



**NATIONAL EDUCATION COLLABORATION TRUST  
EDUCATION DIALOGUESA**

**THE DECOLONISATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLING:  
*"LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD"***

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# OF SEDIMENTS AND TRAILS IN DECOLONIZING THE CURRICULUM: A TRANSFORMATIVE RESPONSE FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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## 1. Introduction

That “Education” professionals, experts, policy makers and practitioners are gathered here today, to address this most pressing issue, is what matters the most. It may have come much too late, but we are here, determined to find ways to un-think, and re-learn what was given to us so many centuries ago, and add strategic anchors so that the base is strong, not weak; resilient not rigid.

I will outline 3 caveats to form the base of my inputs.

### **Caveat 1: The historian’s role**

Howard Zinn, in his book: A People’s History of the United States in referring to the representations of history, stated that there are several paths available to the historian. One can lie outright about the past. Or one can omit facts which might lead to unacceptable conclusions. Or, one can take what has become a fairly “safe” way: i.e. mention the truth quickly, then proceed to bury it a mass of other information.

This third option, Zinn states, is the way to say to the reader with a certain infectious calm: yes, mass murder took place, but it is not that important - - it should weigh very little in our final judgements; it should affect very little what we do in the world. He argues that while it is a useless scholarly exercise to indulge in accusations, judgements and condemnations, ***the easy acceptance of atrocities as a deplorable but necessary price to pay for progress*** (imperialism, colonialism, Hiroshima, and Vietnam – to save Western civilization; Kronstadt and Hungary to save socialism; nuclear proliferation to save

us all) *is still with us*. One reason why these atrocities are still with us is that **we have learned how to bury them in a mass of other facts**<sup>1</sup>.

This kind of **calculated indifference**, coming from the apparent objectivity of the scholar, or policy adviser or development expert, **is easily accepted and ingested**. It is therefore **more deadly**. The **quiet acceptance of conquest and murder in the name of progress** is only one approach to history, in which history is told from the point of view of the conquerors, and this single fact has underpinned the essence of the struggle of what can be called the African, or at times the “Third World” perspective since the beginning of the anti-colonial struggles to the present.

**As we gather here, the rummage of the victims, tainted with the culture that oppresses them, as they seek to find some way out of the impasse of dehumanisation that surrounds them**, may, at times lead to divergent fact surrounding the aspect of history; OR, be witnessed in the victims turning on other victims. This cannot be condoned. But, as Zinn poignantly recapitulates: ***the cry of the poor is not always just, but if you do not listen to it, you will never know what justice is***. And in such a world rummaging for sources of life and hope, a world of apparently never-ending conflicts, a world of victims and executioners, *it is the job of right thinking people*, as Albert Camus suggested, ***not to be on the side of the executioners***<sup>2</sup>.

#### **Caveat 2: The world in which we live**

The era of the Empire, weak and strong at the same time, declared Africa to have nothing. Its knowledge systems were irrelevant. We were unsuited for the modern world. The Imperial, twisted parochial mythologies taught us in Africa that a handful of countries in Europe dominated all thoughts and actions, and naturally set the pattern for the world. They mangled Darwin’s theories of evolution into a populist racist, political narrative of progress and race; and they used it to justify their untold violence on Africa and the Third World saying all the while that it was a manifestation of scientific destiny. So they intentionally headed everything from table manners and dress codes to economic methods, political philosophy and governmental administration, to notions of civilizational truth and destiny.

Thanks to the pen of Herbert Spencer’s “survival of the fittest” in 1864, suddenly public debate in Europe was full of scientific truisms were neither scientific nor true. By 1870, we had social Darwinism which helped to shape more empire mythologies from the Europe to the US and Canada<sup>3</sup>. The combined narratives ruled Africa up to now.

Europeans insisted that their principles in particular were universal. They make sense because behind them **lie the national imperial schools of philosophy which are still anchored around these ideas and perception of the world** in which their (meaning “OUR”) universities, continue to teach this as

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<sup>1</sup> Zinn H. 1999. A People’s History of the United States: 1492-Present. New York. Colin Harper. pp:8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Zinn ibid pp:10.

