Globalization Viewed from the Periphery: The Dynamics of Teacher Identity in the Republic of Benin

MICHEL WELMOND

However, they do not give us what they should. Instead they call us “budge-tivores,” that’s how they treat us. Though, without us society cannot be beautiful.

(Interview, Beninese contract teacher in rural area, 1997)

It is no longer novel to assert that globalization, however construed, rarely leads to homogenizing and predictable change. Studies of local resistance and the unintended consequences of global trends are quite common. It is well documented that reforms of developing countries’ education systems promoted by international development agencies are similar in logic, priorities, and expectations. Those reforms, however, have had different consequences in different countries. Usually blaming the lack of fit between policy and local context, such analyses conclude that education reforms inspired by global paradigms are unsuccessful. What is discussed less frequently, however, are the ways of characterizing this local context that can both explain the varied impact of global trends on education systems and possibly inform better “fitting” policy. This article contends that teacher identity—the teacher corps as a historical, political, and social actor in specific countries—can provide such a lens.

At first glance, it appears strange to bring together teachers and globalization. Teachers, after all, are relatively sheltered behind the closed doors of their classrooms. Although tucked away, teachers are nevertheless placed at the uncomfortable intersection of contradictory demands made on education systems. These demands come from all corners: from elite interests, from ambitious groups vying for social mobility, from ideological paradigms that frame the transformative function of education in different ways, from history, and from global forces. Teachers not only respond to these competing demands but also bring their own preferences and ambitions to this occu-

3 Jeanne Moulton, Paradigm Lost: Implementation of Basic Education Reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa (Greenview, in press).
Such a turbulent landscape makes the study of teachers a particularly rich location for examining the dynamics of change within an education system. Also, there is a long tradition of studying teachers in relation to the nature of the state, and the state is obviously the unit of analysis, either explicitly or implicitly, in any discussion of globalization.5

Using the case of the Republic of Benin, this article examines the confrontation of “globally inspired” education policies with characteristics of the nation’s teacher corps. Through an analysis of the history of Beninese teachers and what different actors say about the role and behavior of teachers today, I present a complex depiction of teacher identity in Benin. Subsequently, I contrast this multidimensional representation of teachers with assumptions about the nature and motivation of teachers that underlie education reform initiatives propelled by many international development agencies in Benin during the 1990s. Policy implications for Benin are then outlined in the conclusion.

As the case of Benin will show, the juxtaposition between different visions of who teachers are and what role they are expected to play has serious implications for the evolution of education sectors. As the teacher quoted above suggests, if policy makers and development agencies view teachers as “budgetivores,” or overpaid, underperforming workers, while teachers see themselves as underappreciated contributors to the future of their country, it is unlikely that the education system can ever meet its mandate to “make society beautiful.”

Some Concepts

Before discussing the case of Beninese teachers, I present two key conceptual tools used in this article—“edlib policy” and teacher identity. Since a full discussion of globalization in all its forms is outside the purview of this article, a specific set of policies has been selected to represent a certain manifestation of globalization for the education sector in the developing world. Edlib policies inspired by the neoliberal economic paradigm popular in international development circles during the 1980s and 1990s were aggressively advocated by international development agencies throughout the developing world, and particularly in Africa.6

The notion of teacher identity is used to contrast teacher corps in different societies. In this case, Beninese teacher identity, constructed on the basis of in-depth analysis of the roles and responsibilities of teachers as viewed


by many different actors in Benin, is contrasted with the roles and responsibilities assumed by the edlib policy paradigm and, thus, by many international development agencies who support education sector improvement.

*The “Edlib Paradigm”: One Face of Globalization in the Education Sector*

The overall notion of globalization and its impact on education systems is addressed in Martin Carnoy and Diana Rhoten’s article in this issue. The need for different societies to compete in a world where knowledge is a principal currency has turned the organization and purpose of education systems into key factors for relative competitiveness. For developing countries in fiscal difficulty, however, efforts to join the knowledge race confront other global trends regarding assumptions about the role of the state in the economy and society. Carnoy calls attention to the contradiction of what he terms “finance-driven” versus “competitiveness-driven” reforms.7

There are many manifestations of the drive to increase competitiveness through the education system. One of the most significant for poorer countries such as Benin has been the Education for All (EFA) movement. Launched in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, education officials and international development agencies made an ambitious pledge to make educational opportunities available to all children in the world over the next decade. One of the key justifications for this global objective was that primary schooling had a positive impact on economic and social development.

In contrast, finance-driven reforms primarily aim to contain the unit cost of education and increase its efficiency. Output is also important because certain types of education expenditures (such as primary education) are considered to have a greater impact on economic development. Such considerations, however, were mostly wielded as a way to decrease spending on “less-performing” educational expenditures (such as higher education). Such finance-driven reforms have been labeled edlib policies.8

This article uses edlib policies to exemplify globalization in the education sector. This is because such policies have tended to be at the center of most education reform support programs financed by international development agencies such as the World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the French Development Agency.9 The impact of the EFA movement will also be taken into consideration where relevant.

In keeping with the neoliberal economic perspective popular in development circles, edlib advocates do not construe the problem of the education sector as one of resource levels but rather of existing resources used in a

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8 Colclough.
9 Ibid.
suboptimal manner.10 The education system is viewed as a firm whose purpose is to produce educational outcomes more efficiently.11 If public resources are to be mobilized, a calculus of social return (relying on economic criteria) determines where funds should be allocated.12 Each investment must be weighed against others (primary vs. higher education, salaries vs. materials) as to which will have the greatest impact on achievement, efficiency, or access. Generally, both the issues and solutions for the education sector are framed in terms of economic costs and benefits.

A focus on education as an economic investment is certainly not a novel perspective. Both human capital theories and manpower planning techniques have justified education expenditures, particularly as parts of development strategies for Third-World countries. What edlib adds is the notion that certain education expenditures are more legitimate than others—particularly where public resources are concerned. Mirroring neoliberal preoccupations with limiting the role of the state, “edlibbers” begin with the question, Is it truly necessary for public resources to be allocated for a chosen education endeavor? They then apply stringent tests that legitimize certain education outcomes over others.

Edlib discourse has been criticized from several angles. First, researchers such as Christopher Colclough have questioned the validity of claims regarding the relative returns to certain inputs or types of educational services, for example, whether postsecondary education always has low social rates of return.13 Others, such as Joel Samoff, argue that edlib reforms reduce the purpose of schooling to purely human capital considerations.14 Thus, concerns for nation building, creating new types of citizens, and education as a human right are deemed economically irrelevant and thus unimportant to policy makers. Outcomes are narrowly construed to mean measurable student achievement in core subject areas (i.e., math and language). Finally, as mentioned above, Carnoy calls attention to the conflict between a vision that intends to contain education spending in order to limit the role of the state and one that expects continued growth of educational opportunities for purposes of productivity.15 Most reform programs claim that they will resolve these problems through greater efficiency and cost recovery. However, there are limits to increased efficiency, particularly where it depends on a reallocation of resources.

The impact of the edlib paradigm on teacher policy in Africa has been substantial, although rarely discussed. On the most basic level, when structural

12 Colclough.
13 Ibid.
14 Samoff, “The Reconstruction.”
15 Carnoy.
adjustment programs have targeted the salary bill or civil service rolls, teachers’ remuneration and working conditions have also been affected. African countries with high indebtedness and negative economic growth generally decreased teacher salaries during the 1980s and 1990s.

