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Rethinking Peace Education: A Cultural Political Economy Approach

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Abstract

Through a case study of a peace education intervention in post-war Sierra Leone, this paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing critique of dominant peace education approaches that seek attitudinal and behavioral change in conflict-affected societies. Specifically, the article interrogates ‘Emerging Issues,’ a curriculum intervention developed between 2007 and 2008 by UNICEF for teachers in Sierra Leone. It applies the analytical framework of Cultural Political Economy, an interdisciplinary theoretical current that extends traditional concerns of political economy with power and institutions to show their interaction with cultural processes of meaning-making. The insights suggest that this approach to peace education might not be as benign as projected. Instead, we assert that it promotes a form of pacification derived from a decontextualized curriculum that treats victims as guilty and in need of attitudinal and behavioral change, whilst avoiding engagement with the structural and geopolitical drivers that underpin many contemporary conflicts.

[8388 words]

While peace education is a diverse and pluralistic field (Salomon, 2002; Bajaj, 2016) this paper seeks to contribute to the growing body of recent, theoretically informed critique of a particular and dominant approach to peace education. This approach emphasizes the inculcation of attitudinal and behavioral changes in conflict-affected societies. In a seminal work on the contribution of education to “reshaping the future” of societies during post-conflict reconstruction, Buckland (2005) defined the content and goals of this approach. He noted that “it includes a range of formal and informal educational activities undertaken to promote peace in schools and communities through the inclusion of skills, attitudes and values that promote nonviolent approaches to managing conflict and promoting tolerance and respect for diversity” (60). This definition captures the emphasis of such curriculum on promoting personal and inter-personal attitudes and behaviors in conflict-affected
communities. These include for instance the ability to solve conflict peacefully, to enable conflicted groups to develop positive and empathetic relationships and where relevant to reduce inter-ethnic prejudice.

Since the 1990s this form of peace education has been widely adopted in diverse conflict-affected contexts by international donors and aid agencies such as the World Bank, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF and INEE (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, 20; Baxter 2014). It has attracted widespread endorsement within the global institutional architecture operating in the education sector of in conflict-affected contexts (UNESCO 2011, 245-246). It has also been feted as exemplary by policymakers and practitioners for its contribution to achieving a “future of peace and hope in refugee communities and post conflict countries around the world” (Baxter and Ikbowa 2005, 29) in diverse conflict-affected contexts. As such, it has achieved the status of a “travelling” global education policy (Verger et al. 2018).

However, despite its institutional success, this approach has also been widely critiqued. Empirical research has highlighted, for instance, a lack of evidence about its long-term impact (Rosen and Saloman 2011); its failure to anticipate the resistance of teachers, parents and communities (Lauritzen 2016, 78); its failure to address structural causes of conflict (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013); its omission of attention to authoritarian practices within schools (Harber, 2018); and finally, its over-ambitious goals and lack of clarity (Bar-Tal 2002).

Of particular relevance to the focus of this paper are critiques that call for more fundamental consideration of this approach to peace education as the product of an insufficiently critical and under-theorized field of curriculum development and practice. For instance, Zembylas and Bekerman (2013) conclude that peace education, privileging attitudinal and behavioral change, needs to eschew the “idealism and fideism” (ibid, 202) driving its widespread
application. In particular, they argue that such peace education practice should be more “critical about its theoretical assumptions concerning issues of power relations, social justice as well as the terms of peace and conflict themselves” (ibid, 198). Hence, they argue that “peace education may often become part of the problem it tries to solve, if theoretical work is not used to interrogate the taken for granted assumptions about peace and peace education” (ibid, 197). Likewise, in a pioneering article, Gur-Ze’ev (2001) noted a “lack of conceptual work and reflection” (ibid, 315) in peace research. He concluded that rather than “taking the goodness of peace for granted” (ibid) there was a need to explore its “contextual meanings and implications” (ibid) to ensure that peace education did not become a “justification of the status quo” (ibid). In particular, he noted how its privileging of attitudinal and behavioral change, universally applied, was grounded in “modernist technical reason” (ibid, 316) which was limited to “positivist, pragmatic and functionalist views of knowledge which pay scant attention to the social and cultural context” (ibid).

Other scholars (Bajaj 2008, Bajaj and Hantzopoulos, 2016) have called for peace education to draw on the theoretical resources of critical pedagogy and social justice education, based on the work of Freire. This would enable teachers and pupils to raise consciousness about, and take action against, structural injustices and inequalities. Similarly, Ross (2014) has highlighted the limitations of a focus on shifting attitudes without equipping participants in peace education programmes with critical skills to enable them to challenge and transform the “status quo”. Zembylas (2018) has recently problematized the orientation to critical pedagogy from a post-colonial theoretical perspective, highlighting its Eurocentrism and
failure to problematize key issues of the ongoing power asymmetries in knowledge production between western producers of peace education and its target audiences.

These various strands of critique underscore the increasing theoretical diversification which scholars are bringing to the field of curriculum research and practice in the field of peace education. What they share is a concern to critically interrogate, rather than idealize, the privileging of attitudinal and behavioral change as the primary vehicle of promoting peace.

