

Foreword¹

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This magisterial book's "main purpose is to overview African Education and its Curriculum Development with particular emphasis on Indigenization and Knowledge Production in Ethiopia and come up with curriculum model that fits for Africa."² To realize that important purpose, Woube Kassaye provides an overview of African Traditional/Indigenous as well as modern education, including their pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial iterations, emphasizing the Ethiopian experience. Kassaye then reviews possibilities for "integrating knowledge systems in such a way that indigenous knowledge, philosophies, methodologies, and techniques become integrated with acceptable international experiences" while showing the prospects for "indigenizing/Africanizing the African curriculum as a whole," emphasizing "curriculum development." All this Woube Kassaye accomplishes, composing a truly seminal synoptic text,³ not only students of curriculum in Ethiopia but across Africa and worldwide.

As a seminal synoptic text – both textbook and reference work, someday, I suspect, deemed a canonical text - *African Education and Curriculum Development: Indigenization and Knowledge Production in Ethiopia* is a most appropriate candidate for publication in Palgrave Macmillan's *Curriculum Studies Worldwide* book series, a series more timely than ever now that globalization recedes and nationalism intensifies,⁴ creating cross-currents – geopolitical, economic, educational - against which curriculum scholars swim when affirming the internationalized character of our expertise that the study of other nations' curriculum studies fields only strengthens. The present is also propitious because,

as scholars – especially those in North America – are laboring to redress cultural imbalances and biases in the K-12 and university curriculum as well as in the curriculum studies field.⁵ Kassaye acknowledges that “efforts towards de-Westernization of non-Western social and behavioral research have been relatively recently organized,” efforts that “indicate that traditional education is either dominated or neglected by modern education which would result in losing of significant cultural values,” requiring “due consideration for traditional education,” as Kassaye does. “But,” he cautions, “this does not mean that rejecting the modern education, rather to consider it in balanced way.” That he does.

Kassaye acknowledges that “every society whether simple or complex has its own distinct system of education,” a fact no different in Ethiopia, where “Indigenous education is inseparable from Ethiopian ways of life.” Due to “Ethiopia’s uniqueness -- thousands of years of uninterrupted independence; enjoying sophisticated civilization during *Axumite* periods-- its history of education “is immensely different” from that of others. Indeed, Kassaye argues that although Ethiopia has a “rich Indigenous history of education,” that history was ignored as “modern education started ... by belittling or avoiding its invaluable experiences of the traditional education.” It is, then, educationally urgent that “unheard voices” be recovered, enabling educators’ and students’ understanding of not only the past but the educational present as well. That understanding is broadly cultural – including considerations of “gender and the essential roles of women” – as well as political, understanding that is prerequisite to “peace-building processes [that] helps to promote democracy, good governance, long-term stability and development,” economic and well as political democracy. Indeed, women “have a lion share role

in indigenous conflict resolutions,” necessitating their empowerment to press for “peace” and “peacemaking at regional and country levels.”⁶

Culture includes religion of course, and “Ethiopia has a long and rich tradition of Indigenous education,” Kassaye explains, “most notably associated with the Coptic Church, which has been a powerful institution in the area of contemporary Ethiopia for over 1000 years,” resulting in both “*Church* and *Quranic* schools,” the former originating “at the beginning of fourth century,” and “*Quranic* schools appear[ing] probably in the 11th century. There were “schools for music and others for dance.” Precolonial education was, then, far from monolithic – “its content was based on the physical, social and spiritual environments of the time” - but generalization is nonetheless possible, and Kassaye tells us that “precolonial education ... aimed to transform the individual from his or her status of absolute individual to that of an integrated member of the society, to make him or her lose the illusion of happiness in the state of isolation so that he or she may accede to true happiness by being open to others, not for personal benefits but in order to create with everybody a new reality transcending individuals.”

Colonial education continues today, Kassaye confirms, as “most African countries continue the colonial system of education by using their curriculum.” And “colonialism in Africa continues to be a topic that sparks intense debates and feelings, as “with the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia, European colonialism extended throughout the whole continent, and newly created territories were shared among Great Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, Germany, and Italy.” Kassaye reviews European nations’ colonial education schemes, one by one. As a “key vehicle for the colonization of the mind,”⁷ the curriculum of colonial education” produced an “inferiority complex” among many of the Africans who studied it, a cruel consequence that “colonial missionary curriculum” accomplished, a “curriculum [that] totally disregarded many of

the West African customs.” He emphasizes that post-independence Africa is not yet free from “processes of domination that have their origin in European colonization,” and “it extends beyond the period of direct colonization to take on new forms, notably those of neo-colonialism.” Moreover, “the early years of independence did not focus on building an adequate philosophical foundation of education that could positively stimulate the heterogeneous cultures of African nations,” focusing less “on national pride and patriotism” than on “misguided capitalism and greed,” thereby creating the “conditions for regionalism, sectionalism, tribalism, bribery and corruption.”

Colonialism, Kassaye summarizes, encouraged – encourages still - “class struggle, tribalism and ethnicity” as it perpetuates “psychological and mental enslavement.” The curriculum that is needed would address the “decolonization of our minds, the recognition that the greatest damage colonialism did was on our minds.” What is the political – educational – challenge now? “Post-independence Africa is confronted with how to have a true identity, a new culture that is African in nature.” African cultures “new” in nature do not, Kassaye suggests, mean “the total rejection of exogenous experiences (the Western experiences).” Indeed, “the African continent cannot isolate itself from the ‘global village’ in terms of current economic, social, political and other situation,” and so “it is necessary to consider useful experiences connected with philosophical and epistemological platforms – curriculum, research and other related issues.”