Within the context of education reform programs promoted by international development agencies, there has been surprisingly little attention paid to teacher policy per se. Rather, the focus has been on the insufficient level of resources allocated to nonsalary expenditures. For countries with little room for budgetary flexibility (and most African countries fall into this category), improving the quality of instruction requires that resources be transferred from elsewhere. In many cases, including Benin, the reallocation of resources toward nonsalary inputs has necessitated the stanching of the teacher salary bill.

Teachers in Developing Countries: Improving Effectiveness and Managing Costs, a document published by the World Bank in 1993, examines teacher policy issues in greater depth. The overall objective of Teachers in Developing Countries is to see “how remuneration and managerial policies help improve teacher effectiveness. [Furthermore], [a]ny measures to improve school effectiveness in poor countries must be found within the existing education budget. Any definition of effectiveness, therefore, must include cost-effectiveness.” Thus, teachers are essentially viewed as economic actors, drawn to and retained by the profession because of an analysis of comparative compensation. Policy makers can improve the achievement of their students by providing teachers with the right incentive packages.

Although most of the authors present a rather nuanced discussion of the pros and cons of different policy initiatives, the recommendations are (as one would expect) more forthright. Alexander Cox Edward discusses the viability of measures such as double shift and multigrade classes, increasing student-teacher ratios, and using teacher aides as ways of reducing costs. Manuel Zymelman, with Joseph DeStefano, present the following suggestions:

1. Delink teachers from other civil servants.
2. Find ways to increase qualifications while mitigating budgetary impact, such as instituting different combinations of training and experience to produce the same teaching proficiency at lower levels of the salary scale.

17 Ibid.
18 World Bank, Education in Sub-Saharan Africa.
21 Manuel Zymelman, with Joseph DeStefano, “Primary School Teachers’ Salaries in Sub-Saharan Africa,” in Farrell and Oliveira, eds., pp. 113–36.
3. Improve data collection and salary forecasting capacity (in order to locate inefficiencies).

From a cursory review of projects in Samoff’s review of donor-financed sector work in Africa, it would appear that these recommendations have had a substantial impact throughout the continent. Double-shift and multiclass teaching, improved information systems to identify “ghost teachers” or to return administrators to the classroom, extended internship periods for student teachers, and the hiring of contract teachers have become quite common remedies throughout Africa for increasing teacher performance. Many projects also include discrete in-service teacher training schemes that usually have no bearing on salary or careers.

These teacher policies suffer from the same weaknesses that other edlib policy formulations do. As most of the contributing authors of Teachers in Developing Countries admit, the research is ambiguous about the effectiveness of any of these measures. In addition, in line with the narrowing of the transformative sense of education to human capital concerns, these policies emphasize the linkages among pay, control, and achievement. Thus, the role of teacher as agent of change is absent from edlib discourse. Finally, the contradiction between increased efficiency and productivity is also glaringly evident in these policies. The reduced means available to the education administration contrasts with the need to increase control over teachers.

Thus, using the edlib paradigm, many development agencies have constructed a certain type of teacher that, in a sense, needs to be tested in the field. The edlib teacher is one input among others in the production process or is a worker whose purpose is precisely defined with regards to quantifiable outputs, namely, the learning achievement of students. How does such a vision of teachers measure up to others, including those held by teachers themselves? I propose the concept of teacher identity as a tool for making such comparisons.

On Teacher Identity

Teacher identity refers to both the personal experience and role of teachers in a given society. It includes both the subjective sense of individuals who engage in the occupation of teaching and how others view teachers. Because these different views of the responsibilities and rights of teachers are often linked to or fueled by competing interests and ideologies, as well as changing circumstances, teacher identity is dynamic and contested. It is the product of competing conceptions of the rights and responsibilities of

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22 Samoff, Analyses (n. 2 above).
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teachers and of different ways of understanding success or effectiveness. These competing perspectives of teacher identity are more or less coherent and more or less shared. This article begins with the assumption that teacher identity is not the same across societies.

Conceptualizing teacher identity in any particular society is a three-step process. The first level of analysis is identifying the specific configuration of cultural schemata. In turn, these schemata together constitute the teacher-identity landscape. The second task is to focus on the experience of teachers at the local level, trying to understand how they navigate within this landscape. One particular feature of the world of teachers is that much of what they do occurs behind the closed doors of the classroom. Thus, competing schemata are mediated through more or less effective mechanisms of control, while teachers themselves play a role (with varying degrees of success) as gatekeepers. This partitioned life is a structural characteristic that defines the modern teaching experience in most countries. However, what is included and excluded (and how effectively) become crucial empirical points for comparison.

The final step examines the state’s education objectives and their influence on how teachers behave and think in certain ways. Because the development and maintenance of a mass education system are important functions of modern nation-states, the role that the state reserves for teachers is a critical factor shaping teacher identity. Of all the forces that influence teachers, the state’s objectives for education are perhaps the most determining ones. More than any other occupation (except perhaps the military), teacher identity must withstand substantial pressures from state apparatuses. The state, however, can rarely attain full control over teachers. Nor can teachers fully escape the ideological, economic, and political force of the state. As a consequence, teachers are often engaged in a pact in which their personal aspirations and expectations are shaped by and come to an accommodation with the demands associated with the state’s specific education goals.

Fundamentally, teacher identity in different societies determines how teachers’ successes or effectiveness will be judged. In a given society, contradictory criteria will invariably be used to make these judgments. Not everyone will agree about what constitutes a “good” teacher. This article argues, however, that different societies will have different competing definitions of ef-

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24 Pearl Robinson’s notion of “cultural schema” is borrowed to express the idea of culturally specific, historically grounded definitions of teachers’ rights and responsibilities (see her “Democratization: Understanding the Relationship between Regime Change and the Culture of Politics,” African Studies Review 37 [1994]: 39–67).

25 Ibid.

26 The term “landscape” comes from D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, Teachers’ Professional Knowledge Landscapes (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995). They use the metaphor of a “knowledge landscape,” where distinct types of knowledge that have dramatically different epistemological bases constitute a teacher’s world.

fectiveness, which are the product of historical, political, economic, and cultural forces specific to those societies.

The teacher-identity literature in the United States, Great Britain, and Australia is quite extensive and thus provides a starting point. Contrasting teachers in France with those in Benin provides two benefits. First, it serves as an informative counterpoint to the perspective of researchers that all share English-speaking educational traditions. Second, France colonized Benin, and thus the French model of education substantially inspired the development of the Benin educational system. Therefore, the similarities and differences between teachers in Benin and France can help underline the specific nature of teacher identity in Benin.

Adopting P. E. Woods’s categorization of teachers, the U.S. teacher-identity landscape consists of three principal cultural schemata. Teachers have a vocational commitment to teaching—caring for pupils and encouraging growth and learning. They also have a professional commitment as subject specialists with an interest in charting a career within schools or the education system. Finally, teachers are often defined as individuals who choose teaching out of the absence of viable alternatives—or in order to decide not to decide what to do with their lives (career continuance). These competing cultural schemata are all present on the teacher-identity landscape in defining the experience of U.S. teachers.

