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# Reconsidering and teaching sociologies in Zambian teacher education: seeking Mbuyi, Mulenga, and Munkombwe

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## ABSTRACT

Global movements to decolonise sociology have gained significant momentum in recent decades and offer far-reaching implications for the field of education. One understudied area of research, however, concerns the sociologies of education taught and experienced in teacher education outside of Anglo/European contexts. This paper uses post-/decolonial theory to explore the teaching and learning of sociology of education for pre-service teachers at the University of Zambia. It draws on data from surveys ( $n=318$ ) and five focus groups with pre-service teachers ( $n=20$ ), a focus group with tutors ( $n=3$ ) working on the course, and reflections by course lecturers to examine Zambian pre-service teachers' experiences and perspectives of sociology. We argue that a sociology of education which includes some elements of the classical canon but is grounded more firmly in sociological perspectives related to local social issues, contexts, and epistemologies may lead to a more informed and inspired cadre of pre-service teachers, and by extension, citizens.

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Sociology; sociology of education; knowledge production; teacher education; Zambia

## Introduction

At many institutions around the world, sociological examinations of educational processes are included as central components in pre-service teacher education programs (Doherty, Dooley, and Woods 2013; Thomas and Boivin 2023). These 'sociology of education' courses aim to examine differences and inequities experienced between various social groups (e.g. student populations), the functions of schools as influential social institutions, and the working and professional lives of teachers, among other areas of inquiry. They also grapple with the arguably complex nexus between theory and practice, and how teaching, learning, and schooling are informed by and reformed through deep(er) theoretical understandings of phenomena in and beyond sites of learning. The means for achieving these understandings are often rooted in classical sociological concepts and theories, such as those espoused

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by Herbert Mead, Karl Marx, and C. Wright Mills, to name a few. Like much of the knowledge produced from Anglo/European<sup>1</sup> sociological traditions, the ideas of these sociologists have been assumed by many to have ‘universal relevance’ and blanket application across diverse contexts (Chakrabarty 2000; Chen 2010; Connell 2014), hence their inclusion in many ‘sociology of education’ courses.

Recent movements, however, have questioned the global economy of knowledge production and dissemination, particularly in relation to which knowledges are privileged and promoted as having universal application (e.g. de Sousa Santos 2015). Sociology as a discipline has been a key area of attention for epistemological, methodological, and topical reconsideration and decolonisation (Connell 2018). Yet these processes are both ongoing and uneven: scant attention has been paid to how sociologies of education manifest in teacher education, or how they are framed in universities located in low- and middle-income countries that are frequently positioned in the periphery of international geopolitical (and knowledge economic) relations.

This paper therefore aims to examine the teaching of sociology of education in Zambian teacher education. It pursues two lines of inquiry. First, it explores pre-service teachers’ (PSTs) experiences and perspectives of a mandatory sociology of education course at the University of Zambia. Second, the paper raises critical questions about the ongoing utility of the historical sociological canon and offers several alternative directions toward a more localised ‘sociological imagination’ (Mills 1959) in the Zambian context. In short, we wonder about the theories and contributions Mbuyi, Mulenga, and Munkombwe – hypothetical Zambian sociologists of education – might have to offer the world that should be taught in Zambia alongside Mead, Marx, and Mills. We posit a sociology of education that critically reviews and engages with the classical canon while simultaneously foregrounding more locally rooted and epistemologically/ontologically diverse sociologies is essential. We contend this broadened sociology of education – or plurality of sociologies of education – will enable future teachers enrolled in this and similar coursework to attain deeper understandings of the complex relationships between schools, students, and societies, and ideally as a result, to engage in more effective and relevant pedagogical enactments.

### **Conceptual framework: whose sociology?**

In what follows, we draw primarily on post-/decolonial theories to reconsider the forms of sociology that have gained currency (and space in teacher education curricula) in many institutions and locations around the world. Part of the general argument is that ‘sociology’ – at least as we commonly think of it in Anglo/European terms – has always sought to explain how lived societies and their related cultures/practices function. This has manifested in several ways. First, many so-called foundational sociological theories and concepts emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries as Anglo/European societies were industrializing and ‘modernizing’<sup>2</sup>. For example, in relation to arguments about stratification, mass (usually urban) societies presented a particular problematic around class formation, leading to early theorising by Karl Marx. Second, individualism and capitalism have been central hallmarks of modernisation theory and so-called classical liberal political economy (see Inkeles 1969; Rostow 1959; Schultz 1961). Other major theorists (for example Weber, Durkheim) also intended their work to be ‘universisable’ at least in the sense of setting up Big Theory models

of how ‘actors’ constitute society. The very point was to establish a tradition/method whose abstraction could not be viewed as too narrow or limited to the concrete specifics of any one location.