This paper seeks to contribute to this process of theoretically informed interrogation. It does so by drawing on the analytical framework and heuristic tools of Cultural Political Economy (CPE) analysis. This is a broad, nascent and interdisciplinary theoretical current that extends the traditional concerns of political economy analysis to show how they interact with cultural processes of meaning making. The paper draws on CPE to explain and interpret the content and development of ‘Emerging Issues’ (EI), a peace education curriculum developed between 2007 and 2008 by UNICEF for use by teachers in conflict-affected Sierra Leone (Novelli, 2011). While addressing five thematic areas of civics and democracy; gender; health and environment; human rights; and learner centered pedagogy, the curriculum was explicitly framed as “a way of creating a composite and comprehensive whole for the dimension of personal behavior change” (Baxter 2014, 175). It was rolled out to in-service and pre-service teachers across the country in 2008 (Novelli 2011, 54).

This curriculum is particularly appropriate to take as an exemplary case study. It has been promoted as a flagship product of UNICEF’s Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy Programme (Novelli, 2011). It has been adopted as an example of best practice by the Inter-
Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE 2015). EI has been described as the “best example” of the “mother manual” (Baxter 2014, 176) education programme developed by UNHCR for refugees in Kenya (1997-2005). This earlier curriculum, which also teaches skills and values associated with peaceful behaviors, has been described as “the most widely used generic package of peace education materials” (Buckland 2005, 60). Therefore, UNICEF’s EI curriculum for Sierra Leone represents not only the use of peace education in one conflict-affected context but also its wider institutional embeddedness, durability and status as a “travelling curriculum” in the previous decade.

By clarifying how a theoretically informed analysis may enhance critical understanding of a curriculum implemented in diverse contexts of conflict, the concerns of the article are also aligned with the explanatory goals of comparative and international education. As Dale (2015) has recently noted, its “potential power … lies fundamentally in providing different ways of seeing the world, of going beyond and behind concrete examples of educational practice, with a view to indicating how they might be improved or how they might be explained” (ibid, 356). In addition, by highlighting the relevance of such theorized explanations to improving the practice of peace education, the insights of this article demonstrate the “power” of the field of comparative education to provide policy relevant “expertise” (ibid, 341). This is particularly necessary given the need to “take stock” of the strengths and weaknesses of educational interventions noted by Winthrop and Matsui (2013) in their review of the history of Education in Emergencies since the 1990s. Finally, the article responds to calls in the broader field of education and conflict for more critical and theoretically informed approaches that advocate a normative commitment to peace with social justice in conflict contexts (Novelli et al, 2017).
The article proceeds first by explaining the context of Sierra Leone. Second, the key characteristics of a CPE approach are outlined. The next section presents the research design and methodology of the case study. The following section presents the findings. The discussion and conclusions highlight the contribution of CPE to developing a critical understanding of peace education as an effect of the intersection between cultural and political economy processes. The emergent insights suggest that peace education, despite its benign reputation, might not be as positive as projected. Instead, we assert that it promotes a form of pacification derived from a decontextualized curriculum that treats victims as guilty and in need of attitudinal and behavioral change, whilst avoiding engagement with the structural and geopolitical drivers that underpin many contemporary conflicts.

**The Sierra Leonean Conflict, 1992-2018**

Sierra Leone’s conflict between 1992 and 2002 resulted in over 50,000 deaths, thousands internally displaced, and left many maimed through the amputation of their arms and legs. Its savagery has led some commentators to characterize the conflict, in judgmental and moralizing terms, as an irrational descent into primordial barbarism or a manifestation of extreme greed and criminality (Novelli, 2011). Keen (2005) has emphasized the role of socio-economic and political grievances in motivating the violence. Such analysis has highlighted the anger of swathes of impoverished, uneducated and jobless rural youth and their perceived social, political and economic exclusion by political elites based in Freetown, as well as by chiefs in rural communities across the country; massive regional inequalities in the provision of education and health services; resentment at a corrupt and patrimonial style of politics through which elites monopolize power and resources; and finally, the perceived
exploitation of the country’s diamond resources by national and international actors. Foregrounding such factors as key explanations for the recourse to violence, the Sierra Leonean conflict has thus been construed as a “venting of grievances and a cry from the dispossessed and powerless who could find no other outlet for their anger and rage at their marginalization and exclusion in a dysfunctional society” (Hirsch 2006, 305).