How do U.S. teachers navigate such a contradictory landscape? According to many researchers, a key structural characteristic of U.S. teachers is that they spend much of their time alone with students. Teaching is a lonely occupation, where one’s actions often escape managerial control. John Meyer and Wes Snyder refer to the decoupled nature of education systems, where efforts to control teacher actions are essentially neutralized by loose organizational structures. Yet, teachers’ independence is somewhat overstated.

References:
30 Goodson and Hargreaves.
After all, parental reactions, political demands, and exhortations from academics have a bearing on teachers' self-perceptions and actions. Some of the challenges facing many U.S. teachers are the attempts of administrators, researchers, and politicians to impinge on their independence. One common result is that teachers do not successfully navigate these pressures and feel alienated in their work.34

Finally, many authors conceptualize the state-teacher pact for U.S. teachers as embodied in efforts to professionalize the occupation.35 Essentially, teachers agree to trade their right to play a political role for a promise of relative independence and are given considerable classroom and school autonomy, recognition of professional status, and social security. They are not, however, allowed a role in educational policy formulation. As mentioned above, the state ambivalently respects this pact—continuous attempts to control teacher activity through standardized tests, performance pay schemes, and increased supervision are at variance with this implicit agreement.

For teachers in France, teacher identity can be construed in an entirely different way. There teachers express little ambivalence regarding their occupation.36 As part of a national corps of government employees, teachers in France clearly believe that they have made a lifelong commitment.37 Thus, in the place of career continuance, the French use the schema of civil service. Furthermore, a widely held conception of teachers in France is that they are members of an elite corps, a vanguard, separated from the rest of society by virtue of their historical mission as part of the project of laïcité, the notion in French public education that schooling is secular and supports republican values.38 Finally, teachers are esteemed as intellectuals in French society.39

For teachers in France, navigating these schemata is less convulsive than it is for their English-speaking colleagues. They are members of a national corps of civil servants and are responsible for implementing a relatively centralized national curriculum. Although they enjoy even greater flexibility than teachers in the United States (they are not even held accountable to the administrative staff of the school or to parents), they rarely seek to exercise this autonomy in ways that would vary with the expectations of the system.40

The boundary of the classroom door is nevertheless an important attribute

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34 Clandinin and Connelly.
35 Gerald Grace, "Teacher and the State in Britain: A Changing Relationship," in Lawn and Grace, eds., pp. 193–228; Lawn (n. 5 above); Ian Menter, Work and Identity in the Primary School: A Post-Fordist Analysis (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997); Ozga, ed. (n. 5 above).
37 However, teaching is not necessarily a first-choice profession in France.
39 Muel-Dreyfus; Novoa.
40 Broadfoot and Osborn.
of teaching in France. Rather than managing the incursion of policy makers and academics, French teachers are busy keeping parents out of their classroom.  

“French education by tradition is elitist and utopian.” This is the essence of the educational objective of the French state. On one hand, the French education system is a powerful mechanism of elite reproduction intrinsically tied to the republican state. On the other hand, it very successfully generates and maintains the discourse promoting that all citizens can and should be imbued with French values and culture for the integrity of the nation and that this creates a meritocratic and level playing field, through the national myth of laïcité. The centralized administrative apparatus of the French system of education has served these objectives well, and teachers have contributed greatly to that success by being organized into two corps: the instituteurs (primary school teachers) as the victorious foot soldiers of the utopian goal of laïcité, and the professeurs (secondary school teachers) as the commandos of meritocratic elite reproduction. In contrast with the relatively unstable professionalization pact of teachers in English-speaking countries, teachers in France enter into a lifelong accommodation with the state.

These constructions of U.S. and French teacher identities—based on the literature about teachers in both countries—substantiate the point that teachers in different societies are expected to meet different criteria of what it means to be a successful or effective teacher. In America, there are contradictory demands—internalized by teachers, the community, and the state apparatus—to be both a professional and a caretaker, and teachers are judged according to both sets of criteria. In France, teachers are assessed in terms of whether they are good civil servants implementing the national curriculum and effectively transforming children into either elites or citizens.

Consequently, teachers in different societies will react to similar policies in distinct ways. One can expect teachers in both France and America to resist furiously any effort to, say, introduce performance-based pay, but for different reasons. For U.S. teachers, this is an affront to their self-image as independent professionals, while in France, it competes with the taken-for-granted legitimacy of the national inspection system.

The edlib paradigm has invented a particular kind of teacher identity, which is constructed on the findings of school-effectiveness literature. The

41 Katheryn M. Anderson-Levitt, “Degrees of Distance between Teachers in Parents in Urban France,” *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 20 (1989): 99–117; Muel-Dreyfus claims that the commonly observed tendency of teachers to manifest hostility toward and distance from parents originated in the coping mechanisms of the previous century— instituteurs needed to find strategies to maintain their status and authority in far-flung villages.

edlib model expects teachers to produce student achievement; thus, the only cultural schema present on the teacher-identity landscape defines and limits the role and responsibilities of teachers to their actions in the classroom and to those actions associated with a measurable gain in students’ knowledge or ability. A teacher’s roles in the community and for the nation (and other types of responsibilities or relationships with his or her students) are considered unimportant. The teacher also has no rights aside from those inscribed in a piecemeal contract—their remuneration and security of employment is directly linked to student learning.

In terms of negotiating strategy, teachers are viewed as rational actors and thus essentially driven by a desire to maximize their utility, defined in economic terms. In other words, they will try to earn as much as they can while expending the least amount of effort possible. Their gain is essentially a loss for both the student and the body politic, and thus they are essentially in a stage of confrontation with their employers (the state) and the consumers (parents and students). Hence, teachers’ strategy consists of using the classroom to hide from administrative and pedagogical control. Their strategy is more or less successful to the extent to which the incentive and control structure binds them to produce more student achievement and to which they are able to exercise monopoly power (collective action).

The state’s education objectives are defined as identical to those of the edlib paradigm, and thus the state is concerned only with generating productive graduates at a minimum cost. As mentioned above, the edlib state-teacher pact is a straightforward contract that should link educational outcomes to pay and continued employment. The enforceability of this contract becomes problematic if elite interests capture the state.

Thus, we already have three models of teacher identity, all erected on the basis of either theoretical constructs (such as the case of the edlib teacher) or extensive study of the experience of teachers far away from Benin. We now turn to the case of the Beninese teacher.

Data and Methods

This research relies on two principal sources of data: archival research and interviews with key informants. Most of these data were collected during three trips to the Republic of Benin during the period of May 1997–February 1998. Much information regarding the history of the Beninese teacher corps was obtained through analyzing government documents and reports generated by donors and lending institutions. In addition, Benin has a national pedagogical research institute that possesses an array of reports, evaluations, and white papers on national, regional, and local educational issues.

43 Student achievement in the edlib paradigm is narrowly defined in terms of the attainment of qualities that contribute to greater workplace productivity.
The second source of information comes from interviews with key informants at different levels of the education system. At the national level, interviewees included Ministry of Education officials, union representatives, legislators, representatives of national organizations concerned with educational issues (e.g., Federation of Parents’ Associations, national nongovernmental organizations), representatives of political parties, journalists, and national personalities who regularly disseminate influential opinions on educational issues.