The relevance of this account is that once sociology had taken its ‘modern’ shape in the metropole it effaced its origins *and* got ‘exported’ *via* several mechanisms to the countries in the periphery, principally through the imperialist traffic of the 18th and 19th century (see Connell 2007). Even today, students and pre-service teachers studying sociology (of education) in, say, an African country like Zambia, may be expected to build their sociological knowledge of schools as social institutions from the basic blocks shaped by Comte, Mead, Weber, Durkheim, and Marx. While these scholars may provide an understanding of the theoretical approaches underpinning an (arguably biased and incomplete) history of the discipline, they are perhaps insufficient in explaining more particular, localised phenomena.

Moreover, in a context such as Zambia, which was under British rule/occupation until 1964, the lingering vestiges of colonialism are embedded throughout many aspects of educational and political life. Hountondji’s (1990) notion of extraversion – characterised by an orientation towards the metropole – is relevant here wherein Zambia’s teacher and higher education system is largely built on British structures and assumptions. For example, elsewhere we have documented how the content included in Zambian teacher education syllabi (see Thomas, Serenje-Chipindi, and Chipindi 2020) is rooted largely in non-Zambian and instead primarily British and European, scholarship. This orientation is further expressed across the breath and width of what is conceptualised as formal education. The concept of formal education was so subtly constructed to other forms of socialisation that predate colonialism – and which some commentators have described as ‘indigenous’ education (see Kelly 1991; Carmody 2004; and Snelson 1974) – that no matter how knowledgeable a person became in these indigenous systems, they would still be considered uneducated unless they had participated in the formalised system, which again was notably British in nature. Even at the highest level of the Zambian educational stratum, the University of Zambia, course content with deeply problematic assumptions/claims such as modernisation theory is still taught as ‘The Truth,’ largely unchallenged and unquestionable (personal communication, Zambian academic).

Beyond these direct effects, the discipline of sociology has played a problematic role in this relationship. Connell’s (2007) exploration of *Sothorn Theory* suggests the colonial relation in knowledge generation was there from the inception, both in terms of anthropologists and other researchers ‘explaining’ the societies they visited, and the use of sociological theorising to ‘abstract’ history (which was also a conquest) into a neutralised conception of difference. She writes that ‘...sociology displaced imperial power over the colonised into an abstract space of difference. The comparative method and grand ethnography deleted the actual practice of colonialism from the intellectual world built on the gains of empire’ (16). In essence, while British colonial rule ended officially in Zambia in the mid-twentieth century, the work of so-called ‘mainstream’ sociology continued to position those in the periphery in generic or neutral terms, largely eliding entire histories of colonial relationships and unequal knowledge production practices.

In summary, we must remind ourselves and others to critically examine the sociological explanations espoused in academic journals and, particularly, in higher education classrooms. Classical sociology, as emanating from Anglo/European traditions, should not be

viewed as ‘neutral’ knowledge but rooted in specific traditions, replete with omissions and particular biases. Chakrabarty (2000), for example, highlighted how specific theories seem to emanate simultaneously from ‘everywhere and nowhere,’ leading to their presumed generalisable application worldwide. His work, conversely, aims to particularise and ‘provincialise Europe’ to decentre its narratives, which have traditionally stood as unquestioned universals. Keim (2008) also described this historic and contemporary process:

In the past as well as today, the dominant North Atlantic tradition has exerted hegemonic tendencies of Eurocentric inclusion and exclusion, leading to a distorted form of universalism. Ethnocentrically, it emanated from North Atlantic particular social conditions; logocentrically, it deduced common general assumptions, based on these particular conditions, and applied them to all social realities on the globe. (40)

Problematically, these presumed universals are then reinscribed through uncritical application across societies, including those colonised by European powers (i.e. Zambia). The (mis)perceived absence of more localised sociologies further enables this retrenchment of certain knowledge traditions elevated to the level of general theory. These imbued power relations are particularly problematic in higher and teacher education, where cadres of new teachers are educated: the sociologies and theoretical explanations they learn offer potent lenses through which they see their work as future teachers and the roles of schools as influential social institutions.

### **Sociology of education (in teacher education)**

Despite the transformative potential of these teacher education courses, approaches to teaching sociology(ies) of education have been largely overlooked in research scholarship. At the time of our writing, a search for the phrase ‘teaching (of) sociology of education’ – with and without the first ‘of’ – in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* returns only one item: a book review where the author references in passing a personal experience of teaching sociology of education using empirical data. Moore’s (1996) article in the same journal, while not explicitly focused on teaching sociology of education, posits a helpful distinction between a sociology *of* education (as a sub-discipline of sociology concerned with the systematic study of education), and a sociology *for* education (focused on bringing the tools of sociology to bear for educational practitioners). Doherty, Dooley, and Woods (2013) pick up this theme elsewhere by discussing sociology *of/for* education in Australia. We would argue that these approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive; it is indeed quite possible to accomplish both sociology *of* and *for* education within the same teacher education course. We also firmly believe teachers should not be perceived as mindless technicians who implement instructional tactics; rather, we endeavour in our own work as teacher educators to empower our students to become both great pedagogues and deep thinkers, as we see the two as mutually reinforcing (see, for example, Thomas 2022; Thomas and Yehle 2018).