Since peace was declared in 2002, Sierra Leone has been the target of various interventions by UN agencies operating within the priorities of the dominant model of international peacebuilding interventionism: liberal peacebuilding. Such interventions have emphasized the importance of establishing security, democracy, and the opening up of markets (Novelli, 2011). Having enjoyed relatively peaceful elections in 2007 and 2012 and as one of the fastest growing economies in sub-Saharan Africa, Sierra Leone is often used to demonstrate the success of liberal peacebuilding (AfDB, OECD and UNDP 2017, 287). However, scholars have also underlined the continuation of the structural drivers of conflict which pose a major threat to sustainable peace. Firstly, they have highlighted the failure of liberal peacebuilding’s security and market priorities to realize the promise that macroeconomic reform would ameliorate the widespread poverty of the Sierra Leonean population (Castañeda 2009). Secondly, they have noted the failure of the state-building mission and security first approach of international peace operations to meet the “everyday” needs and aspirations of Sierra Leoneans (Cubitt 2013, 92). Thirdly, specific grievances, especially unemployment amongst the population’s youth, have been identified as continuing drivers of conflict (Cubitt 2011). Fourthly, researchers have noted resentment in some parts of the country toward the operation of international mining companies, and a perception that the country’s resource wealth is being exploited by global business with little tangible benefits to local populations.
(Zulu and Wilson 2012). Finally, there remains continuing widespread distrust and dissatisfaction between the state and its citizens (Drew and Ramsbotham 2012, 60). It is therefore not surprising that many have suggested that Sierra Leone may be considered post-war rather than post-conflict, experiencing only a thin type of negative peace where despite the absence of violent conflict many of the structural causes of grievance and conflict remain unaddressed. Indeed, some commentators have warned of the high likelihood of a recurrence of conflict (Cubitt 2013).

The value of CPE as tool for curriculum analysis

This paper builds on recent applications of CPE in the field of education (Robertson and Dale, 2015) and in conflict-affected contexts (Novelli et al, 2017, ibid) However, it contributes to the ongoing exploration of the potential for using this theoretical approach by drawing on Sum and Jessop’s (2013) recent articulation and applying it to a particular curriculum. While not aiming to provide a comprehensive guide to CPE, this section clarifies key features of its analytical approach and conceptual tools that are particularly relevant to its application to peace education curricula.

CPE takes as a fundamental ontological premise the existential necessity of simplification through making meaning. This is required to enable social agents to “go on in the world” (ibid, 24), given the fact that the world is too complex to be grasped in its complexity in real time. This insight underpins its analytical concern with various inter-related processes of selectivity

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1 Johan Galtung (1964) makes a distinction between negative and positive peace – whereby the former simply refers to the absence of violence or war, and the latter implies not only the mere absence of violence, but a removal of the underlying causes of violence.
through which the complexity of the social is reduced and understood. These processes provide distinct but interconnected entry points into understanding how the meanings which actors attribute to the social world are embedded in material, political and economic relations and institutions. Sum and Jessop offer four such selectivities:

1. Discursive Selectivity
2. Structural Selectivity
3. Agential Selectivity
4. Technological Selectivity

Firstly, discursive selectivity refers to the selective process of inter-subjective meaning making through the use of language. This is a process which reduces complexity for actors by “directing attention to and focusing on, some aspects of the world out of countless possibilities” (ibid, 149). Hence, “every social practice entails meaning making” (ibid). This process of meaning making shapes perception and social communication. CPE uses various concepts to illustrate discursive selectivity. For instance, social “construals” refer to actors’ apprehension of the natural and social world that result from this process of reduction of meaning. These set limits on how the social world is framed, imagined and understood.

CPE also uses the notion of social imaginaries to understand the impact of discursive selectivities on actions and agendas of agents. This refers to representations of social reality that “frame individual subjects’ lived experience of a complex world and inform collective calculation about that world” (ibid, 165). Within a CPE approach the production of such social imaginaries constitutes an important semiotic moment in complexity reduction. Without such imaginaries, as Sum and Jessop have noted, individuals cannot “go on in the world” and “collective actors such as organisations could not relate to their environments, make
decisions or engage in strategic action” (ibid, 165). These imaginaries therefore, have performative effects and constitutive power in shaping as well as framing social relations. Moreover, they have “a central role in the struggle not only for hearts and minds” (ibid) but also for the “reproduction or transformation of the prevailing structures of exploitation and domination” (ibid). Offering one entry point into a super complex reality they can be associated with different standpoints which frame and contain debates, policy discussions, and conflicts over ideal and material interests.

Recent applications of the notion of discursive selectivity have been applied to understanding the transnational dominance of particular economic imaginaries e.g. economic competitiveness in response to the crisis of neoliberal capitalism in Europe and Asia (Sum 2015). Sum shows how these are communicated in Poverty Strategy Reduction Papers and World Development Reports produced by the World Bank. This paper argues that it also offers useful explanatory value in relation to understanding developments in the field of peace education. Thus, within the explanatory logic of CPE, the content of El may be considered as a discursive selectivity; or as offering from a range of possibilities a particular, partial construal or diagnosis of the needs and agency of teachers, students and the post-conflict Sierra Leonean community.

However, within a CPE analytical framework, some construals of social reality are privileged over others. They may dominate ways of thinking about and also determine social relations due to their promotion and appropriation by institutions and agents with varying degrees of power and technologies of persuasion. As has been noted, such “reductions” are “never wholly innocent” (Sum and Jessop 2013, 149). Thus, a further explanatory challenge addressed within CPE is explaining why some construals are selected and institutionalized
over others. Here, CPE analysis focuses on the inter-relation of discursive processes, in other words processes of meaning making using language, with extra-linguistic factors. It thus invites interrogation of the underlying social, economic and political dynamics, material conditions and power asymmetries that have shaped and conditioned the construals which are privileged. These explanatory priorities connect cultural or meaning making processes with the traditional concerns of political economy analysis.