<sup>3</sup> Ralston Saul J. 2014: the Comeback. Toronto. Penguin Canada books.7-11

universal. This is still with us. Their narrative of history, cuisine, of civilization, of fashion spread wide during the violence of colonization -- all apparently universal, and “natural”.

Educational curricula were filled with these absurdities. They then went to mount attacks on indigenous cultures and peoples and demean them by banning languages, cultures, rituals and all things spiritual. The illegal, unethical moral acts followed. Myriad laws regulations and administrative structures were created and amended in order to install a legal infrastructure and punishment, both social and economic”<sup>4</sup>. We didn’t die.

### Caveat 3:

In his closing of the UNESCO World Conference in Science (Budapest 2000), Werner Archer, the President of the International Council on Science (ICSU) distinguished between the **supply side of science** which focuses practical applications of technology in medicine, food which satisfy human needs and help to improve prosperity; and the **philosophical applications of knowledge – the world views that inform the way knowledge is generated and applied**. The latter, Archer emphasized can bring **worldviews up-to-date** and can foster **an increased consciousness of a human mission in a complex world** (Archer 2000:456). For education to be worth its salt, it should pay close attention to this!!!

At the same gathering, the then Director General of UNESCO Federico Mayor stated that basic science and educational researchers have to get to grips with issues that they may not have considered as aspects of their work.

“We have to practice democracy at a new level: a level where each party to the science-society relationship is a respected partner, where there is a constant interaction between the natural and social sciences, where science communication becomes a two-way exchange between science and society, between science and politics...there must be a debate – so intense, so creative, so rigorous, so intellectually challenging that it comes to be seen as a social, political, yes, a scientific Renaissance – one in which universities, academies, research councils and institutes, and parliaments, the media and associations for the advancement of science mobilize to link everyone, within and between countries to the knowledge base of humanity. And for this to happen, we need a new commitment at all levels” (Mayor 2000:458)

#### 1.1. The Vision of Education and Development in Post-Apartheid South Africa

The national project for education and development in the post-apartheid dispensation contains at core two basic thrusts. The first is the creation of a system that promises well-being, respect, human rights, transparency, accountability, promotes concepts of justice and sense of identity. The other is a commitment to understand the nature of globalization in order to capture its possibilities to better the

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<sup>4</sup> Ralson Saul 2014:12

quality of lives of South Africans, many of whom were at the receiving end of the brutality of the apartheid system.

The transformation of the post-apartheid system of education requires the rebuilding of the fibre of the nation taking full cognizance of the past. Quality education for all requires new capacities to be built around literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, conceptual imagination as well as communication skills. An important facet of this lies in improving quality through a better understanding of the process of teaching and learning. This calls for a radical reconception of the very building blocks of education including an overhaul of the pedagogy of apartheid and colonialism.

Education and management processes must put learners first, *recognizing and building on their knowledge*. It states that there must be special emphasis on the redress of educational inequalities *among sections of the population who have suffered particular disadvantages*.

The government's commitment to a people-centered development espoused by former President Nelson Mandela binds the country to the pursuit of the goals of freedom from want, freedom from hunger, freedom from deprivation, freedom from suppression and freedom from fear. It is these freedoms that are fundamental to the guarantee of human dignity. Thus without social development there will be no productive growth. A sense of liberty and social solidarity combines and contributes to the requirements for productive work innovation. All this cannot work without an interventionist state set on providing social scaffolding for human survival and expression. At the same time, the success of the educational system is highly dependent on the social fabric of its surrounding.

As globalization privileges values such as materialism, individualism and commodification over human values, propelling a divisive and polarized social fabric, it becomes imperative that the country begins to rediscover, and generate its local values. Side by side with this are the issues of language and the very question of epistemology of knowledge. It is here that South Africa recognizes that the meaning, nature and content of knowledge itself needs further deconstruction.