Elsewhere, a search in the *sociology of education* journal similarly returns no hits. There are only three papers with attention to teaching sociology *of/for* education in the journal *International Studies in the Sociology of Education*. One generally explores the inclusion of feminist pedagogies in higher education and mainly focuses on reflective practices in professional doctorates in education (David 2004), while another picks up on the discussion

of sociology of/for education within the context of New Zealand, focussing particularly on the political nature of sociological research and teaching (Rata 2010). Arguably the most relevant paper from this journal compares syllabi from French and English courses in sociology of education from Canada and analyses the readings assigned and topics explored. Although most of these courses were electives and not necessarily associated with teacher education programs, Jean-Pierre's (2013) findings nonetheless echo the question of whose sociology is taught. She notes that 'English Canadian and French Canadian students do not learn the same course content and are exposed to completely different literatures,' leading her to question: 'How can we continue to teach local contextualised issues and at the same time introduce course content that reflect more accurately the plurality of our experiences?' (52). Finally, even the journal *Teaching Sociology* – concerned with the teaching and reproduction of the discipline – largely overlooks the teaching of sociology of/for/in teacher education in lieu of research on the teaching/learning of the larger sociological discipline or its more popular and historically common sub-fields of study (e.g. work, unions, gender).<sup>3</sup>

A small number of additional pieces do address the teaching of sociology of education, though many of them tend to be more conceptual than empirical in nature and/or are based on high-income countries such as Australia (Doherty, Dooley, and Woods 2013) and New Zealand (Hogan and Daniell 2012, 2015). Within Africa, we found only a small handful of relevant studies. For example, Chinwendu and Itoje-Akporiniovu (2020) provide a theoretical accounting of the utility of sociology of education for Nigerian society, and Offor (2019) surveyed 74 lecturers in Nigeria responsible for teaching sociology of education. The latter study maintained a unique emphasis on sociology of education for sustainable development, and specifically investigated the 'physical facilities that inhibit effective teaching' (80); lecturers' most common teaching methods; and, among other aspects, 'measures to be taken to ensure effective teaching of sociology of education for sustainable development' (82). The lack of teaching/learning materials and other material constraints (lecturers sharing offices, no residential house, etc.) emerged as a central issue, one not entirely foreign from the Zambian context under study. Lastly, one of the most geographically relevant empirical studies comes out of the University of Zambia itself. Muzata, Banja, and Kalimaposo (2020) broadly examined the perspectives of students enrolled in the educational psychology and sociology of education degree programmes. They probed students' motivations for entering their degrees and resultant levels of satisfaction, finding that most students were broadly satisfied with their degree programme. However, the study did not examine students' specific experiences in any courses, nor the nature of the knowledges and sociologies taught within them.

## Research context and methods

This study occurred in the (post-)colonial context of Zambia, a land-locked nation-state that gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1964. The University of Zambia (UNZA) is the flagship higher education institution in Zambia, having emerged in 1965, only one year after Zambia gained its independence from the British. It has two campuses – Great East Road (main campus) and Ridgeway – located in Lusaka, a city of nearly 3 million people and Zambia's national capital. UNZA is officially accredited and recognized dually by the Ministry of General Education and Ministry of Higher Education. It is a comprehensive university with approximately 30,000 students studying various disciplines across undergraduate and post-graduate levels.

Within UNZA, the School of Education was established in 1966 and is one of the three oldest schools in the university. It is also the biggest School and offers a range of programs, including but not limited to: primary education, adult education, education psychology, education administration and policy studies, special education, and library information science. The teacher education programs, specifically, are among the biggest in the school and, indeed, on campus. These programs share commonalities with others around the world in that they begin primarily with a series of educational foundations courses, followed by courses specialised for their teaching domains (e.g. primary education, secondary science), and eventually, practicum experiences in the field.<sup>4</sup>

As part of their teacher education programs, PSTs take a 15-week ‘sociology of education’ course in their educational foundations suite. This course is compulsory for all PSTs preparing to be teachers – including those in the early childhood, primary, and secondary education degree programs – and therefore has large annual enrolments. In 2017, the year in which data were collected, there were 1,257 students enrolled in the course, with most of them in their second year of study. Due to this massive enrolment, and the lack of facilities to teach the students as a whole group, the PSTs were divided into three streams of approximately 420 students, each taught by a different instructor. One of the instructors also served as the overall course coordinator, overseeing the general operations of the entire course, and is a co-author of this paper. The course comprises three hours of lecture and one hour of tutorial each week. Thus, within their streams, the students were further divided into tutorial groups of approximately 35 PSTs, though there was some variation in enrolment figures due to student scheduling.

