



“There is still peace. There are no wars.”: Prioritizing unity over diversity in Botswana’s social studies policies and practices and the implications for positive peace



Bethany Mulimbi, Sarah Dryden-Peterson*

Harvard Graduate School of Education, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Botswana
National identity
Curriculum
Assimilation
Multiculturalism
Negative and positive peace

ABSTRACT

This article examines the ways in which education policy and practice in Botswana negotiate tensions between assimilationist and multiculturalist approaches to ethnic diversity. We find that the curriculum, as written and as taught, is preoccupied with unity and the avoidance of armed conflict, goals that have perpetuated an assimilationist approach, normed around the culture and language of the Tswana ethnic majority. We argue that a multicultural approach could foster conditions of positive peace, including recognition and equality of opportunity across ethnic groups, which is more urgent today given the sustained absence of armed conflict. We offer strategies for how practitioners and policy makers might move forward in transforming existing multicultural policy discourse into multicultural school practices.

1. Introduction

Since independence from Great Britain in 1966, Botswana has been celebrated as an example of enduring peace and democracy (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Moyo, 2009). Yet Botswana is not unlike the many other multiethnic states in Sub-Saharan Africa, in that it has faced the dilemma of how to negotiate ethnic diversity while promoting a sense of national unity. Botswana has followed a particular path: post-independence education policies promoted assimilation through construction of national identity as synonymous with the majority ethnic group’s culture and language. Currently, however, just over fifty years after Independence, there are competing constructions of Botswana’s national identity: assimilationist, rooted in the only slightly numerically dominant Tswana ethnic group, and multicultural, reflective of Botswana’s more than 20 ethnic groups (Dryden-Peterson and Mulimbi, 2017; Nyati-Ramahobo, 2006b).

These competing constructions are particularly visible in the expectations placed on the formal education system, which Botswana’s post-independence government has long regarded as “potentially the most important single instrument for nation-building” (Republic of Botswana, 1977, p. 12). The assimilationist construction pervaded the first post-independence official education policy, *Education for Kagisano* (1977), which embraced the majority indigenous language, Setswana, and promoted the Tswana ethnic identity as the identity of all citizens, including members of numerous ethnic minority groups

(Nyati-Ramahobo, 2006a; Tabulawa, 1997). The multicultural construction emerged explicitly two decades later in Vision 2016, a document that articulated national goals for the 50th anniversary of independence. This long-term vision document, which remains the blueprint guiding national development policies (Republic of Botswana, 2009), drastically departed from an assimilationist approach, stating, “[t]he education system will recognise, support and strengthen Botswana’s wealth of different languages and cultural traditions” (Presidential Task Group for a Long-Term Vision for Botswana, 1997, p. 5).

Tensions between assimilationist and multicultural constructions of Botswana’s national identity, as reflected in the education system, are not inconsequential for Botswana’s continued stability and students’ well-being. Policies promoting assimilation to a Tswana cultural and linguistic identity as the basis of Botswana’s national identity may have contributed to national unity and, as a result, to Botswana’s avoidance of ethnically-based violence (Dryden-Peterson and Mulimbi, 2017; Gulbrandsen, 2012). This absence of violence is what Galtung calls “negative peace” (1969) which, despite the pejorative term, is nonetheless significant in a region where wide-spread violence has been the norm. And yet the comparatively poor academic performance and high school drop-out rates that many minority ethnic groups experience have been attributed to these same assimilationist school policies and curricula (Jotia and Pansiri, 2013; Nyati-Ramahobo, 2006a; Pansiri, 2012). Differential educational outcomes along ethnic lines, coupled

* Corresponding author at: Harvard Graduate School of Education, 6 Appian Way, Gutman Library 457, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA.
E-mail address: sarah_dryden-peterson@gse.harvard.edu (S. Dryden-Peterson).

with an ongoing lack of public recognition of minority ethnic groups (Dryden-Peterson and Mulimbi, 2017), stand in the way of Botswana achieving “positive peace,” or the absence of structural violence that could lead to equal opportunities (Galtung, 1969).

This article examines the extent to which education policy and practice in Botswana currently address issues not only of negative peace but also of positive peace. To do so, we analyze the ways in which social studies curriculum – as written in formal and nationally-approved syllabi and textbooks and as taught by teachers in classrooms – negotiate the tensions between the assimilationist and multicultural constructions of national identity found in policy. We find that the written curriculum continues to be assimilationist in approach, normed around the culture and language of the Tswana ethnic majority. At the same time, the curriculum promotes civic values that cut across ethnic groups, and it emphasizes the importance of national identity over ethnic identity. Irrespective of their own backgrounds or those of their students, teachers overwhelmingly adhered to the curriculum as written, citing ideological and practical reasons for doing so. We conclude by discussing whether the elements of national identity that teachers found salient in the written curriculum and prioritized in their classrooms are as relevant for goals of unity today as they were following Independence, as the potential for direct conflict has changed considerably and the need to establish conditions of positive peace are more urgent.