The rest of the interviewees were located at the school and community level. Five circumscriptions scolaires (or school districts) located in three different regions were chosen for this research. These circumscriptions are representative of different conditions that exist for teachers in Benin (e.g., rural, urban, isolated). In each of the circumscriptions, between five and 10 schools and their communities were selected, and the school director and a number of teachers, as well as representatives of local parents association and local dignitaries, were interviewed. Most interviews were one-on-one, although in some cases group interviews were conducted. Table 1 presents certain attributes of the interviewees.

The basic data set was drawn from open-ended interviews. This produced a large quantity of text to systematize. The methodological strategy used to
analyze these data consisted of two steps: first, the responses were reviewed and categorized within each category of the interview schedule. From these initial categories, the key responsibilities and rights of Beninese teachers evoked by interviewees were identified and subsequently served as the building blocks of different cultural schemata.

The objective of this research is to identify the configuration of cultural schemata that define the Beninese teacher-identity landscape. Consequently, different schemata are not associated with specific actors. Older French teachers are not vanguards, and younger teachers are necessarily civil servants. U.S. male teachers are not necessarily professionals, and female teachers are not necessarily caring. Such a deployment of teacher-identity schemata defeats one of the purposes of this research, which is to identify different configurations of schemata in different societies.

The analysis of the data collected proceeds in two steps. First, a brief history of the teacher in Benin is presented. Second, applying the approach outlined in the previous section, a multifaceted depiction of teachers is developed.

**Beninese Teachers: A Story of Unrequited Ambitions**

Beninese teachers have long been engaged in an uncertain struggle to maintain their social status. Teaching in Benin has always constituted an ambiguous means of social mobility. Many of the first public school teachers were originally members of a particular social group—the brésiliens—who were held in high esteem by both colonial and indigenous authorities. From the mid-nineteenth century, taking advantage of their linkages with the Americas and Europeans, many freed slaves from Brazil and certain Caribbean nations settled in Dahomey and quickly established themselves as landowners and traders in the southern coastal towns.

These teachers were thus already established members of the Dahoman elite. As the teacher corps evolved and recruited from a wider range of social backgrounds, the linkage between the teaching occupation and elite status became increasingly tenuous. During the colonial period, teaching was established as the principal means to give ambitious Dahomans access to posts in the colonial state apparatus. Not many teachers were successful in attaining positions in the prestigious colonial administration, and many were disap-

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45 In fact, most individual interviewees invoked several distinct (and sometimes contradictory) notions of the nature of Beninese teacher identity.

46 The Republic of Benin has gone through two name changes since independence. Until 1974, it was called the Republic of Dahomey. Then it was renamed the People’s Republic of Benin. In 1989, the name was changed to the present Republic of Benin.

pointed with the limited status and opportunities once they attained these coveted promotions. Since this period, teaching has continued to constitute a capricious springboard for those seeking social mobility.

The very structure of the teaching corps amplified the tenuous nature of the link between teaching and social mobility. A constant of the Beninese education system has been that a large number of second-tier teachers vied for entry into a relatively smaller clique of elite teachers. Periodically, colonial and then national education authorities have met increased demand for schooling by creating a new corps of underqualified and lower-paid teachers. There have always been several different categories of teachers with different levels of compensation and status working side by side in Beninese schools. During most of the colonial period, Dahomey had two distinct education systems (private and public), with separate teacher corps receiving different levels of training and compensation and facing different career opportunities. Over time, however, the public education system subsumed the private sector, and the stratification of the teacher corps eventually shaped the social mobility potential of the teaching occupation. During the early 1960s through the 1970s, the Dahoman teacher corps was made up of instituteurs ordinaires and instituteurs adjoints. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Dahoman authorities promoted most moniteurs (teacher aids or class supervisors) to instituteur adjoint status.

The revolutionary regime of Mathieu Kérékou that began in the mid-1970s recruited over 5,000 Jeunes Instituteurs Révolutionnaires (JIR; young revolutionary teachers) to teach primary school. The JIR were part of a comprehensive education reform called the Ecole Nouvelle, whose objectives included rendering more democratic the whole education experience. The reform was eventually rejected by most Beninese stakeholders, in part because of the low quality of instruction rendered by the JIR. Lower secondary school graduates were given one month of training and deployed into schools throughout the country.

Since independence, teachers have represented the largest group of civil servants and have regularly flexed their collective muscle with profound consequences for Benin’s body politic. Numerous coups and unending changes in government during its first 15 years of independence gave Dahomey the notoriety of having one of the most unstable regimes in Africa. Teachers, often constituting (along with the military) one of the most significant social groups, played a key role in fueling this instability, which precipitated the collapse of each government. Indeed, an interesting dynamic was set in mo-

tion. Dissatisfied with their diminishing social, political, and economic standing, teachers were easily mobilized against the regime in power. They constituted a key force during the fight for independence. Their collective action contributed to the string of regime changes from 1960 to 1972. Secondary school teachers were the key force in support of Kérékou’s regime. Finally, their mobilization in 1989 precipitated the fall of Kérékou’s regime, and their support for opposition parties during the 1990s led to the electoral loss of Nicephore Soglo in 1996. Their successive political achievements were always bitter ones, as new leaders were unable or unwilling to reverse the slide in teachers’ status and power. As one teacher in the north of Benin contends, “We brought Kérékou to power in the 1970s, we chased him away in the 1980s, we brought him back again in 1996—but the joke is still on us” (interview, Benin teacher, 1997)

The cycle has continued to the present day. From 1995 through 1998, Benin faced a tremendous teacher shortage. With a hiring freeze in place, class sizes ballooned in urban areas, and one or two teachers ran many rural schools. Evidently, previous projections of student enrollment had seriously underestimated the demand for schooling that the new political and economic regime would engender. The government responded by creating yet again a new teacher corps. First, a preemployment scheme for university students was diverted to provide more than 1,000 temporary teachers. In 1996, the government, in agreement with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), set targets for hiring contract teachers, who were to be paid out of the national budget. The ministry eventually hired 3,000 teachers under a 2-year contract that began with the 1997–98 school year, paying them less than half what civil-service teachers made.

Salary freezes were also introduced in the late 1980s. The Kérékou regime eventually fell because it was no longer able to pay salaries on time—salary freezes have been a key way for the current regime to keep fiscal solvency. A new dynamic, however, has been put in place—where promised promotions in effect became salary arrears. For example, in 1996, teachers were paid the salary levels of their positions based on the civil-service salary scale of 1991. The discrepancy between what teachers were paid and what they were promised constituted a key point of contention that led to successive strike actions throughout the 1990s.

Cultural schemata defining the responsibilities and rights of teachers have evidently changed as teacher employment conditions have evolved. Social

50 Allen, “Benin.”
mobility had become increasingly bound to the definition of teachers as state employees. Also, the social status of teachers has steadily declined. From their status as models and experts through the 1960s—similar to the cultural schema of intellectual-pedagogue in France—teachers under the revolutionary period no longer enjoyed the popular confidence that they knew what they were doing in the classroom. Indeed, this makes for a poignant contrast with teachers in France, where teacher qualifications grew as the size of the education system also grew.