The course’s specific content is explored elsewhere (see Thomas, Serenje-Chipindi, and Chipindi 2020) and includes 10 sections or units. In the year of this research study, these included: (1) introduction to sociology of education, including definitions and historical developments; (2) theories of sociology of education, such as structural/functionalist, conflict, human capital, and interactionist or labelling theories; (3) social functions of education (e.g. manifest and latent functions and dysfunctions); (4) socialisation processes and agents; (5) school organisation structures and dynamics as well as leadership styles; (6) school and the community, including their linked interrelationship; (7) education and social stratification (e.g. social class and mobility); (8) teacher roles; (9) teacher status and its effects on the supply and retention of teachers; and (10) the teaching profession, including a sociological examination of the teaching profession and several teacher organizations operating in Zambia. These sections were broadly supported by a set of prescribed and recommended readings on the sociology of education in Africa and elsewhere, and guided by the course’s objectives, which among others included the goal to ‘discuss the relevance of sociology of education to the Zambian education system’ (syllabus, 1). This was indeed a goal of our study, too, which we elaborate in the following sections.

## Research methodology

The broader research study upon which this article is based explored the sociology of education course at UNZA and the ways in which students, faculty members, and course coordinators experienced its design and enactment. After receiving appropriate research



ethics approvals, the research team collaboratively designed a primarily qualitative study to answer the following questions:

- How is the course interpreted and experienced by students, tutors, and lecturers?
- What enduring understandings do future teachers learn through this sociology of education course?

As may be evident from these questions, the primary focus of the study did not centre on issues of coloniality or knowledge ecologies and hierarchies. However, in retrospect, this would have been an area ripe for a specific investigation. Nonetheless, as outlined below, issues related to the forms of sociologies of education as taught in the course arose as a theme in the data and, consequently, related to the core objectives of the larger project. Through multiple virtual meetings and in-person discussions, we decided as a research team that this aspect of the project was crucial to the larger enterprise of understanding sociology of education *in situ* and therefore warranted closer inspection.

### **Data collection and analysis**

To examine students' expectations, PSTs enrolled in the course were invited to participate by a colleague of Author 2 (Serenje) to avoid coercion as much as possible, then provided ample opportunity to review the consent forms and a description of the research before making their decision. The PSTs who volunteered to participate in the study were then asked to complete an anonymous descriptive survey on the first day of the course. In addition to asking basic demographic questions, the survey explored their expectations for the course and their perceived knowledge of sociology and its relation to their future work as teachers. 272 PSTs completed this initial survey, with an overall response rate of 21.64%, with approximately 60% of the respondents identifying as male and 40% as female.<sup>5</sup> A second survey was then conducted at the end of the course, which asked similar questions from the first survey but also explored retrospectively the ways in which they experienced the course, including their impressions of sociological concepts, the forms of pedagogy and assessment in the course, and more. There were 318 PSTs who completed the second survey, with a response rate of 25.30%.<sup>6</sup> To maintain anonymity and prevent perceptions of coercion, the paper-based surveys were not matched from phase one to phase two. However, the broader population invited to participate was the same (i.e. those enrolled in the unit).<sup>7</sup> The quantitative survey results were analysed descriptively, and the open-ended responses were analysed in accordance with the other qualitative data, as outlined below.

In addition to the survey, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to explore qualitatively how students understood the benefits of the course and aspects they thought would benefit their future roles as teachers. Four FGDs were conducted with PSTs from the course – each with five students ( $n=20$ ) – and one was held with tutors who worked as instructors on the course ( $n=3$ ). All FGDs were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The focus group discussions were coded inductively using an iterative approach, wherein all three researchers first individually immersed themselves in the data before collectively discussing and generating a provisional list of codes. This codebook was then applied back to the data for refinement before engaging in more focused data coding. Several central



themes emerged, including students' insights into social reproduction processes (e.g. how labelling students can negatively affect their learning and well-being; see Nkhata et al. 2019), their desires for more time to engage with the sociological topics, discouragements when learning about the declining status of the teaching profession in Zambia, frustrations with the material constraints of the institution, and general excitement regarding seeing schools and societies in a new light. This paper, then, focuses on one additional theme: the forms of sociology they encountered.