2. Background: ethnicity and language in Botswana

Although the name of the country indicates that Botswana is the home of the Tswana people, there are in fact many ethnic groups within the national borders. Social scientists have long cautioned against “groupism” – thinking of ethnicity as involving bounded groups whose members are homogeneous on various cultural markers, language, and worldviews. They argue instead for conceptualizing ethnicity as dynamic processes of social interactions and ways of interpreting the social world, while at the same time noting the natural human tendency and political usefulness of reifying ethnic groups (see, for example, Brubaker, 2009). These practices are common in policy rhetoric and school textbooks globally. Botswana is no different: curricular documents, stakeholder interviews, and lesson observations show a strong tendency towards such groupism, as opposed to more complex understandings of ethnic identity. Grounded in these data sources, our analysis takes these references to specific, named ethnic groups as units of analysis. We acknowledge, however, that individuals in Botswana may think about boundaries between ethnic groups and the nature of ethnic identity very differently.

The ethnic groups of Botswana are illustrated in Fig. 1, organized by their linguistic relationships. The Constitution recognizes eight “major tribes” who share the common language, Setswana, and who live mainly in the south and east of Botswana (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2006a; Pansiri, 2012; Republic of Botswana, 2000). These eight Tswana groups constitute the majority in political and legal terms, while numerous politically unacknowledged but self-identifying non-Tswana ethnic groups make up the minority. As is customary in English, we refer to this political majority ethnic group as Tswana, to all other groups as minority, and we reserve the term Batswana to connote all citizens of Botswana, regardless of their ethnicity.

Botswana’s indigenous ethnic groups include non-Tswana-speaking minority ethnic groups who live throughout the country but are concentrated in the west and north (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2006a; Pansiri, 2012). Each of the Bantu groups speaks a unique language that is mutually unintelligible with Setswana but in the same linguistic family. These groups are not recognized in Botswana’s Constitution. Also not recognized in Botswana’s Constitution are members of Khoi and San groups, “first peoples” whose presence in the Botswana territory predates the Bantu groups, both Tswana and minority, by over 130,000 years (Denbow and Thebe, 2006).

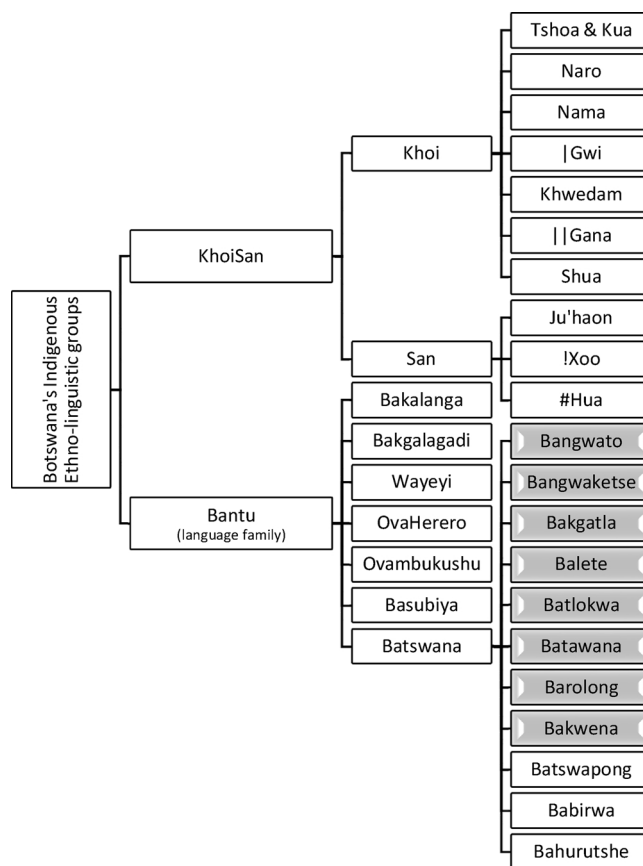


Fig. 1. Indigenous ethno-linguistic groups in Botswana. Groups shaded in gray are those recognized in Botswana’s constitution.

Policy-makers and minority rights advocates use widely varying population estimates of ethnic groups to represent Botswana as either ethnically homogenous or ethnically diverse, with claims ranging from 18% Tswana (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2006a; Nyati-Saleshando, 2011) to 80% Tswana (Republic of Botswana, 1977). The Afrobarometer survey is the only nationally representative data that includes self-reports of respondents’ ethnicity. In the three years that include data on ethnicity (2005, 2008, 2012), just over half of respondents identify as Tswana, and slightly under half identify as one of 21 other ethnic groups (Dryden-Peterson and Mulimbi, 2017).

Minority groups in Botswana are diverse in terms of culture and language, historical migrations into modern-day Botswana, and political and economic standing. For example, the Kalanga – the largest minority group at around 11% of Botswana’s population – have lived in the northeast of modern-day Botswana for at least five centuries, began their own postprimary schools as early as 1932 (Gossett, 1986, p. 349), and are well-represented in civil service and professional fields (Selolwane, 2004; Werbner, 2004). The pastoralist Herero – who constitute about one percent of Botswana’s population – have lived mainly in the northwest of present Botswana only since the mid-1800s, with the largest influx fleeing the German genocide against them in modern-day Namibia around 1900 (Gewald, 1999).

Despite their varied historical experiences, minority ethnic groups have all long experienced geographical, political, or economic marginalization. In precolonial eras, many were in positions of serfdom within Tswana kingdoms (Gulbrandsen, 2012), and postcolonial investment and development has been concentrated in Tswana-dominated regions (Cook and Sarkin, 2010; Leith, 2005). Furthermore, the Land Act of 1968 removed from Tswana chiefs the ability to allocate land, yet consolidated that power with Tswana political elites, effectively making land inaccessible to minority groups (Gapa, 2017). Until

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6841107>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6841107>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)