The negotiation strategies of teachers have also shifted. During the colonial period, teachers attempted to be included in the social and political elite by mimicking those who had already attained elite status. Since independence, teachers have focused on trading their assets for benefits proffered by the state. In addition, teachers went from being relatively successful (although never completely so) in their negotiation strategies to experiencing abject failure.

Finally, the pact between state and teachers has changed over time. Teachers increasingly viewed their jobs in relation to access to state resources or to the power to extract resources that state affiliation should provide them. Those who became teachers, however, had fewer and fewer social credentials. Under the revolutionary period, they seized opportunities to act as go-betweens for the state authorities, to the detriment of the communities they served. Thus, teaching represented a strategy for social promotion because teachers believed that they would be compensated by those same authorities. Teachers’ objectives (as well as those of the state), however, were never completely achieved.

The Beninese Teacher-Identity Landscape

The responses of interviewees to questions about teacher roles and responsibilities can be mapped onto two axes of orientation. First, two diametrically opposed notions of the nature of teaching define Beninese teacher identity. On the one hand, teachers are defined by their qualifications and their possession of certain types of knowledge. On the other hand, they are defined by the active rendering of their skills and knowledge in the community or in the classroom. In other words, teaching is either being or doing education.

The second dimension of the Beninese teacher-identity landscape concerns the relationship of teachers with other actors in the education environment. On the one hand, teachers are beholden to the state and are narrowly accountable to the objectives of the government’s education project or to the specific terms of contract (both implicit and explicit) that exist between the government and the teacher. On the other hand, teachers are responsible to the communities where they are deployed and to the children in their classrooms.

Different combinations along these two axes essentially helped locate the
different cultural schemata that populate the Beninese teacher-identity landscape (see fig. 1). The terms used to define each cultural schema represent the most prevalent descriptors used by the interviewees themselves.

1. Teacher as *phare* (beacon). Teachers are vessels of special knowledge available to the students and community. They are also conduits between the community and the outside world by virtue of this special knowledge. In the classroom, they convey this precious knowledge to the children, not so much through the act of teaching as through their presence. They are thus capable of transforming both the children and the milieu by their very appearance. However, it is the responsibility of the children (and the community) to take advantage of what the teacher has to offer. When children do not learn something, it is generally considered to be the fault of the child or of the parents. In return, teachers expect high levels of respect and a privileged position within the community.

2. Teacher as *fonctionnaire* (civil servant). Teachers are members of a special club that provides them privileged access to state and community resources. In their communities, they can (if properly compensated) serve as conduits of communication with the government. This is quite different from the cultural schema associated with civil servants that exists in France. In Benin, however, being a civil servant has a very particular connotation: one has privileged access to state and community resources. These resources are made available to civil servants through elaborately codified rules (salary pay scales, set procedures for promotions, deployments, and benefits). They are also accessible through a peculiarly Beninese mechanism, *à côté*. By virtue of membership in the *fonctionariat* (civil service), teachers claim access to a host of peripheral entitlements, many of dubious legality. Fundamentally, Beninese teachers are *fonctionnaires* who happen to teach. In France, by comparison, teachers are teachers who happen to be civil servants.

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53 This term refers to income other than salary that civil servants receive both officially as part of their employment and unofficially as a result of their station (per diems, allowances, bribes, etc.).
3. Teacher as *sacerdoce* (dedicated teacher). The teacher is a self-sacrificing, hard-working good person who is a surrogate parent, a moral example, and a key aid to the locality at which he or she is deployed. In return the teacher can expect to take part in community resources as an honored member of that community. A key notion for such *sacerdotal* teachers is that they will receive *considération* from the community for their efforts. *Considération* can include respect and a thank you but usually also has tangible manifestations in gifts. Unlike for the *phare*, the gift is given in recognition for a specific act.

4. Teachers as *efficace* (efficient teacher). These teachers are responsible for ensuring that pupils pass their end-of-primary school exams; whether these children actually learn anything is another issue. Here, the teacher’s responsibility is essentially to ensure that students pass the final exam in order to continue on to subsequent grades, particularly to secondary schools. No particular benefits accrue to the teacher as a consequence of this.

This constellation of teacher-identity schemata has many obvious similarities to and differences from schemata described for the U.S. and French teacher-identity landscapes. The distinctiveness of this set of schemata lies with the specific location that Beninese teachers inhabit with regards to the community, on the one hand, and the state, on the other. The identity of U.S. teachers is defined by the boundaries that have developed between them and education authorities and that define their relative autonomy from the state. In France, teacher identity flows from how the state has defined the teacher’s role. In the Beninese case, teachers straddle both worlds in such a way as to find themselves in an ambiguous location with regards to both the community and the state.

**Teacher Strategies in Negotiating Their Identity**

The different schemata on the teacher-identity landscape each define teacher “effectiveness” differently. Teachers are successful when they act in a recognizable manner as a *phare*, *fonctionnaire*, *sacerdoce*, or *efficace*. Overwhelmingly, however, interviewees claimed that today’s teachers fall considerably short of expectations, as defined by the four schemata above.

Thus, according to most actors, most teachers are illegitimate. Because of their steady decline in status throughout the history of the Beninese education system, they are accused of not attending to the responsibilities associated with any of the four schemata. Teachers are not *phares* because they are so undertrained and unqualified as to have nothing to offer to either the student or the community. In addition, they are barely *fonctionnaires*, as they are unable to parlay their position into *à côté*. They are certainly not *sacerdoce*, given their lax morals and lack of community commitment. And
finally, because they are certainly not responsible for the children’s success at exams, they cannot be deemed *efficace*.

As a consequence, teachers mobilize one of three strategies in order to be identified according to any or all of the schemata that occupy the teacher-identity landscape. The first strategy is perhaps the most surprising. Teachers actively portray themselves as victims. Interviewees incessantly discussed how teachers were unfairly considered to be the lowliest class of people in Benin. Fundamentally, teachers turn the logic of the illegitimate teacher on its head: teachers do not fulfill the responsibilities of any of the four schemata because their rights, as defined by these schemata, are not respected. This argument is not couched in defiant terms (i.e., teachers are not on strike). Rather, teachers claim they are not given the tools to fulfill their assigned responsibilities. For example, I saw a sign that a teacher had put on his classroom wall in a school in an isolated village: “And the Lord beheld our WORK and He was very pleased. He asked to see our SALARY, turned to us and began to cry.” Because neither the mostly illiterate parents in the community nor his second graders could read this sign, one must ask with whom this teacher was trying to communicate. He appeared to be attempting to reinforce his view of himself as a victim.

The second strategy constitutes a direct endeavor to regain the knowledge base and qualifications that accompany the *phare* and *fonctionnaire* teacher-identity schemata. Here, teachers invest heavily to obtain a civil service promotion. In this way they hope to gain access to the elite core of the teaching ranks and thus lay claim to the rights of certain key teacher-identity schemata. Over the last few years, teachers have been given the opportunity to pass the Certificat d’Aptitude Professionnelle (CAP; certification of professional aptitude) exam that enables them to become full *instituteurs* (most teachers, until the 1990s, were in the *instituteur adjoint* category of the civil service). Teachers have willingly invested substantial resources to earn this qualification—much more than would be justified by the expected financial return. Interviews with teachers revealed that, on average, they were willing to pay the equivalent of 9 months’ salary in preparations, training, and bribes in order to succeed at this exam.54

By eventually passing this exam, teachers received their promotion, albeit with a certain inevitable disappointment. Often, anytime from 3 to 5 years after passing the exam, teachers’ salaries would actually increase with little possibility of retroactive payment for those years. Although the financial incentives were obviously important, teachers evidently pursued this strategy in order to increase their status and recognition among their peers.