### **Positionality**

Engaging reflexively with one's positionality is certainly important in any study, but this process arguably takes on elevated importance when studying one's own students and within a (post-)colonial context. As a diverse and collaborative team of researchers, we sought to consistently engage in purposeful reflexivity, focused especially on how our own experiences and identities necessarily shape our multiple engagements with the participants as well as our interpretations of the data and concomitant concepts. Author 1 (Thomas) was born in the United States and completed several degrees there, including one at the same institution as Author 3 (Chipindi). Thomas has been engaged with multiple urban and rural communities in Zambia in various capacities as an educator, researcher, and consultant since 1996. Thomas also has considerable experience teaching large, mandatory sociology of education courses comprised of 65–450 teacher education students across three different higher education institutions in Australia and the United States. It is also important to note that he is currently based at a research-intensive university with ample research facilities. Author 2 (Serenje) was born in Zambia and completed her first and second degrees at UNZA and is currently completing a linked doctoral program between UNZA and a European institution. Serenje has also worked as the coordinator of the sociology of education course under study and therefore routinely coordinated courses like those of Thomas. Author 3 (Chipindi) was also born in Zambia and completed his first and second degrees at UNZA before completing a Ph.D. in the United States focused on the experiences of faculty members within African higher education, affording unique insights into the tutors' experiences in this study at UNZA (see Chipindi 2018; Chipindi and Doyle 2017). Chipindi has worked as a tutor on the sociology of education course in the past, though not in the year data were collected. Finally, all three authors have collaborated previously in both academic scholarship and on applied international development projects sponsored by bilateral aid organisations, offering a solid foundation on which to conduct – and reflect upon – this study.

### **Research findings**

In this section, we explore several findings related to the sociological approaches and knowledge(s) explored in the sociology of education course and the omissions that may signify gaps in the broader political economy of knowledge dissemination. Elsewhere we have examined the syllabus itself, including its level of detail, adherence to external forms of accreditation and validation, assessments, and course content (see Thomas, Serenje-Chipindi, and Chipindi 2020). Thus, here we share findings related to the epistemological

orientation of the course through the eyes of the students (and tutors), suggesting there is some desire for a more localised and ontologically embodied approach to sociology of education at UNZA.

It is perhaps worth noting that the course has immense potential to shape the perspectives of the pre-service teachers enrolled. Although a few students entered the course with some conceptions of sociology – i.e. ‘it was first discovered by Herbert Spencer’ (survey response) – 49.3% of respondents left blank a question in the first survey asking, ‘What knowledge do you have about sociology of education?’ and 10.7% wrote ‘none’ or ‘no knowledge.’ The remaining respondents wrote mostly generic, though not entirely inaccurate, comments about education and society; for example, ‘it is concerned with the way of life of the people.’ Thus, it largely seemed, as one student noted in FGD 4, ‘...the time we started this course I was [a] completely blank amount of what sociology is. The only thing I knew was that it had to do with socialisation.’ With minimal grounding in sociological thinking, then, the students could presumably be guided toward various understandings of the social world and the institutions in which they (will) work and inhabit. Or arguably, they could be encouraged to collectively and constructively explore sociological concepts from Zambian or more localised perspectives. This work is not easy, however, as students must understand and wrestle with theory, a proverbial challenge for many undergraduate students, especially those who are reading, learning, and writing in English, a second (or third, fourth, etc.) language for most UNZA students.<sup>8</sup>

The challenge to balance theory and practice may be exacerbated in professional programs such as teaching, where globally there is often a ‘just tell me how to teach’ sentiment circulating amongst teacher education students (e.g. Thomas and Lefebvre 2020). Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that several UNZA students ( $n=9$ ) wanted the course to be ‘more practical’ and to ‘include practical examples.’ These suggestions were offered in response to the final, optional question on the survey, which asked PSTs to recommend ‘only one thing to improve the sociology of education course.’ Less than one third of respondents answered this question, but those who did focused primarily on (a) the material constraints – overcrowding of facilities, inability to see the board from the back of the classroom, etc.; (b) the efficiency of tutors’ instruction and assessments; and (c) the time allocated for the course in general – i.e. the course should run over the entire year instead of just one 15-week term. Thus, most of the comments generally reflected students’ concerns about course mechanics rather than the content itself. Yet several students did comment on the (im)practical nature of the course, an area which we believed was quite important. One participant even suggested that students should have more opportunities to ‘practise their knowledge outside the university,’ an interesting and perhaps insightful comment given the desire within teacher education to pursue the nexus of theory and practice. Despite this promising idea, with such large enrolments (1,200+ students) and limited instructional space, enacting more experiential and individualised – or embodied – learning experiences would be immensely challenging. These survey responses nonetheless aligned closely with some comments from student focus groups, where one student suggested that ‘when its practical, the knowledge will remain fresh in our minds.’