CPE analysis offers three other types of selectivity. Firstly, structural selectivity refers to the impact of political and economic processes and the relative power of institutions in determining which construals are privileged and come to dominate discourse landscapes. This selectivity thereby creates an uneven distribution of constraints and opportunities “on social forces as they pursue particular projects” (ibid, 214). Secondly agential selectivity refers to the processes which enable some agents to be more effective at advancing particular discourses due to their power or technical expertise. Thirdly, technological selectivity refers to the range of technical apparatuses which are deployed to advance particular construals, as well as their role in regulating and controlling behaviors and creating subject positions. Examples might include programmes, guidelines, policies, best practice advice produced by institutions and organisations. Applying a CPE approach to peace education curricula therefore entails understanding how its content and development are the product of an intersection between discursive, structural, agential and technological selectivities.

Within a CPE analysis, moments of crisis in a given field of social practice are taken to be particularly revealing of the operation of all selectivities and a useful analytical entry point. Put simply, these refer to moments of cognitive and strategic disorientation in which new circumstances threaten established ways of thinking and acting (ibid, 25). While objectively
indeterminate, they generate a proliferation of crisis responses. These attempt to make sense of, or in other words interpret what has happened through, for instance, developing new policy paradigms or rethinking established institutional agendas. These may be considered to be discursive selectivities, since the process of construing the crisis involves a range of partial responses or readings, depending on actors’ particular standpoints. Moreover, some such responses become more dominant and authoritative than others due to the operation of agential, structural and technological selectivities.

This notion of crisis is particularly appropriate as an analytical framing to understand the context within which peace education emerged. Winthrop and Matsui (2013) have noted how the engagement of aid agencies in the unprecedented intrastate conflicts of the 1990s began to threaten intervention paradigms which had been established when conflict between states was ubiquitous. Extending the sociology of the constituencies who were conflict-affected to include whole populations, including women and children, such new forms of internal conflict created new strategic and epistemic challenges for those concerned to leverage education in relation to peacebuilding.

Also of relevance, are the various key goals of social analysis in CPE; Sum and Jessop (2013) note an underlying concern to denaturalize taken for granted imaginaries and to re-politicize them by locating them as symptomatic of the play of power relations. Hence, CPE is also committed to a critique of ideology. This means a concern to reveal the “immanent contradictions and inconsistencies in relatively coherent meaning systems; [and to] uncover the ideal and material interests behind specific meaning systems” (ibid,164). Given the resistance of peace education to critique, such attention to its underlying ideology is a
particularly relevant part of CPE’s theoretical armory for an analysis. The next section explains the research design and methodology.

**Research Design and Methodology**

A case study approach was considered appropriate in particular because it allows the possibility for theoretically informed reflection based on a bounded particular example. The overarching research question is: *How may the analytical and conceptual tools of CPE enhance critical explanation and interpretation of the aims, goals, development and implementation of peace education with particular reference to the development and text of the EI curriculum in Sierra Leone?*

Following the CPE theoretical entry points noted above, this overarching question breaks down into a further set of sub-questions.

- *How may the EI curriculum be explained and interpreted as an effect of discursive selectivity?* This invites analysis of how the EI curriculum represents Sierra Leonean teachers, their pupils and the national community and invites attention to the social imaginaries presented therein.

- *How may the EI curriculum be explained as an effect of structural selectivity?* This invites analysis of how the curriculum’s content, its social imaginary, be understood as located in relation to developments within the global aid architecture, geopolitics of aid intervention, institutionalization of aid interventions and responses to these within international aid organisations.
How may the EI curriculum be explained as an effect of agential selectivity? This invites analysis of the differential contributions of diverse actors in the process of writing and developing it.

How may the EI curriculum be explained as an effect of technological selectivities? This invites analysis of the techniques used to promote and communicate the EI curriculum and how these regulatory and control behaviors target the audience of teachers and the Sierra Leonean community.

Data was gathered through content and discourse analysis of the final published EI curriculum text (UNICEF 2008a, b and c). This paper also draws on initial in-depth semi-structured interviews as well as follow up communications with 16 individuals involved in the writing and production of the EI text. These included UNICEF staff (2) directly involved in the writing and production of the curriculum, other UNICEF educational specialists (3), national and international consultants employed to support the processes of curricula development (2), lecturers from four teacher training colleges who were involved in writing the curriculum (6) as well as individuals from the Sierra Leone Ministry of Education (3) who were engaged at different stages in its development. These initial interviews, conducted between January and July 2012, sought the views of individuals on the aims and content of EI and where appropriate, their experiences of the processes of its writing and production. They were transcribed and analyzed following a qualitative interpretative methodology. This entailed thematic attention to emergent meanings, in particular how informants individually and collectively perceived and experienced the process of curriculum writing and their roles and contributions. The paper also draws on follow up interviews with all groups, which provided an opportunity to clarify and confirm the findings.
Findings

The following account presents a CPE analysis of the data, highlighting illustrative examples of each process of selectivity operating within the EI curriculum. Following a CPE logic, this analysis starts by explaining the curriculum’s discursive selectivities, before exploring other selectivities, structural, technological and agential, that highlight the role of political economy factors in explaining its content and priorities.