The third strategy has been partially discussed in the historical survey. Teachers actively seek to assist politicians who aspire to government office in

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54 “Training” usually consisted of visits by education officials offering tidbits of advice and expecting compensation.
order to benefit from possible promotions or access to state resources. Practically all teachers who were interviewed claimed to be militants for different political parties. By helping a particular person gain office, teachers expect to be appointed to administrative posts outside of the education sector. At the very least, they count on being handsomely compensated for their assistance: “Me, for example, I knew one of the political party chiefs. During the campaign they promised that if they became ministers of directors of cabinet, I would no longer have to teach primary school” (interview, student teacher in rural area, 1997).

Thus, an essential notion for this strategy is the recurring theme of a tremplin (springboard). By embarking on a political program, teachers aim to leave the teaching profession for greener pastures within the civil service. Although there is very little chance that the student teacher quoted above will ever be able to attain the high-level government position he seeks, it continues to appear to him as a viable strategy. Unlike teachers in America, who navigate their particular teacher-identity landscape by closing the classroom door, Beninese teachers do whatever they can to escape the school.

Unfortunately, no matter how hard teachers run and maneuver, they are unable to find their niche on the teacher-identity landscape. Ironically, each strategy tends to reinforce characterizations of teachers as illegitimate, keeping them off the Beninese teacher-identity landscape. As victims, they appear more pitiful. Their new qualifications are ridiculed. Their attempts at political promotion are generally thought of as naked attempts to earn additional income. Thus, despite all efforts, teachers continue to be trapped in their classrooms and, thus, remain illegitimate teachers.

Teachers and the State

Beninese state education objectives are similar to education objectives found in many other countries. Fundamentally, the state maintains a dual goal: to create meritocratic conditions for social mobility and to ensure the reproduction of the elite. Both objectives are important for maintaining the legitimacy of the postcolonial state. In the case of Benin, as for many developing countries, particularly in Africa, these two objectives are intrinsically bound to public sector employment. Because the existing labor market does not require a great number of educated workers, the civil service sector remains the principal employer for those seeking social mobility through the school system.

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The opportunities for social mobility through state employment have historically been a limited possibility (even more so in recent years), and thus state education objectives face a clear dilemma: how can access to education opportunities be increased as the flow of qualified people to positions of elite status (i.e., state employment) is being limited? A key means of doing this is to provide additional opportunities for obtaining education while limiting the possibility of succeeding at schooling. A highly selective exam system is one instrument that can be mobilized for this purpose; another is to under-invest in the quality of instruction. As a Ministry of Education cabinet official says, “The Beninese are fundamentally elitist. They understand that not everyone will make it through school, that only a small minority will be able to become civil servants. They just want to be sure that the process is transparent and based on merit. This idea that everyone should attain a certain minimal qualification is just completely foreign to Benin” (interview, February 1998).

Of all the inputs that the state provides to communities to manifest its education objectives, the teacher is the most central. Communities often mobilize most other resources for schooling, constructing school buildings and furniture, purchasing pedagogical materials and textbooks, and providing for school supplies. The state signals its commitment to education by providing the teacher, the most expensive input.

This renders the teacher a potential threat to the state. Teachers are everywhere, are capable of political action that closes schools, and are expensive. As Beninese history shows, teachers have been key in the fall of every regime. However, certain characteristics of the teacher corps have evolved to dampen this threat:

1. A stratified teacher corps has evolved as a permanent feature of the education system that both limits the costs of schooling and makes it more difficult for teachers to mobilize.
2. With the continuing promise that teachers can become members of the civil service, their calls to change the system radically will always be relatively muted.
3. When teachers play minor political roles and thus believe in the possibility of significant promotion outside the teacher corps, the potential dangers present in teachers’ ambitions are further deflated.

A key feature of the state-teacher pact in Benin, however, is that it is continually breached by the state. The state is unable to mobilize the resources necessary to honor its commitment to teachers, and teachers subsequently rise up against the regime in place. Furthermore, by circumscribing the pedagogical effectiveness of teachers, the state’s education objectives are also undermined. Although wary of an overabundance of educational success, as the experience of the Ecole Nouvelle shows, the state’s legitimacy can collapse if the education system loses its credibility.
The evolution of the teacher corps reflects the development of the education objectives of the Beninese state in the postcolonial period. The colonial authorities created public education opportunities as a way to bind the indigenous populations of the colonies to the metropole. However, a profound contradiction lay at the heart of these education objectives: these people were not being recruited as citizens of the French Republic but, rather, as subjects of the French Empire. Teachers were, of course, the uneasy representatives of this essentially flawed endeavor. More important, teachers directly experienced the contradiction of the colonial education objectives with their partial inclusion by the colonial elite. With its independence in 1960, Benin’s education system became a key resource for an elaborate spoils system. As the state expanded opportunities for government employment, becoming a teacher was one possible reward. Teachers also quickly understood that they could provide national political leaders with access to vital resources (the allegiance of local populations) and, much in the spirit of the political climate of the time, attempted to parlay this to their advantage. The education objectives of the revolutionary period (1974–90) consisted of a new contradictory mix—a concerted ideological scheme to change the objectives of the education system and a more mundane strategy to purchase the legitimacy of the regime through an expansion of educational opportunities. This endeavor eventually failed, and an illegitimate state created conditions that reinforced the illegitimacy of teachers.

The “Global” versus the “Local” in Teacher Identity

Beninese teacher identity challenges almost every assumption of edlib teacher identity, as the schemata that populate the Beninese teacher-identity landscape are substantially more complex. Beninese teachers are expected to perform a much greater range of feats than simply ensuring student learning. They are expected to act as models to students and communities, they are responsible for moral education, and they must honor a specific contract with the employer—the state—that emphasizes respect for procedure rather than results. At first glance, the efficace schema has the most in common with the edlib teacher-identity model, as both focus on student achievement. In the case of Benin, however, the emphasis is on exam success for the purposes of social mobility and screening rather than on student learning for higher economic productivity.

By portraying teachers as rational actors and free-riders, the edlib model assumes away the complex pressures that define and blur teacher interests. Teachers in Benin are evidently motivated by money and believe that incentives should accompany expectations. As victims, teachers claim that they cannot act in certain expected ways because the terms of their contract are not honored. However, they expect to be treated as fonctionnaires or phares and held to the standards of what it means to be a fonctionnaire or phare in
Beninese society. A key part of their attraction to the occupation of teaching is that it provides a gateway to prestige and status in Beninese society. The fact that this prestige and status remain infuriatingly outside their grasp, rather than providing opportunities for easy money, constitutes the principal factor that motivates teachers as individual and collective actors.

Edlib teacher identity assumes that the state is principally concerned with facilitating economic productivity and couches any deviation from this objective as a sign that state apparatuses have been captured by special interests. In contrast, the Beninese state-teacher pact portrays a state whose very logic consists of legitimizing the state’s claim over community resources and controlling the distribution of access to what consequently become state resources. The edlib model essentially misconstrues the very nature of the Beninese state.