The students also raised concerns about the historical nature of sociology as presented, learned, and assessed in the course. In the final survey question described above, one student suggested course instructors should ‘remove ancient topics,’ presumably in reference to introductory topics at the beginning of the course, which include the history of sociology

and the so-called ‘Fathers of Sociology’ (i.e. Comte, Spencer, Mead, Marx, Weber, Durkheim). Another student commented, ‘due to changes on [sic] society, we need new research’ and a third suggested ‘new ways of research.’

The data from focus group discussions elaborate on this sentiment as well. For example, Maxwell (FGD 3) noted that ‘...most of the stuff we look at are a century old.’ He continued by lamenting the emphasis on memorising theories of the past. Cholwe (FDG 2) likewise supported a more updated sociological investigation:

I also believe in new knowledge. In as much as we have the fathers of sociology who have given us their views, hasn't there been any change from the time these people were there up to today? I feel things have changed and so I was thinking maybe we can adapt some new knowledge, where we can say the fathers have said this and now there are such and such changes or progress.

This student's perspective raised a temporal question about the status of sociology as a discipline and how its theories – as the means to explain phenomena in the world – have evolved over time.

Another student, Chimunya (FGD 3), agreed that some aspects of the course ‘centre too much on history.’ She recognized that ‘it is good to have knowledge of the background’ but felt that ‘sometimes some topics are irrelevant.’ Instead of remaining focused on the historical sociological cannon and its tools for explaining contemporary events, she posited that ‘there are so many issues that have arisen that affect students and everybody else. I think they [instructors] should bring up things like HIV/AIDS, in detail.’ Here Chimunya seems to suggest the course be reformed such that more contemporary topics in the local context are explored sociologically, mentioning HIV/AIDS as an example. Indeed, for many years the epidemic entrenched itself in all aspects of the education sector, as M.J. Kelly (2000), educational scholar and former vice-chancellor of UNZA noted:

HIV/AIDS is affecting pupils. It is affecting teachers. It is affecting curriculum content. It is affecting the organization, management, and planning of education. It is affecting resources for education. It is slowly leading to questions about the very nature, purpose, and provision of education. (6)

Chimunya's suggestion therefore demonstrates her own sociological imagination – rooted in the ability to move between history and biography (see Mills 1959) – and reflects a desire for sociological analyses of contemporary and ongoing issues affecting Zambian institutions and individuals.

Even the tutors who worked on the course felt a desire to examine and discuss more modern-day, and perhaps locally relevant, sociological issues. In the focus group discussion, the facilitator asked tutors about the concepts they felt should be discussed in the course. Tutor Munsaka opined,

Some of the concepts that need to be included in sociology is [sic] the contemporary issues. Those are the issues that will be able to help the society much, unlike where we talk of these other subjects that talk of things that happened a long time ago and are not even in existence...in addition to what my friends have said, we should also include contemporary issues that will be able to help the learners and will be able to benefit the community.

Later in the focus group, Tutor Muleya returned to this idea, noting that other ‘issues should also be added, issues that are affecting us today in the twenty first century,’ such as

‘drug abuse.’ he continued: ‘We have seen how pupils are abusing drugs, and the society is affected. So, we should include issues affecting us today like poverty, unemployment, gender-based violence – all those vices should be included in sociology.’ In sum, students and tutors seemed to long for a more contemporary and relevant exploration of sociological themes – and undergirding theories to explain them – that exist in Zambian schools and society. In what follows, we raise several critical issues related to the reconsideration and teaching of sociology of education in Zambia, and beyond.

## Discussion and conclusion

This project – constituted broadly by both the data and research findings as well as ongoing and reflexive discussions between us as a team of researchers invested in the processes of preparing future teachers through sociology of education – led to four important issues warranting further discussion and investigation. The first is the perpetual tension between theory and practice, a common trope within teacher education programs and research (e.g. Akyeampong et al. 2013; Butin 2014; Thomas and Boivin 2023; Zeichner 2012). The findings suggest some participants sought additional ‘translation’ of theory into practice, and perhaps vice versa. Engaging in this translational work with/for PSTs can be challenging for teacher educators worldwide, but we believe these difficulties may be exacerbated by the context in which sociological theories are taught. By this we mean that the higher education structure at UNZA – largely inherited by the British, though obviously reformed somewhat since independence – relies heavily on assessment structures that indeed privilege rehearsed (aka memorised) descriptions of theories, rather than deep engagement with their meanings or applications (see Thomas, Serenje-Chipindi, and Chipindi 2020 for more on the assessment structure of the sociology of education course).