The 'knowledge' as defined within the context of globalization is to a great degree, western based, and Americanized. South Africa needs to affirm the importance of local knowledge generation (both formal and informal), and extend its intellectual pursuits beyond those dictated by international interests (DoE p:33). Citing president Thabo Mbeki, the document draws attention to the issue of the mental universe of the colonized peoples:

*...the enormity of the task at hand is magnified when we consider the legacy of colonial education, the long term effects of domination of African peoples both through brute force and thought control, through divorcing the African child from his or her own experiences and environment, and through systematic processes of alienation and assimilation...bringing about the domination of the mental universe of the colonized...(President Mbeki, cited in DoE 2000 p:34).*

We need to re-focus attention at the subtleties of this domination of the mind space that is linked to the domination of the physical and economic space, both of which have been well documented as central to the projects of apartheid and colonialism.

I have said at so many occasions that quality prognosis only follows quality diagnosis. You cannot cure what you do not know.

Teachers cannot work innovatively to circumvent a malaise whose full dimensions have not been fully articulated. It is here that the issue of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) is introduced to the education and training debate, in order to sharpen the lenses and instruments at the disposal of curriculum developers and planners on the one hand, and to provide opportunities to teachers, sitting as they are in the 'eye of the storm', and straddling as they are the dual systems of knowledge at community level, to navigate creatively, inculcate dialogue among the knowledge systems, contribute to the project of epistemological redress, while infusing dynamism into content by introducing the wealth of knowledge that surrounds the school, and appropriating it for the fulfilment of the goal of human centered development to which this country is committed.

In order to do this, it is essential that retroactive analysis of the interface between colonialism and the construction of knowledge is undertaken. Within this, it becomes unavoidable to revisit much of what is taken for granted: the role and ideological use of science in such a construction, and the manner in which the resulting framework for the definition of knowledge ended up privileging, consistently, the essentially provincial, and itself an ethnic, western system, and extrapolating this wide in the context of colonial subjugation, as the UNIVERSAL knowledge.

Methodologically, we must present a forensic analysis of that interface between colonialism, science, and now globalization, in terms of the commonality of the threats they have posed, and continue to posit for countries wishing to pursue issues of human rights, the right to be, democracy, plurality, tolerance and the acceptance of European influence without succumbing to European dominance.

We know that South Africa toes the fine line i.e. to seek the fulfilment of its goals of social justice while participating fully in globalization presenting a heightened challenge to researchers, analysts and policy makers alike. To dance this close to the devil while maintaining both one's dignity and limbs, and especially to seek to gain from such an endeavor requires that the nature of the tunes, the body language, the nuances, and subtleties of this entire drama is scrutinized on a consistent basis through intellectual intelligence work, in order that pre-emptive strategies are worked out in good time either to bolt for the ballroom door, outwit the devil in question, or render the threat irrelevant.

For this reason, what we need to do is revisit the epistemology of colonialism as a continuing issue rather than something that disappeared with the new dispensation in 1994. It is the view here that 1994 signals the beginning of a new process of deconstruction and reconstruction of the tenets of that pedagogy so that non-European people needs no longer feel inferior, so that they no longer need to laugh at their own gods, so that they can participate in Freirean project of naming the world as equals along with the numerous others, and thus creating that alternative and human centered vision for personal, national, regional and global development

The values that will help the country reclaim its moral fabric needs not be found in the United States Constitution. African societies have had superior philosophies that engender a sense of solidarity and responsibility to others. At the same time the loss of cultural reference points that is contributing to the fundamental dislocation can be traced to the efficiency with which colonialism at the political, economic, and epistemological levels sought to precisely denigrate all those it considered refractory to its gaze.

Teachers will not know how and with what tools they need to reconnect with the community around the school: those round huts that have been associated only with poverty and ignorance.

How can we operationalize empowerment if we continue to associate progress only with western cultural artefacts and deem all else as perverse and irrelevant to their use? How can South Africa define LifeLong Learning or LifeLong Education without including the complex and elaborate child development strategies and psychological, social and cognitive competency building curriculum that parents in African communities give to the children? How can we talk of developing critical thinking skills without taking cognizance of the threats inherent in the social construction of reality as represented in western epistemologies that reward mimicry, docility and passive assimilation of the good old ethos of indifference to others, individualism and “competitiveness unto death” that underpins the new globalization imperative?