Edlib advocates might retort that what is described here is a sick system that can be fixed if the proper policy framework and incentive system is put in place. Herein lies the most fundamental flaw of the edlib paradigm. The schemata identified by this research are clearly linked to the specific historical evolution of the Beninese education system and are embedded in a particular political economy. The edlib model, by contrast, separates teachers from their historical, political, social, and cultural contexts with, as will be discussed below, devastating unexpected consequences.

Policy Implications

Benin education authorities face a dilemma when setting teacher policy. On the one hand, the Beninese government is expected to provide educational opportunities to all children, which, particularly with pressure from the EFA movement, has traditionally meant deploying an instructor paid from public funds. On the other hand, competing demands for public resources, the extremely poor domestic resource base available for government expenditure, and the sheer number of teachers required to meet the goal of universal access to education simply do not add up in fiscal terms. Compounding these issues, teachers (also for a number of reasons) fervently expect a certain level of compensation and a number of opportunities as emblems of their own professional legitimacy.

The Beninese government has traditionally used two policy instruments in response to this dilemma. First, it has frozen or slowed down the growth of the salary bill generated by the existing teacher corps through measures that usually affected all government employees (reduction of benefits, freezes in hiring, promotions or automatic salary increases, etc.). Second, the government created new cohorts of lesser-paid teachers, usually with the promise of eventual qualification. Rather than providing educational opportunities at a more reasonable cost, these policies have tended to create an embittered
teacher corps, education of questionable legitimacy, little fiscal respite, and political instability.

Through the recent creation of the contract teacher corps and current hiring and salary freezes, government authorities (at the urging of foreign assistance agencies) have revisited these very policy instruments. They have once again attempted to contain the government’s salary bill while expanding the size of the teacher corps through these well-worn strategies; in all likelihood, they will face the same unsatisfactory results.

What does this article’s depiction of Beninese teacher identity provide to policy makers interested in breaking this cycle of policy failure? Carnoy’s distinction between competitiveness-driven and finance-driven reforms provides a starting point.

Reforms that aim to change or improve the outcomes of education (including efforts to render graduates more competitive) will eventually induce some sort of change in the expected behavior of teachers. This article has identified different definitions of teacher effectiveness that are specific to and recognizable on the Beninese teacher-identity landscape. As mentioned above, teachers are successful when they radiate knowledge to their students (the phare), closely follow the terms of their civil service contract (fonctionnaire), are successful community and student advocates (sacerdote), or send many of their students on to lower secondary school (efficace). Thus, if policy makers are interested in promoting a new definition of teacher effectiveness (e.g., linked to success in standardized testing), they will inevitably compete with these historically grounded and widely accepted notions of teacher rights and responsibilities.

One response might be to try to discredit or do away with other less palatable teacher-identity schemata (the introduction of contract teachers, e.g., is a thinly veiled strategy to displace the fonctionnaire schema). This constitutes a formidable task. For example, attempts to discredit the fonctionnaire schema have been interpreted as simply another assault on the legitimacy of teachers, one that has led to teachers being less motivated and accountable.

A potentially more promising response would be consciously to link desired behaviors to schemata already present on the Beninese teacher-identity landscape. Rather than introduce parallel achievement tests, policy makers should consider incorporating new materials and objectives within the existing exam system—thus taking advantage of the efficace identity schema. Rather than doing away with fonctionnaire teachers, they should establish à côté that are linked to certain kinds of teacher behavior (e.g., tangible benefits linked to percentage increases in pass rates). In a related manner, changing the contents of the CAP exam to include new pedagogical approaches might be more effective than the current practice of providing in-service training opportunities that are not at all linked to teacher career paths. Another approach would be to change the CAP examination process to include hours
of accredited in-service teacher training sessions as an eligibility requirement. One way of harnessing the *sacerdoce* schema might be for both communities and teachers to receive *à côté* when a particular school has achieved significant increases in results. These suggestions all reflect a common strategy: use recognizable behavioral norms and acceptable types of sanctions as tools for change.

If the objective is for teachers to adopt more active, child-centered pedagogical methodologies, the *phare* schema does admittedly stand out as a formidable obstacle. As Meyer and Snyder indicate, the attachment of teachers (and parents) to more classical pedagogical approaches should not be underestimated.\(^{57}\) Transforming what it means to be a prestigious, feared, and respected teacher (i.e., *phare*) to include child-centered pedagogical approaches will necessarily represent a long-term goal. Changes in the exam structure, *à côté*, and the qualification system may gradually chip away at the more egregious aspects of the *phare* schema, but not without major resistance from every corner of the education community. As one possible strategy, policy makers could attempt to increase the status and prestige of teachers exhibiting certain preferred behaviors through prizes, awards, and promotions. This would necessitate that education officials become convinced of the need for such changes in teacher behavior, which is certainly not a given factor.

This leads us to examine the other side of the teacher-identity equation. Whatever the objectives of policy makers or the commonly held notions of good teaching, teachers and other Beninese education actors clearly tie these outcomes to two key inducements: compensation (and opportunities for compensation) commensurate with perceived comparison occupational groups and tangible signs of respect. Without these, Beninese education actors believe that teachers are doomed to be illegitimate. Consequently, policy makers cannot ignore or belittle the importance of a meaningful incentive system.

To be a teacher in Benin means that one has (barely) attained membership in a select part of society—mostly populated by civil servants—that entitles one to certain privileges and types of remuneration. Aside from employment security and an administratively defined salary that is disbursed on a regular basis, teachers also expect access to other revenue and payments in kind (*à côté*) to compensate for particular working conditions, for acts beyond the call of duty, or for recognition of the special role that they play.

As a consequence, it would be of limited effectiveness to render teaching a less secure occupation or one that is paid much less than other occupations that require similar levels of experience and training. Rather, it would be more fruitful to tie changes in behavior explicitly to the payment of new forms of *à côté* that are made specifically available to teachers. For example, the use of housing allowances or other benefits made available to teachers

\(^{57}\) Meyer and Snyder (n. 33 above).
who are deployed to difficult locations would be a readily accepted action. In addition, teachers could be given prizes with cash rewards if, say, they have produced significant changes in exam results with their children.

This research has made evident the centrality for teachers of being treated with respect. Teachers often make reference to considération as a key expectation and deplore its absence. Policy makers would be misled, however, if they believe that signs of considération could somehow reduce remunerative expectations of teachers. For Beninese teachers, considération is clearly tied to their material standing. First, it is often manifest through gifts. Second, teachers and other education actors clearly relate the kind of respect that a teacher can command with their material standing in the community. A bonjour maître costs little—but the trappings a teacher must possess to command such deferential greeting may be quite expensive. Some policy makers might want to encourage communities to provide greater levels of considération to deserving teachers. Such approaches, however, are really nothing more than a variation of more general fiscal strategies to transfer certain social sector expenses away from the government to the community. Whether the community can afford such expenses and whether it makes good social policy sense to expect the community to incur extra educational costs would be the product of other sorts of analysis. What is important to keep in mind is that considération is not a cost-free factor that can somehow be substituted for teacher remuneration.58

Policy makers are correctly frustrated with the fonctionnaire teacher-identity schema. Teachers appear to be more interested in their rank in the civil service hierarchy—and what this might mean for their access to state resources—than in the quality of their teaching. Some analysts claim that the civil service status of Beninese teachers contributes to their high costs and to their lowered accountability.