Discursive selectivities

The curriculum repeatedly announces its goal to position teachers to effect processes of behavioral and attitudinal change in Sierra Leoneans. Typical is the declaration that “we looked at behavior change in individuals because EI is a course about behavior change” (UNICEF 2008a, 15). The emphasis on behavior change underpins the curriculum’s homogenizing presentation of Sierra Leoneans as collectively prone to negative and “destructive” behaviors. Thus, the text declares at the outset that “the behavior and understanding of the people of Sierra Leone is not constructive” (ibid, 14). Likewise, trainee teachers are invited to “think about all the destructive behaviors practiced by Sierra Leone” (ibid, 7).

The overwhelmingly negative portrayal of Sierra Leoneans and the resulting need to engineer national social transformation through attention to individual behaviors, constitutes a defining social imaginary which is invoked throughout the text. It is also communicated through the text’s repeated invocation of a contrast between such “destructive” behaviors and the “constructive” future which will result from the curricula intervention. The text’s
repetition of the verb “internalizing” to characterize the impact of curricula content on Sierra Leoneans underscores its attention to the inner, psychological transformation of individuals.

These aspirations are celebrated as self-evidently legitimate beneficial and appropriate. For instance, the text asserts that “Sierra Leone is a post-war nation in the process of reconstruction. To help us to look to a constructive future we need to change our current destructive behaviors” (ibid, 15). Moreover, the curriculum is promoted in redemptive terms as “life-saving and life-changing” (ibid, 15).

However, applying a CPE analysis invites analytical attention to problematize the claims of the text as self-evident truth. As noted above, this approach seeks to understand and explain its content as the effect of a selective process of meaning making that privileges one particular version of peace promotion in Sierra Leone from a plurality of possibilities. Several instances of this selective process may be identified. Firstly, consideration of the various iterations of peace education occurring throughout the 20th century indicates that the focus on attitudinal and behavior change, emphasized in EI, amounts to a drastic narrowing down of potential possibilities (Harris 2008). These included, for instance, knowledge, critique and activism against global, national and local issues of social injustices linked to conflict; identifying forms of systemic and structural violence causing grievance and conflict and taking action to challenge them; studying the geopolitical causes of war and conflict and holding governments to account for policies likely to threaten peace. The text’s foregrounding of individual personal change in Sierra Leoneans excludes the concern with social and political transformation and the structural and systemic drivers of conflict associated with peace education’s previous goals and activities.
Secondly, the certainty of purpose articulated in the wording of the curriculum disguises the equivocal and contested emergence of peace education within a particular historical conjuncture in the geopolitics of aid and development in the late 1990s. Indeed, as noted earlier, the unprecedented challenge of mobilizing education to address the needs of whole populations affected by conflict, produced cognitive and strategic disorientation amongst professionals working in such contexts. Within a CPE approach, such a crisis necessitates a re-reading of initial responses by professionals and researchers aiming to mobilize peace education to address these new forms of conflict and is to be reminded of the uncertainty which accompanied their efforts. For instance, Aguila and Retamal (1998) warned that “the technical impact of education as a tool for changing the behavior and attitudes of an illiterate or semi-literate population in general by the trauma of war needs to be further assessed” (ibid, 7). Such uncertainties are excluded from the EI’s unhesitating promotion of the need for attitudinal and behavioral change in the Sierra Leonean demographic as a necessity to enable peace.

Thirdly, the overwhelmingly negative portrayal of Sierra Leoneans distracts attention from the existence of alternative, more positive and optimistic paradigms of the nation and its post-conflict trajectory. For instance, the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission paid tribute to Sierra Leoneans living “in the ghettos of Freetown or the villages of the Provinces [who] maintain their dignity notwithstanding conditions of extreme poverty and deprivation” (Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2004, 125) and who are “examples for us all” (ibid). It concluded that the political elites of successive regimes in the post-independence period were responsible for creating the conditions of conflict. Far from representing the behaviors of the whole nation as deficit, the report pinpointed the activities of a small but
powerful constituency who “plundered the nation’s assets, including its mineral riches at the expense of the national good” (ibid, 14). This more specific sociology of national failure draws attention to the exclusionary nature of the EI’s undifferentiated judgement on the national demographic.

Fourthly, the undifferentiated treatment of Sierra Leoneans occludes the social fault-lines within the country; particularly between the state and its citizens, urban Freetown elites and rural communities, and rural youth and elders, groups between which grievances leading to conflict emerged and continue to exist. Indeed, the curriculum’s foregrounding of internal personal change is at odds with the insights of research which has demonstrated the persistence of the structural drivers of conflict into the post-conflict period, as noted earlier.