“Despite many efforts to Ethiopianize the curriculum,” Kassaye continues, “Western education continues to dominate.” He reviews the twentieth-century history of African education, documenting education’s colonization, pausing on “Italy's colonial educational strategy” – after its invasion in April 1936 – that was, he summarized, “founded on racism,

fascism, and a martial educational philosophy.” After the expulsion of the Italians, decolonization commenced, signaled in the curriculum by the compulsory study of *Amharic*, the national language. Still, in third grade English - “officially considered as the second language of the country” - was taught, and “from about the fifth grade the pupils were expected to use English as the medium of instruction and comprehension as well as a school subject.” And “from 1952 through 1974 the “curriculum was associated with the influence of the Americans.”

During the socialist period – between 1975 and 1991, under the Mengistu regime, “Marxist-Leninist philosophy was the central theme,” and, “accordingly, the overall education system was aimed towards the attainment of communist ideology where this view was incorporated in National Democratic Revolution in 1976, General Directives of Ethiopian Education in 1980, and the guidelines of the Working Party of Ethiopia in 1984.” Kassaye continues: “To accomplish this educational reform, the Ministry of Education designed a new curriculum, developed new textbooks, teachers' guides, and other materials for nearly all subjects and grades of the regular schools,” all “produced in consonance with government guidelines, the National Democratic Revolution Programme, and later on the Workers Party of Ethiopia's Program.”

Despite the end of the *Derg* regime, attempts to revise the curriculum were made “without success.” In recent years, efforts have been made to improve the curriculum; Kassaye cites “the adoption of a framework known as Curriculum Framework for Ethiopian Education: KG-Grade 12 by the Ministry of Education in 2010.” Kassaye reviews the ascension to power in 2018 of Abby Ahmed, who asserted that Liberal Democracy, based on the European liberal culture, doesn't fit Ethiopia, a country unable “even to feed itself,” insisting that “Ethiopia needs an independent and Ethiopian philosophy - *Medemer*” - a term that translates into English as “synergy,” calling for cooperation between the Ethiopian people and the Ethiopian government,

between political parties, different religions, and states. “Its main objective,” Kassaye tells us, was building upon “political and economic gains,” correcting “mistakes,” and addressing “the needs ... of the future generation.”

Education in Ethiopia – “particularly its curriculum” – has faced – faces still - “enormous challenges,” among them “foreign involvement in curriculum development, “failure to give due emphasis for indigenous knowledge” as well as a “poor understanding of the curriculum” overall. Kassaye also lists “poor understanding of stakeholders and educational officials connected with curriculum” and the “lack of instructional resources.” Still an issue is what he terms “academic servitude,” enacted by “Westernized African/Ethiopian scholars shamelessly expect[ing] their curriculum to meet with Occidental approval.” The response to that servitude must be “decolonization, i.e. intellectual disobedience,” the rejection of “any form of authority alien cultures exercise over Ethiopia/Africa.” Kassaye continues: “Understanding the concept of curriculum and its implementation is vital for those who are engaged in education, particularly teachers, educational administrators, supervisors, curriculum experts, policy makers,” but, he judges, “understanding the concept and knowledge of curriculum is low among policy makers as well as curriculum practitioners.”

After his encyclopedic survey and acknowledging that “that no single model is optimal,” Kassaye offers his own curriculum model, what he terms the “CAI curricular method (Countrysization - C, Africanization - A and Internationalization.” He explains that “countrysization refers to the incorporation of local, regional (federal), and national issues of a given country,” while “Africanization focuses on relevant/model indigenous and non-indigenous African experiences,”⁸ and “internationalization focuses on relevant non-African experiences, such as those from the West and the South.” The suffix “ization” denotes that each phenomenon

is in process, that is malleable, open to discussion and debate, a conception that Kassaye extends to the model's implementation, which can only occur "when African countries interact with one another and several organizations, such as those associated with curriculum organizations in Africa and Associations for African Universities (AAU)." He acknowledges that CAI "also necessitates additional research and ongoing dialogues among notable African people, scholars, leaders, and others, as well as other concerned scholars from the world." CAI is also concerned "with the question of African educational futurity," as "we must be able to dream and produce new visions." That Woube Kassaye has.

African Education and Curriculum Development: Indigenization and Knowledge Production in Ethiopia is a remarkable achievement, an epic testament to the past and promise of curriculum reform in Ethiopia, with obvious and powerful implications for curriculum reform for Ethiopia. It is a text to which students and scholars of curriculum will want access, either through their libraries or by including it in their own professional libraries. I know I will keep it in my mine, as it provides an invaluable reference of understanding curriculum, not only in Ethiopia and across Africa, but worldwide.

References

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Endnotes

¹ To *African Education and Curriculum Development: Indigenization and Knowledge Production in Ethiopia*, by Woube Kassaye (Palgrave Macmillan, in press).

² Unless otherwise indicated, all quoted passages come from this book.

³ Synoptic texts provide encyclopedic portraits of the complex “socio-intellectual” community known as a field of study. They do more, however, than simply represent or capture the field as it exists at the time the text was written. Synoptic texts also organize that field, accord it significance, and help determine what in the field is important: see Pinar et al. 1995, 11-16; Pinar 2006, 1-14.

⁴ See Tröhler et al. 2023.

⁵ See, for instance, Abdou and Zervas 2024. For an earlier effort, see Pinar 2010.

⁶ For recent efforts at conflict resolution see Bickmore 2024; for a cross-cultural conception of nonviolence see Wang 2024.

⁷ As Fanon knew: see Pinar 2015, 175, 189.

⁸ This concept seems akin to “national literacy” (Pinar 2023).