Can we genuinely believe that human agency at community levels can be engendered only through political processes without a recognition of the knowledge systems that sustain those communities day by day? Can South African policy makers, researchers, managers and teachers genuinely continue to believe that “diversity” “plurality” and “equality” can be compatible with a situation in which **knowledge**, the single most dear currency in global transactions today, continues to be defined through the mono-cultural prism of western epistemology alone, and that it is alright to uncritically dump the children in this country, in their diversity and beauty only into this single way of seeing? What would this do to the notion of democracy this country would like to espouse?

## 1.2. Decolonization and the Construction of the “Other”

For the last 500 years, the world has been controlled by a form of European nationalism. From this nationalism has emerged a concept called the cultural “other” that influences European vision of themselves in their contact with Africans, Asians, the Native Americans and people of the Pacific Islands. Since then, it has become **almost natural to endorse as primitive what Europeans do not understand. We laugh at our gods because Europeans said we should.** We lump traditional medical practitioners, psychologists, pharmacologists together **as a bunch of witches or people practicing witchcraft, because European religions said so.**

Even us, the “educated”, shame on us!!!!

In other words, **Europeans not only colonized the world, but colonized information about the world and soon developed monopoly control over concepts and images, including that of god, knowledge, life and death.**

According to Ani (1994), prior to colonialism, people were not referred to by their color. The fact remains that centuries of this otherwise artificial classification became the central tenet of the slave trade and the colonial system that followed, and left an indelible material, psychological, and economic mark on the victims of the classification.

**Distortions were key to the strategy of developing the monopoly over perceptions and constructions of reality.** Thus even though Europeans destroyed more culture and civilizations than they built, in their textbooks and travelogues and sometimes in the interpretation of the Bible, the European has said, or



inferred **that they were the only people in the world who created anything that deserves to be called a culture.**

Knowing that the minds of African people are still crowded with the image of Europeans as superior beings, **a condition which locks their will and freezes the spirit force**, it is essential that we engage in questioning the scientific epistemology that underlies this hegemony as well as the material, and ideological implications of this ideology.

In order to move towards a constructivist frame of reference, it may become important to reaffirm for instance the fact that **every culture has a developmental germ or seed, an essence, the ideological core, the matrix of cultural identity which must be identified in order to make sense of the collective creations of its members.** It is this core that determines cognition patterns. From this core one can discern what gives a culture its emotional tone and motivates the collective behavior of its members.

Cultural imperialism would then be understood even by children **as the systematic imposition of an alien culture in the attempt to destroy the will of a politically dominated people.** Teachers and educators in general need to understand that it is the functioning of cultural imperialism that **causes cultural insecurity and self-doubt within the dominated group.**

### 1.3. Decolonizing perspectives of knowledge production in formal institutions

Decolonization is more than post-apartheid. At the ideological level lie questions around the ideological basis for scientific work and especially how the power of the ideology of rationality embedded within it was propagated in the context of colonial conquest of non-Western societies.

At the philosophical/methodological level, one finds **the harrowing legacy of epistemological silencing, and the concerted strategies that have together, preempted any possibility for co-existence, fruitful exchange of methods, or even dialogue around heuristic methods.**

At the level of application is found **the arrogance of practice which is still rife up to today** in formal institutions that are confidently, and **without qualms, maintaining the monochrome logic of western epistemology** (Odora Hoppers 2001a).

The confluence between this arrogance and the quasi-sciences on the one hand, and the rendering of other knowledge systems to the informal sector on the other, has had tremendous consequences on identity formation and human development in all societies where-ever colonialism left its footprints. Clearly the vacuum in theorization, in the formation of perspectives on knowledge production, as well as the gap between formal institutions and society cannot be left to posterity. The same can be said of **the unhelpful kind of rules, regulations, and protocols that govern scientific practice especially in terms of the relationship between science and society.**

Time has now come to draw attention to the manner in which the exclusion of other traditions of knowledge by reductionist science **is itself part of the problem that has led to a myriad of failed development initiatives all around the world.** The development model premised on this ideology **transmogrified billions of people and sent them to the back of a queue (Esteva 1992) at the head of which stood the totality of the western model of life, its idiosyncracies, its ineptitude as well as its possibilities, a provincial model extrapolated wide.** The concrete and vernacular implication of this in

people's daily lives are that **anyone who can demonstrate efficacy in imbibing, especially uncritically, this provincial rendition of reality**, will find a place around the banquet table.