This section has highlighted some of the ways in which EI’s construal of post-conflict Sierra Leone is highly selective. As has been noted, such reductions are not purely discursive and “never wholly innocent” (Sum and Jessop 2013, 149). The analysis turns now to explore how EI’s partiality of content may be explained by the constraints shaping its location within structural selectivities entailed by the geopolitical agendas of powerful global institutions and actors in the field of peacebuilding interventionism and global governance.

**Structural Selectivities**

The discursive selectivities of EI implicate education within the mission to transform “whole societies” (Duffield 2001, 121) in conflict-affected zones, which has been identified as a key rationale of liberal peacebuilding. A key feature of the geopolitical agenda of liberal peacebuilding has been to problematize conflict-affected states as threats to international stability and Western interests. This has resulted in what some commentators characterize as
a “direct attempt to transform whole societies, including the beliefs and attitudes of their members” (Duffield 2001, 121). The content and assumptions of the discursive selectivities of the Emerging Issues curriculum resonate directly with key features of this peacebuilding agenda and indicate how the curriculum mediates its priorities and parameters. Firstly, in offering a wholly negative projection of Sierra Leoneans as displaying “destructive” behaviors, the text reiterates the pathologization of conflict-affected societies as a rationale driving intervention (Hughes and Pupavac 2005). For instance, in a section on Pollution, the text declares that:

“Sierra Leone suffers from every type of pollution; but it is not the big factories that create most of the pollution in Sierra Leone. It is us. The ordinary Salones we are destroying our own soil, air and water and thereby killing ourselves and our country”(UNICEF, 2008b, 25).

This above analysis ignores the widely evidenced environmental degradation resulting from the extractive operations of international diamond mining companies in the country, a major source of grievance amongst its communities especially in Kono (Zulu & Wilson, 2012). It thereby casts the Sierra Leonean demographic as the sole locus of blame. This problematization of the national community is repeated throughout the text. For instance, there is an injunction to “think about what we do to increase our level of poverty” (UNICEF, 2008a, 7). It is claimed that “here in Sierra Leone corruption is endemic (everywhere)” (UNICEF, 2008b, 27). This homogenization of responsibility occludes the primary responsibility of both national elites and international actors in the production of both corruption and poverty. Relentlessly problematizing the behaviors and attitudes of the Sierra Leonean demographic the curriculum repeats liberal peacebuilding’s tendency to attribute
blame for the emergence of conflict on endogenous societal factors disconnected from broader global political economy dynamics.

Secondly, in its micro-level attention to transforming the individual behaviors and attitudes of the Sierra Leonean population, undifferentiated by class, gender, tribe, language or region, EI operationalizes the ambitions of liberal peacebuilding interventionism to penetrate the socialization habits of conflict-affected nations (Nadajarah and Rampton, 2015). For instance, explaining the aims of the curriculum, the text announces that “we looked at behavior change in individuals because Emerging Issues as a course is about behavior change” (UNICEF, 2008a, 15). At another point, the text explicitly declares that “we are teaching a form of socialization” (UNICEF, 2008a, 10). Such aspirations, explicitly tie the curriculum to a project of social transformation of a demographic deemed inherently prone to violence and self-destruction. This is aligned with what Paris (2002) has described as the “mission civilisatrice” at the core of international peacebuilding, whose interventions in conflict-affected contexts he argues are redolent of the mission to civilize populations deemed inferior that characterized colonial engagement with colonized states in the 19th century.

Thirdly, in framing issues of environmental damage and health care as a matter of addressing the negative personal behaviors and attitudes of Sierra Leoneans the EI curriculum reproduces the concern with individual responsibility, disconnected from an analysis of structural socio-economic constraints, which has been identified as a feature of liberal interventionism. As Hughes and Pupavac (2005) have noted, an implication of liberal peacebuilding’s projection of “domestic populations” as “dysfunctional” is the “criticism of the failure of the populations to take responsibility” (ibid, 883). The result is that “societies are viewed as formed of violated or violating individuals, whose actions spring from
psychological processes rather than from political beliefs or economic needs”. (ibid, 874). The declaration in the EI curriculum that “any change has to come first from within; in fact it is not actually possible to change anybody else’s behavior” (UNICEF, 2008a, 15) typifies a similar individualizing and psychologizing approach to social change in a conflict-affected context. Such construals of the sources of conflict fail to acknowledge or to critique features of the current global economy that generate social and economic inequalities which drive grievance and conflict (Novelli, 2017).

Finally, the curriculum reproduces the state and elite-centricity which has been noted as a feature of the failure of liberal peacebuilding interventionism to address the needs of the majority of the populations living in conflict-affected contexts (Richmond 2012). Hence the text declares that the project to engineer personal change is “an area of concern to the Ministry of Education because the behavior and understanding of the people of Sierra Leone is not constructive”’ (UNICEF 2008a, 14). This explicit affiliation of its peace education programme with the wishes of the Sierra Leonean government ignores the widespread mistrust of the central state by the majority of Sierra Leoneans living outside of its capital, and in particular the failure of government to address massive regional inequities in the provision of social services.