Moreover, it is not difficult to imagine that (primarily young) Zambian pre-service teachers feel disconnected from the eras and foci of sociologists as represented in the traditional sociological ‘canon’. Connell (2018) writes:

Part of the case against mainstream sociology is how often its concerns are marginal to the biggest issues. It’s hard to get worked up about reflexive modernity or shifting subjectivities when you are facing starvation in a drought, rampant pollution in a mega-city, a grey economy embracing half the population, rape and femicide committed with impunity, military dictatorship, forced migration, climate disaster, or other such conveniences of modern life. If social science is to be relevant, it has to be a different social science. (403)

Here we certainly do not mean to suggest that all Zambians are facing starvation, or to reinforce a deficit perspective of their society and related concerns. We do, however, agree with Connell’s central point that, in the case of this paper, sociology of education must have a clear connection and relevance to society as well as engage with its most pressing issues. In sum, while some of the challenges faced by pre-service teachers at UNZA as they aim to move back and forth between theory and practice are common across many teacher education programs worldwide, others are perhaps exacerbated by the conditions in which they are studying and learning sociology.

This, then, brings us to the second key issue raised through the study: broadening the topics of sociological investigation. One of the research participants suggested a more localised sociology of education might examine the historic devastation and continued effects

of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, one which was particularly brutal within the teaching profession in Zambia (Grassly et al. 2003; Kelly 2000; Ministry of Health 2005). Exploring this topic of sociological study within a sociology of education course at UNZA could serve as a profound and poignant example of how and why sociology (of education) helps us to better see, analyse, explain, and understand how various social phenomena impact teaching, learning, schooling, and indeed all of society.

Other more 'localised' topics might similarly yield significant interest and powerful insights among pre-service teachers at UNZA. For example, within Zambian society there are ingrained patterns of particular ethnic/linguistic groups that operate as paired 'cousins' (e.g. Lozi and Tonga; Bemba and Nyanja; see, for example, Bbaala and Mate 2016). We imagine and know anecdotally that sociological explorations of these how these social relations (i.e. paired cousins) influence the interactions between teachers, students, and administrators – or perhaps even the national language of instruction policy for primary education – would be both highly relevant and immensely interesting to students. Attention to rural, peri-urban, and urban experiences across Zambia, mainly due to globalisation and rapid economic growth in recent years – and how these changes intersect with extant educational structures, discourses, and pedagogies – might also serve as rich points of sociological inquiry. Finally, systematically studying the unique system of community schools in Zambia could further entice and enhance student interest in sociology of/for education. As Bamattre (2018) suggests, these schools primarily:

represent an extreme version of devolvement on the most local level, where people in communities and villages are responsible for many of the core aspects of education, including building schools, hiring teachers, and supervising teaching and learning. These institutions represent a dramatic shift in how state and society are constructed and imagined in the arena of education, by allowing and even empowering communities to play an increasingly major role in creating and managing their own education provision, a sector previously seen as a belonging to the state. (98)

In sum, we posit there are a range of new or other sociological issues that could be addressed in a sociology of education course in Zambia, either as instructive examples of theoretical concepts or more substantive curricular units for prolonged examination. Exploring these issues may alter not only the experiences of students in the class, but their enduring understandings of how schools and societies interact and affect each other, linking back to one participant's comment about sociology as the study of 'the way of life of the people'.

However, merely applying Anglo/European theories and methods to study Zambian issues is inadequate. The third issue relevant to this discussion is the epistemological balance of sociology taught and valued within sociology of education at an institution like UNZA. Scholars have recently advocated for *alternative knowledge* produced in the global south to form a more substantial and enduring part of sociological research and teaching (Alatas 2006; Baber 2003). We concur and suggest the first step is to approach varied epistemes and knowledge systems – particularly those that have been othered and subjugated by colonially-enforced educational systems – with the same reverence that has historically been granted to the Anglo/European canon. While some may understandably support the teaching of an exclusively localised/Zambianised sociology of education, we are more tempered in our stance that a plurality of sociologies of education are necessary for future

teachers in Zambia to navigate the various fields (e.g. Bourdieu 1977) they inhabit and discourses they encounter across local and global frames, and everywhere in between. This implies a need for the acknowledgment and explicit discussion of multiple modes of knowing – a particularly worthwhile discussion amongst future teachers who are charged with teaching, assessing, etc., various forms of knowledge (see Thomas and Talbot 2021) – and the reluctance to rank Anglo/European theories as superior.