Research in an inclusive paradigm would acknowledge that research on indigenous people have incurred deep resentment and even resistance, and thus rendered research suspect. Direct participation in the knowledge generation, production and determination processes by the IK authorities themselves should become foundational to any research activity.

In a similar vein, existing areas of misinformation, misinterpretation, and mis-representation about IKS also need to be deconstructed and reconstructed. This is the way to go towards attaining new heights in the interpretation of human rights. Taken in this light, transformation is not just political, but also of the knowledge and wisdom systems that should lead to new human consciousness.

Here, South Africa can learn from the example of attempts being made in Namibia to monitor and evaluate cultural and gender bias in the education system. This monitoring of exams is quite impressive and can serve as an example to other African countries. The monitoring of the junior secondary certificate examination in 1993 showed for instance that the examination in the home science subject had a clear cultural bias towards urban living and European food.

All the illustrations were of Europeans or European home environments; all the recipes were of European food. There was nothing in the examination paper indicating that it was from Africa or Namibia. When it came to the examination paper in accounting it drew on a variety of cultural settings but nearly all persons mentioned were males.

When it came to the examination paper in art it was found that only 16% of the marks could be earned on anything to do with Namibia - 84% of the marks were devoted to European art history. The monitoring paper concludes:

with only a token to Namibian or African art, this examination continues the cultural disinheritance of Namibia, strongly criticised in Ministry documents, and counter to Ministry policy. The paper as a whole is also devoid of gender awareness (MEC/NIED, 1994:9 in Brock-Utne 2001)).

Likewise the examination paper in music is said to have a dreadful cultural bias. Of 100 marks, 74 could be gained on specifically European music, 10 on specifically African music and 16 on culturally neutral music theory. Only male composers were referred to. The history paper was, however, praised for promoting awareness of Namibian and African history but criticised for making women and their contribution to history invisible. The monitoring of exams in Namibia goes on and a small improvement in the examination papers set in the year 1995 has been detected (Avenstrup 1995).

#### 1.4. IKS: its Significance for Cognitive, Institutional, and Global Transformation

IKS draws attention to the issue of cognitive justice whose pre-requisite is an engagement between the dominant western knowledge structures and the indigenous knowledges. IKS implies the de-formaldehydation and de-museumization of indigenous knowledges and cultures from the colonial and modernist archives (Visvanathan 1997), engaging in its critical evaluation and careful validation, while

recognising its inner truths and coherence in order to facilitate its active re-appropriation and authentication into current, living development strategies.

IKS challenges the knowledge generation and legitimation processes: e.g. what type of knowledge is being generated in scientific institutions; what type of research questions are being asked, and what are the existing rules and regulations governing the definition of “scientific” knowledge, its legitimation and accreditation?

IKS calls for a deeper exploration into: the interface between epistemology, diversity and democracy, and of the potentials for true exchange and what Hountondji refers to as the “*reciprocal valorization among knowledge systems*” (Hountondji 1997); and the scope for establishing knowledge as an intrinsic part of democratic politics (Visvanathan 1997).

Colonialism itself remains a factor in so far as it provided the framework for the organized subjugation of the cultural, scientific and economic life of many on the African continent and the Third World. This subjugation extended in a spectrum from people’s “way of seeing”, their “way of being”, their way of negotiating life processes in different environments, their survival techniques, to technologies for ecologically sensitive exploitation of natural resources.

All these knowledges were, *en masse*, rendered irrelevant to their use as millions of people became transmogrified by the combined advent of modern science and colonialism, into an inverted mirror of Western identity - - a mirror that belittled them and sent them to the back of the queue.

For many Africans, it is therefore strongly felt that the time has, indeed come, to subject to **direct interrogation**, the historical, scientific and colonial discourses behind the semantic shift that turned the illiterate from someone who is ignorant of the alphabet, to *an absolute ignorant*; pitting what is not written as thoughtless, as a weakness, and, at its limit, as primitivism - - which has been central to the strategic dis-empowerment of African societies since the advent of colonialism.