The next section turns to consider how the partiality of the curriculum’s conceptualization of peace promotion in Sierra Leone may also be explained by considering it as an effect of agential selectivities.

**Agential selectivities**
The EI text was a product of a collaboration between various actors. These included UNICEF education staff, teacher educators at the country’s colleges of teacher education, international consultants in peace education and individuals attached to the Sierra Leone Ministry of Education. Together, they brought diverse knowledges, expertise and professional concerns to the process of writing the curriculum.

However, the data gathered from interviews reveals a process of agential selectivity by which the knowledges of some participants were valorized over others in the production of the final text. While interviewees represented a range of groups, all noted that corrections were made by international consultants to the initial drafts produced by college lecturers. Evoking the extent of the revisions one independent consultant pointed out how “the text was transformed from an academic oriented course to behavior change...a new programme... that change transformed the course”. These textual revisions were understood as a necessary corrective to the inadequacies of the original version written by lecturers. One consultant pointed out that the drafts produced by lecturers were “not too far away from conventional academic modules...and were a problem if we wanted to incorporate behavior change”. Resulting changes included the discarding of much material produced by writers because of its perceived irrelevance or inappropriateness to curricula format and content required by peace education programmes.

Commenting on the differential contribution between local writers and external consultants, one informant noted that “the views of the international expert carried a lot of weight and greatly influenced the direction of development”. Some writers of the initial drafts expressed frustration that the work of lecturers had been discarded. One lecturer commented that “we expected a bigger participation in the writing by our staff”. Caution was also expressed about
the dangers of relying on external experts; “when you bring an external consultant...they look at their experience in other countries...it makes it easier for them...they can pick a lot of things, this is what I have done, I think it can work here...and what you think may be applicable in one area may not be applicable in another area”. Another informant expressed some reservations at the appropriation of a “standard thing...peace education being around in all countries globally”.

These reflections illuminate how the final peace education curriculum was a form of knowledge production that relied on several processes of agentic selectivity. Firstly, in appropriating an inherited peace education format, the textual revisions illustrate the privileging of the specialized knowledge and techniques of “experts”, what Kothari (2005) has characterized as the “increasing professionalization of development” (ibid, 430). Thus, “what counts as professional expertise in development is not primarily founded on in-depth geographic knowledge about other places and people but is located in technical know-how” (ibid). In the case of the evolution of EI, this professional culture is demonstrated by the exclusion of text written by local teacher educators because of its failure to fit with a particular pre-established curriculum format circulating within and legitimized by, international aid agencies.

Secondly, the exclusion of local contributions to the curriculum’s final content, illustrates a power asymmetry in knowledge production as a result of a process whereby “some agents, by virtue of their nodal position in social networks, have better capacities to read particular conjunctures, refocus arguments, displace opponents and introduce timely imaginaries and world views than others” (Sum and Jessop 2013, 220). Thus, the international consultant is afforded the institutional authority to reframe and re-write the EI curriculum.
While ostensibly a collaborative project, then, the production of the EI curriculum in fact results from a process of knowledge production reliant on agential selectivity. This also constitutes a moment of technological selectivity in so far as it is secured through technologies of “expertise, techniques and apparatuses that construct authority and marginalize others as well as guide actions and process” (ibid, 221).

**Technological Selectivities**

As discussed, authorial authority in the writing of EI resulted from access to and knowledge of the INEE peace education curricula (UNESCO-INEE 2005a,b) for attitudinal and behavior change. Indeed, it is striking that large sections of the text repeat verbatim the content of the INEE Peace Education Programme, initially developed by the UNHCR for teachers and communities living in refugee camps in Kenya and Uganda between 1997 and 2005 (UNESCO-INEE 2005 a,b). This was promoted as “developing in its audiences skills that build positive and constructive behaviors for peace and conflict prevention and minimization” (Baxter & Ikbowa, 2005, 22). EI’s sections on experiential learning (UNICEF, 2008a, 13) curriculum theory (UNICEF, 2008a, 11), effective listening (UNICEF, 2008a, 28), questioning skills (UNICEF, 2008a, 30-31) effective teaching (UNICEF, 2008a, 32) and conflict management theory (UNICEF, 2008a, 54-55) all reproduce images and text which appeared in the earlier INEE curriculum (UNESCO-INEE 2005a, 40; 22-25; 29; 36-37; 28; 19-21). Also reproduced are explanations of Bloom’s taxonomy of cognitive development, Kohlberg’s theory of Ethical or Moral Development and Maslow’s theory of social development (UNICEF, 2008a, 20; 24-26; UNESCO-INEE 2005b, 28-33, 40-42; UNESCO-INEE 2005a; 19-21). This derivative textual strategy is recognized by one of the main authors of EI who notes that “the INEE peace education programme was the foundation of the Emerging Issues programme, not least
because the basic skills were applicable to human rights, good governance, citizenship and pedagogy” (Baxter, 2014, 175). However the result is to appropriate for Sierra Leonean teachers and their pupil’s material for a curriculum developed for another conflict-affected group in another setting by other aid agencies. In this way the curriculum text reproduces the institutional embeddedness whereby peace education has been instrumentalized across very different contexts and between institutions.

