism, colonialism (particularly of Southern Africa) and twentieth century world history.

The strengths of this curriculum lay in its direct challenge to the assumptions of curricula in apartheid South Africa legitimating white supremacy and in its provision of a framework for understanding the relationship between the human and non-human worlds as well as the "nature" of society and social conflict. Situating South African history within world history was a central aim.[51] The limitations of the curriculum lay in the didacticism and teleological stage-ism of the approach. The courses were not popular among students, although some acknowledged that they developed analytical capabilities and a sense of agency.[52]

Environmental Education

The case for integration of environmental education in the SOMAFCO curriculum had been made as early as 1981. According to the Head of the Curriculum Unit at SOMAFCO, it was explicitly taken up as a consequence of the recommendations made by the UNESCO Environmental Education Charter adopted in 1975 that it be

[49] Michelle Brattain, "Race, Racism, and Antiracism: UNESCO and the Politics of Presenting Science to the Postwar Public," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 5 (2007): 1386–1413.

[50] Op cit., 11.

[51] See also ANC SOMAFCO Papers, Fort Hare, Box 12, Folders 75-78, Letter from MW Njobe to H Wolpe, Oct 12, 1981.

[52] Morrow, Maaba, and Pulumani, *Education in Exile*, 74.

incorporated in the educational programmes of nations.[53] The aim of this curriculum integration of environmental themes was expressed as being to "raise the level of consciousness …to a more intense appreciation of the importance of the responsible use of the environment, so as to safeguard it against wanton pollution and destruction."[54] The paper drew attention to South Africa's pattern of industrial development, mining operations and reliance on coal as presenting environmental dangers and the need for incorporating environmental themes across the curriculum. The recommended guiding principle was to start from environmental concerns within the home and family, move on to broader environmental problems in the management of health, production of food, nutrition and resources, and on to environmental issues in the world.[55]

These curricular undertakings made at that time signalled an early commitment to environmental concerns, however preliminary and limited, that anticipated a future curriculum. The curriculum policy-making process after the advent of democracy in 1994 was, however, shaped less by social actors from exile and more by internal actors. An Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa (EESA) through its Environmental Education Policy Initiative (EEPI) was vital in ensuring that the environment was part of the conversation about the new post-apartheid curriculum that began in the transition years from 1990-1994. It metamorphosed into the Environmental Education Curriculum Initiative (EECI) that played a part between 1995 and 2002 in the development of the new curriculum.[56] This integration of environmental issues into the curriculum in a cross-curricular manner was supported by a major national project funded by DANIDA to support subsequent curriculum development.

Conclusion

Environmental historiography and the decolonial turn invite re-examination of the educational past. How the environment has been integrated into formal curricula, including through its conceptualisation as context, as a curriculum subject (Nature Study) and more informally, are under-explored areas deserving of more work.

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[53] ANC SOMAFCO Papers, Fort Hare, Box 12, Folders 75-78, SSS/012/070A/4, CDP/3/81, MW Njobe (Head of Curriculum Development and Planning Unit), "The Case for Introducing Environmental Education in the Curriculum of the ANC (SA) Education Programme (EE) as unfolding at SOMAFCO," 9.3.81

[54] Op cit., 1.

[55] Op cit., 2–3.

[56] Callie Loubser, "Establishing Environmental Education in the Formal Curriculum in South Africa," in *Environmental Education in Context: An International Perspective on the Development of Environmental Education*, ed. N. Taylor and others (Sense Publishers, 2009), 180–181; Pat Irwin and Heila Lotz-Sisitka, "A History of Environmental Education in South Africa," in *Environmental Education: Some South African Perspectives*, ed. Callie Loubser (Pretoria: van Schaijk, 2005), 35–56.

This article has taken up the challenge presented by South Africa's robust environmental historiography and environmental education community to consider how history of education might be extended. The decolonial turn has prompted a re-examination of pre-colonial histories, where much of the emphasis now lies. Much more can still be done in an examination of colonial and apartheid education and curricula. How the concepts and notions of "nature" (and/as the environment) were embedded in and constructed conceptions and practice of education amongst both mainstream and oppositional actors is a rich field. This article has taken a small part of South Africa's oppositional history – the educational initiatives of social actors in exile – to show that ideas about environmental education were present in exile as much as in South Africa's internal anti-apartheid movement. They were part of a curriculum that included Development Studies, a subject that aimed to counter the colonial developmentalist "othering" assumptions of apartheid curricula. Although Development Studies was part of a wider "developmentalist" discourse, it aimed to undermine colonial stereotypes and can be seen as a form of decolonisation of education. Strong continuities in the importance and role of UNESCO as a social actor in integrating environmental education into the curriculum suggests that further work on its historical role is necessary. There may be earlier continuities and connections that are worth exploring.

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