From the perspective of science development itself, IKS enables us to move the frontiers of discourse and understanding in the sciences as a whole and open new moral and cognitive spaces within which constructive dialogue and engagement for sustainable development can begin. To “clear space” in order to enable new issues in science development to be generated and fostered and thus determine new directions for the philosophy and sociology, as well as political economy of the sciences. IKS enables us to begin to understand the political economy of “Othering”, and especially to enable those silent witnesses to the development paradigm premised on the above, to take an active part in questioning the competence and ethics of the professional expert. IKS re-establishes science as the story of all animals, and not just of the lion, thus permitting us to begin to develop a clearer sense of the ethical and juridical domain within which science works (Visvanathan 1997).

As governments seek to transform their societies and empower local communities, the challenge becomes one of how to operationalize empowerment itself in a context in which diverse knowledges are barely tolerated and exist only in sufferance and subjugative deference to a mainstream, essentially western forms of knowledge (Odora Hoppers 2001a).

### 1.5. Challenges and New Possibilities

South Africa had fought **apartheid**: the country now needed to fight the more insidious **apartheid of knowledges**. In the keynote of the 9<sup>th</sup> SARCHI Retreat held in Venda in 2016, Visvanathan had this to say:

“As a people, we know that no community is complete without the other. No society is complete in itself. The other opens us, enlarges us; without the otherness of the other, the self is incomplete and even vulnerable. What is true of society is true of knowledge. No knowledge is complete in itself. No knowledge is complete without the dreams of the other”.

In his paper entitled “A festival of Humble Knowledges: An Invitation”, Prof Visvanathan stated there were no “lesser” forms of knowledge, only **a common** in which each kind of knowledge had its place. There was no failed society or failed knowledge which deserved to be eliminated. Hospitality, reciprocity, generosity and plurality are an integral part of the commons of knowledge. He called on society to draw together all areas of knowledge so that all existing kinds of knowledge could be used for the benefit of humanity. He invited everyone to join in “a festival of humble knowledges”, with ethics placed as a central part of science, where no culture is “museumised”, and technology not subject to cost-benefit analyses. Humility necessitates openness, emergence, which invokes both difference and solidarity. Humble knowledges are plural knowledges that refuse to seek hegemony.

He called on the participants to join in seeking the humility of non-violence in world where peace consists of ethical repair, of reconciliation, where the notion of “society” exceeds “contract”, to healing, restoration. We have to re-learn our people’s “way of seeing”, their “way of being”, their way of negotiating life processes in different environments, their survival techniques, to technologies for ecologically sensitive exploitation of natural resources and bring this **respectfully to play a part in the present and into the future**. Our generation needs a holistic knowledge framework that seeks to make whole that was partial, incomplete, in large measure stunted, and therefore also stunting.

Therefore in the spirit of the nation, we have to define and firmly operationalize the issue of “Knowledge”

1. As a universal heritage, a universal resource, and therefore it is diverse and varied.
2. The acquisition of Western knowledge has been and still is invaluable to all, but on its own, it has been incapable of responding adequately in the face of untold injustices; massive and intensifying disparities, untrammelled exploitation of pharmacological and other genetical resources, and rapid depletion of the earth’s natural resources.
3. Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) represent both a national heritage and a national resource which should be protected, promoted, developed, and where appropriate, conserved.
4. But it is also a resource which should be put at service of the present and succeeding generations. Because IKS is not fixed or static, where necessary, it should be critically evaluated.

5. By indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) are meant the combination of knowledge systems encompassing technology, social, economic, philosophical learning/educational, spirituality, legal and governance systems.
6. It is knowledge relating to the technological, social, institutional, scientific and development including those used in the liberation struggles.
7. The idea of indigenous knowledge as espoused within this proposed Unit for instance is not just about woven baskets and handicraft for tourists per se. It is about excavating the technologies such as looms, textile, jewelry and brass-work manufacture; exploring indigenous technological knowledge in agriculture, fishing, forest resource exploitation, atmospheric management techniques<sup>5</sup>
8. It is about knowledge transmission systems, architecture, medicine and pharmacology, and recasting the potentialities they represent in a context of democratic participation for community, national and global development in real time.
9. It is about a new notion of democracy, human rights and innovation<sup>6</sup>.