This article points to a more nuanced explanation that leads to other policy parameters. Interviewees commonly discussed past teachers as highly accountable, effective, and qualified. Throughout this article, a variety of reasons have been put forward to explain why today’s civil servant teachers exhibit fewer desirable characteristics. Being overpaid does not appear to be a principal factor.

Civil servant teachers claim that the explicit and implicit terms of their contracts have not been honored. Teachers who are civil servants believe that they have been betrayed and thus act accordingly. They believe that they have been promised (1) a steady salary commensurate with other workers whom they perceive as equals, (2) job security, (3) opportunities for social

58 Consideration may be a more cost-effective incentive for preferred teacher behaviors than increases in pay, or even à côté. Policy makers might want to consider subsidizing considération as a way of sanctioning preferred teacher behavior. This, however, would not reduce the education costs associated with teachers. Finally, it is unlikely that subsidizing considération would offset the damage of salary cuts or freezes to teacher performance; however measured.
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mobility, and (4) high social status. In contrast, their salaries have been frozen, they are at risk of civil service reductions, they must find ways to escape the teacher profession in order to advance, and they are ridiculed. As a consequence, they engage in a host of behaviors and tactics that are detrimental to the quality of instruction (e.g., moonlighting, unacceptable social behavior, increased tardiness, and absenteeism). It is not that teachers are indifferent to instructional quality because they are civil servants whose salaries are insensitive to measures of performance. Being a member of the civil service does not necessarily cause unteacher-like behavior—rather, it appears to result from the betrayal of the terms of membership.

In addition, successive financial crises have made it virtually impossible to maintain the institutional infrastructure necessary to support a functional and effective centralized civil service teaching corps. The Beninese inspectorate is understaffed and underequipped and has too many conflicting responsibilities. As discussed throughout this article, the quality of preservice and in-service teacher training continues to decline. It remains an empirical point that teachers who are not civil servants will be easier to manage, render accountable, and maintain at high levels of technical expertise. That supervising a contract teacher corps would be less costly is also an assumption to be tested.

So far, this article provides little solace to those seeking ways of reducing or containing the teacher salary bill in Benin, but it does not aim to belittle the importance of education costs. If Benin is to reach full enrollment of its primary school age population, current unit costs—driven mostly by teacher salaries—certainly present the most distressing constraint. Benin must increase the present number of school places by more than 50 percent to accommodate all the children in the country today. Benin’s population growth of more than 3 percent per year also needs to be factored in. At current primary unit costs, projected economic growth will not create the additional resources necessary to expand educational opportunities sufficiently in the near or medium term.59

Unfortunately, these findings show that, without risking political and social instability, on the one hand, or a decline in the quality of instruction, on the other hand, the margin for containing teacher salaries is quite slim. Thus, accelerating the rate by which educational opportunities can be made available by reducing the cost of teachers is not a very promising option, as the history of Beninese teaching has already illustrated. If Benin is to use domestically generated resources eventually to reach universal primary enrollment, policy makers should probably curtail their ambitions.

Benin, however, has never intended or been expected to attain its educational objectives without external assistance. In fact, foreign assistance agencies have accelerated the rate by which they provide resources for the edu-

cation sector. As mentioned above, these organizations have categorically refused to finance teacher salaries, unless these teachers are not civil servants. Considering the findings here, however, foreign assistance agencies might want to reconsider their policies in this area. Many assistance agencies claim that their investment is driven by the belief that education contributes to economic development, democratization, and peace. They have also tended to emphasize quality and equitable access as the desired outcomes of their assistance, as compared with simple increases in enrollment capacity. Under these circumstances, it appears contradictory to steer clear of the most important part of the education bill—teacher salaries.

A common argument against subsidizing teacher salaries has been that it is not a sustainable investment on the part of foreign assistance agencies. Generally, agency officials argue that foreign financial resources should catalyze development and aim to create self-sustaining mechanisms of finance for key activities. What is typically unclear in most sustainability argumentation is that the time frame remains blurred. No matter how one conducts budget forecasts, it is unlikely that Benin will be in a position to finance its own education system for at least a generation. If foreign assistance agencies want their investments in education to bring forth some sort of return, this assistance will need to be sustained for quite some time to come. Why not then finance the teacher?

It appears that more and more foreign assistance agencies are coming to the same conclusions. New financing facilities, such as education sector investment programs, increasingly focus on recurrent education budgets. At the same time, these same agencies are insisting that a new sort of contracting system be put in place for teachers in countries like Benin that have civil servant teacher corps. As seen above, it is not a given that non–civil servant teachers will necessarily become better teachers. Perhaps then, such schemes simply represent a form of ideological “sour grapes”—because edlib analysts could not ignore teachers, they will punish them instead.

Foreign assistance agencies may begin to use existing teacher schemata to shape their interventions, pay more attention to the existing incentive structures, or even finance teacher salaries. These efforts alone, however, will not address a fundamental policy constraint brought into focus here: the complicated relationship of the state to the education system and, by extension, to the teacher corps. Teachers, in the eyes of state officials, are not just pedagogues with varying abilities and incentives to teach children the basics. They are, intermittently, a potentially dangerous social group, a conduit of social control, and a sign of state legitimacy.

This places certain policy makers within the Benin education system and within foreign assistance agencies in a difficult position. The underlying priorities and logic of the state contrast starkly with those of individuals who are primarily interested in increasing the “competitiveness” of education sys-
tems. This reality, rather than the vested interests of teachers, is perhaps the most formidable obstacle to changing teacher policy in Benin.

It is certainly beyond the scope of this article to address how and whether foreign assistance agencies or any other actor should change the nature of the Beninese state. This said, the presence of states with an alternative logic has certain important implications for teacher policy in Benin. This case—of Beninese teacher identity—confirms a point made more generally by James Ferguson: that ignoring the political context of “development efforts” and the historical basis of the problem at hand is not only shortsighted but will generally lead to abject failure.\(^{60}\) Policy analyses based on purely technical evaluations, without an understanding of the pact between the state and the teacher, will generally lead to well-worn recommendations that have already proven their uselessness. In the case of Benin, any policy framework that does not include a coherent strategy for addressing teacher valorization or professionalization will not lead to the intended results.

Foreign assistance agencies have begun to dabble with attempts to change the nature of states such as Benin. Neoliberals have tried to dismantle and starve state apparatuses; democracy advocates have urged a creation or freeing of civil society. Both tasks have usually been devoid of any political or historical analysis, particularly with respect to how different forces and interests have engaged in complicated struggles for power. Typically, these agencies then act with unintended consequences. An alternative strategy would be to engage the political struggle that is unfolding directly and to create explicit alliances with key actors in order to induce change.

In the case of teacher policy in Benin, a key relevant finding of this article is that teachers have historically been kept outside the policy process. Teachers—like parents, students, and most other actors interested in the education system—are really victims of contradictory state education objectives. Thus, this research suggests that rather than punish teachers for the confusion of the state, they should be engaged as allies in a struggle to (re)instate the transformative power of schooling.