The text’s repurposing of a peace education curriculum written for another context entirely implicates the EI curriculum in the rise of a professional culture of replicable toolkits and templates. As noted by Winthrop and Matsui (2013), from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s the field of Education and Emergencies was characterized by a concern to develop “shared assumptions, standards and tools” (ibid, 14). This resulted in the proliferation of “technical resources” (ibid, 21), to guide policy makers and practitioners, exemplified by the INEE peace education programme. Such developments were driven by a perceived need to advocate for the role of education within humanitarian interventions and to disseminate “best practices”. That EI was promoted as one of the best examples of an earlier INEE peace education programme being used as a “mother manual” (Baxter 2014, 176), demonstrates its implication in this drive to identify and disseminate ‘exemplary’ curriculum models.

However, while laudable and well intentioned, such professional practices also encourage a problem-solving approach that emphasizes commonalities between conflict-affected contexts rather than their distinctiveness. This has resulted in what a recent review of the political economy of education interventions in such contexts, has concluded is their ‘disembedding’ from the context specific political and cultural dynamics conditioning the lives of the communities in which they arrive and take root (Novelli et al, 2014). This insight leads
on to another technological selectivity, its implication in processes of social control and regulation.

Through its explicit focus on inculcating personal attitudinal and behavioral changes in Sierra Leoneans, the curriculum may be understood as a technology of governance aiming to regulate the subjectivity of whole populations. A study of the implementation of the UNHCR peace education programme on which EI was based, draws attention to the regulatory nature of its behavior change goals which are described as a “controlling process” (Sagy 2008, 360). Here, the imperative of achieving personal attitudinal and behavioral change was mobilized to re-shape the conduct of Kenyan refugees, perceived to be intrinsically predisposed to engaging in violent conflict and having destructive attitudes. However, this focus deflected attention away from the structural causes of refugees’ grievances, such as material scarcities or experiences of human rights violations, and instead onto the problematic dispositions of refugees themselves. Peace education in this context, Sagy concludes, “seems to be an act of pacification and disempowerment of the blaming the victim kind” (ibid, 370). In repurposing this same curricula EI instantiates a further iteration of the capacity of this approach to peace education to operate as a technology of social control across conflict-affected contexts and demographics.

**Conclusions**

By applying CPE analysis to a particular instance of peace education curriculum, this case study has problematized the taken-for-granted reputation of peace education as a panacea in conflict-affected contexts. On the contrary, it has revealed how its concern for attitudinal and behavioral change of individual Sierra Leoneans, is a highly partial and exclusionary representation of this conflict-affected demographic. Thus, understood as a product of
various processes of selectivity, the EI curriculum mediates the geopolitical priorities and institutionalized assumptions about conflict-affected states of global peacebuilding interventionism; reproduces unequal power relationships sanctioned within transnational circuits of knowledge; and is collusive with technologies operative within the professional culture of education and peacebuilding that serve to regulate and control conflict-affected populations. The result is a curriculum that is deeply implicated in the geopolitical and biopolitical agendas of the West. Furthermore, it fails to address the structural issues of Sierra Leoneans, pathologizes the nation, blames the poor for their plight, and fails to achieve the transformative goals of education to address the social injustices driving conflict.

These insights overlap with the theoretically informed critiques outlined at the start of this paper. Exposing the inattention to structural drivers of grievance in peace education curricula aligns with the priorities of more critical approaches. Equally, highlighting the dominance of Western foreign policy agendas and psychological knowledges, exposes the failure to consider ongoing coloniality and asymmetrical power relationships which post-colonial critiques have opened up. What this CPE analysis contributes to further enhance theoretically informed explanation, is its systematic exploration and elucidation of these limitations as material effects of cultural political economy dynamics and processes. In this way, peace education is also “put in its place” as a product of particular geopolitical interest and agendas, power relationships, professional networks and technologies. These are all rendered invisible in its reputation as a neutral and benign panacea. This explanation operationalizes the specific agenda of CPE to denaturalize meaning making processes and to re-politicize them within multi-scallar power relations. Such a theoretical goal is particularly apposite given the much-noted insulation of this particular approach to peace education from critique and its
reputation as offering self-evident truths about the peace needs of conflict-affected societies (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013).

This case study also has policy relevant implications for peace education as a field of practice, and points towards the need for more active and transformative interventions that are more contextually grounded and challenge inequality and injustice in all its diverse forms. The findings corroborate the need for careful conflict analysis prior to educational interventions to ensure that programming is properly tailored to drivers of grievance and pinpoints the role of education in addressing and challenging them (Novelli et al, 2017). Furthermore, a CPE approach also highlights how this process should not assume that the origins and drivers of conflict are internal to the country or inherent in the personality traits of its poor. Finally, caution needs to be taken in privileging the travelling expertise of international consultants to ensure that participation of local actors in curriculum development and writing is more than merely symbolic².

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