A new social contract is therefore needed, and that it must go beyond security, justice, and well-being, to include **an expanded citizenship with a sense of belonging, meaningful participation, and a stronger civil society: and ethics of solidarity.**

## The Decommodification Thesis

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<sup>5</sup> see for instance Dah-Lokonon. G. B. 1997. 'Rainmakers': Myth and Knowledge in Traditional Atmospheric Management Techniques. In Hountondji P. ed. Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trails. Oxford. CODESRIA.

<sup>6</sup>Doussou F. C. 1997. Writing and Oral Tradition in the Transmission of Knowledge. In Hountondji P. ed. Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trails. Oxford. CODESRIA.

**Key words:** Democracy, Culture, Commodities, Colonialism-Decolonialisation, students, Africana critical pedagogy.

## 1. Abstract:

“Education is the means of [the] social continuity of life”- John Dewey in *Democracy and Education*. This, by overt implication speaks to the necessity of education as a central intrigant for agency and mobility. **These cannot exist without an examination of the epistemological roots of the current prevailing notions and narratives surrounding education as we know it.** A sustained and consistent frontal must be waged against the very notion that the logical inference of the current system is an aggregation of the current inequalities, this made manifests by the elitist nature of education. The function of our education cannot be, as many scholars have argued, merely the broadening of opportunity with the emphasis of escaping our social groups and changing our lived environments. The basis should be in the collective empowering of our social groups and only through this will we change our lived condition. The first function, in essence, confines education as an individualistic pursuit devoid of the responsibility one has to ones’ community. The second function does not look at the mobility of the individual outside their community. Schooling should not only assure fair competition, but should also reduce the economic gap between the winners and the losers, by this approach the evening of the playing field would manifest. This role of schooling in pursuit of equality of opportunity has been referred to as the ‘egalitarian’ function of education. This speaks to a fundamental prescript in education being the pursuit of equality- this equality needs the existence of two conditions in order for it to be realised; the first is an understanding of the basic tenets of the contextual reality of all. Redress cannot happen without understanding; any attempt to address this inequality without an understanding of the realities that govern inequality stands the risk of addressing the symptom and not the cause. Education must be seen as a major catalyst in promoting the psychic and moral development of the individual. As stated in Samuel Bowles and Ginthis, *Broken Promises- School Reform and Retrospect*, Personal fulfilment depends, in large part, on the extent, direction and vigour of development of our physical, cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and other potentials. If the educational system has not spoken to these potentialities by taking individual development, as a means to constructive societal progression, as an end in itself, it would have failed:

*“The criterion of value of school education is the extent in which it creates desire for continued growth and supplies the means for making the desire effective in fact... The educational process has no end beyond itself it is its own end.”- John Dewey*

The irony in both the quotes I have used above, is that the author-John Dewey- believed that personal development is economically productive and that a free and universal schooling system can render the opportunity for self- development independent of race, ethnic origins, class background and sex, the heart of this paper will argue differently. In that our education has defined and promulgated many of the perceptions in relation to the very constructs it must rid itself for it to be, as Dewey argues, utilised optimally. I will argue that the pursuit of equality as referred to earlier is about understanding

the nature and development of these constructs and in unravelling these can education be an end. This process has come to be known as a process of decolonisation.

What we are thus here trying to set out, not in so much terms of having to do an economic treatise but rather give a critical assessment of the potential barriers that make education, schooling a construct of *laissez faire* “pygmy”, if you like. Therefore, we set out first by trying to understand the extent and impact of what becomes a decolonising prospective and whether by using the abstraction “Decolonisation” will not further propel us to what we consider to be the defects of “commoditisation”. It shall also be understood that the centrality of the discussion herein foregrounds the subject-student as an organic character which contends with the harsh realities of the dominant super-structural impediments, both contends and suffer the liberal sentimentalism of “individualism”. It is prudent to note that many problems we have the responsibility to explore and expand upon are resultant of a lack of a thorough and driven exercise of progressive self-introspection. To this extent we must assert an old realisation, which begs our ability to be a target driven, objective orientated organisation.