This brings us to the fourth issue: where are Mbuyi, Mulenga, and Munkombwe, and what can we learn from them? For us, these three surnames represent hypothetical sociologists of education engaged in critical and engaging research that sheds light on a host of local issues – ideally employing a range of onto-/epistemological frames – that could inform the thinking and practice of future teachers. This is not to suggest no scholars are doing sociological work in Zambia – there certainly are. Instead, it serves as a thought experiment to ask why they are not known, cited, or (perhaps most importantly, given the focus of this article) taught. What could Mbuyi, Mulenga, and Munkombe offer to Zambia pre-service teachers? How might their research and insights offer alternative sociological explanations, axiological orientations, and topical investigations? How might their work advance and complement scholarship from other sociologists in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere in the (non-)Anglo/European scholarly world? And ultimately, in reading work by Mbuyi, Mulenga, and Munkombe, how might PSTs approach not only the study of sociology of education differently but the entire enterprise of teaching and learning?

Yet to be taught, scholars must first be known (see Chipindi and Vavrus 2018, for more on this issue in the Zambian context). This is a core problem within the field/discipline of sociology and academic knowledge production as it has developed. As Go (2013) suggests, an actual postcolonial sociology would imply a two-way flow in which practices and ideas from non-Northern hemisphere centres of knowledge are used to illuminate sociological problems in *and beyond* those contexts (i.e. also in Anglo/European contexts). Connell (2018), Hountonji (1990), and others have long made the case that we must support, cite, and promote scholars writing from a range of standpoints and epistemologies, lest we continue to support what de Sousa Santos (2015) calls ‘epistemicide’. We seek to extend this call beyond just research processes, but in application to teaching and teacher education coursework. Returning to the thought experiment, imagine what powerful explanations and understandings future teachers may be missing by not studying Mbuyi, Mulenga, and Munkombwe alongside Mead, Marx, and Mills.

Finally, we feel it is necessary to address one final point related to knowledge production and dissemination hierarchies. There is, of course, an inherent irony in publishing this piece in an international journal rather than seeking publication within a more ‘local’ or Zambian community of scholars. Indeed, the School of Education at UNZA runs its own *Zambian Journal of Educational Management, Administration, and Leadership*. We could have submitted this paper there, and we encourage you to explore its publications. But the unfortunate reality, harsh as it may sound, is that depending on where you sit in the global constellation of knowledge production, there is a strong possibility that you would not be reading this piece right now if it were published there. Thus, and for the purposes of seeking to reframe sociologies of education in and beyond Zambia, we have opted to publish it here. However, all three of us as co-authors have all published in more ‘local’ outlets (journals, books, etc.), and we plan to continue doing so in the future. We also know first-hand that



Zambia has a thriving community of educational researchers, many of whom regularly publish robust educational (and sociological) research.

Thus, our final plea, like those of Connell (2018) and others, is to encourage all of us as scholars, sociologists, and especially teacher educators, to consider carefully the sociologies of education we teach and discuss amongst our students. Through the process of conducting this study and engaging in broader reflexive discussions as a team, we are even more convinced of the need to (re)consider the knowledges and sociologies we privilege in teacher education, specifically, and to seek out the largely unknown contributions Mbuyi, Mulenga, and Munkombwe have to offer pre-service teachers in Zambia, and vitally, beyond.

## Notes

1. We would like to note the problematic nature of terms such as ‘global North/South’ or ‘Western,’ which essentialise heterogenous histories, cultures, ethnicities, etc., as singular categories and may reinforce seemingly dichotomous binaries between them. At the same time, however, we acknowledge the utility of appropriating these terms for the purposes of destabilising deeply embedded power structures. In most instances, we have nonetheless opted to use the adjective ‘Anglo/European’ as a (slightly) more specific descriptor, though we of course also recognise this phrase is imperfect and likewise deserves critique and deconstruction.
2. See Escobar (2007) for more on the relationship between modernity and coloniality.
3. We would note, however, that these journals are based in high-income countries and rooted largely in Anglo/European knowledge traditions; as such, the irony is not lost on us in canvassing these outlets for updated literature relevant to this study. As noted above we also searched for research in ‘local’ journals in and beyond Zambia as well as in the University of Zambia’s research repository database (see <http://dspace.unza.zm/>).
4. See Manchishi and Mwanza (2014) for a discussion of UNZA PSTs’ experiences with teaching practice in the field in Zambia, and Thomas and Boivin (2023) for more on common teacher education structures.
5. Five respondents did not note their gender identity.
6. These participants were likewise offered descriptions of the survey and asked to sign consent forms, if they had not done so already. Participants who completed the first survey were also provided the opportunity to withdraw from the study. Given the focus of this paper, we do not draw extensively on the first survey in our analysis but include it here to paint a more holistic picture of the broader study.
7. All names included in this paper are pseudonyms.
8. While English is an official language in Zambia – and the primary language of instruction at UNZA – seven local languages are utilised at early grades in primary school, and it is often suggested there are 72 indigenous languages within the country. See Banda and Mwanza (2020) for more on language histories and policies in Zambia.

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