## 2. Context:

We had on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2007, in a speech delivered at UNISA which subsequently became a discussion document, made the assertion that, “financial resources remain the foremost exclusionary impediment for the majority of previously disadvantaged students who desperately and legitimately need access to higher education.” This at the time showed our understanding of the extent of the problem that the obstructionist commodification of our institutions of higher learning were, but also indicated our lack of contextual insight into the ideological underpinnings of the challenge of access and obstructionist commodification of our institutions.

It is this reality that lays the foundation for much needed constructive introspection. It must be noted though, that even at the time we crafted the “*Institutional and Governance Funding in Higher Education*” document, access to higher education had long been a thorny issue and topical discussion point in the organisation. The issue can be traced as far back as NUSAS, where institutional tuition was at the centre of their responsibilities. Over time the issue of access to higher education morphed from merely being about access as a catalyst to addressing the deep rooted transformational imperatives that lay dormant and unattended in what we consider to be a fledgling democracy.

It is worth mentioning, in order to provide context, that the history of our country is checked with exclusionary practices that segmented all aspects of our society; race, class, gender oppression exacerbated by patriarchal economic modes of accumulation.

SASCO remains to hold the view that institutions of higher learning and all sights of education at all levels remain as concerted expressions of power relative to the balance of forces, to this end, our immediate task is to transform the state and related institutions, in the pursuit of them becoming concerted representations of our society, amplifying all aspects that define us as a people. It is with this in mind that we affirm our progressive vision for transformation of education in our country. In pursuance of this, we must at all material times take into account the nature and character of the wider political and socio-economic impediments and therefore resolve to create a better system based on equality, democracy, non-racialism, non-sexism, redress and academic excellence.

Today's schisms and skirmishes that have become ubiquitous with the present day university in South Africa, are not products or by-products of irrationalism but are a direct negation of what the university is, a place of esoteric curatorship. The way in which higher education is financed in practice gives the ruling class a "monopoly of knowledge", deepening the historic polarities that have been there since the establishment of these institutions. There are more efforts made in the university today to produce a technically specialised labour force that would enhance and advance the neoliberal agenda of capitalism. With the common availability of institutional autonomy, higher education has become more adept at its display of bureaucratise.

The true representation of any institution of higher learning is seen through its competence and industriousness of its academic and knowledge production output. Therefore, we can witness universities for different reasons, they become sort of "better centres" of knowledge production than the others. However, since universities have by their very nature adopted distinctive identities from which we can identify them with, it on its own becomes something of a historical facade.

This facade is related to the cultures that embrace these different universities, taken or inherited from the past. As a historical space of technocratic and a traditional sanctuary, manufacturing realities that may impact the existence of the human race, the university takes up an axiomatic role of Intellectual honing. Through its preparation of putting the universal experiences of the world in more particularised forms, qua, as research centres, the university clamours for its social embrace. For it to be embraced, the university selects its historical interest, that is to say, it chooses its place in society as the phenomena of human interactions and relations.

As the skein of history unwinds, so does the university's idea of human relations oscillate, put more succinctly, the university becomes part of a social formula. This formula is affected by how the social factors that are manifestly dominant influence the university. These programmed social realities which could in this instance, be thought of as a transition from one form to the other, that is, from an apartheid social reality to a democratic one, or rather from a capitalist to a socialist form can be taken as an understanding of its evolutionism.

The historic facade that engenders these particular responses to the forms which the university undertakes as its compass that guides it through the thicket of history creates the perfect climate for the germination of a particular interest in the university. This is related to how the university responds to the unravelling social realities, how it positions itself as a space for serious intellectual and academic reflection. It should therefore determine what kind of a socially responsible role it will play in the fashioning of a given society. For instance, the preceding phases of our political and social evolution in South Africa was primarily to give, not really the brightest sons and daughters of the ruling class that required classical education, but was more strictly race based, the colour of your skin determined your fate, and therefore, education was a demarcated phenomenon.

These privileges were given to equip the "privileged white student" in South Africa to administer industry, the nation, and the army efficiently. Thus producing what the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre calls the "classical intellectual" in the true sense of the word. It is with this reality in sight that the university conforms to the systemic functionalism that makes it a space of orderly thinking, fostering methods for independent scholarship, laying down a common cultural background and the



informal ties based on this background between “elites” in all areas of social life. This was and still to a larger extent is the primary role of the university education for the majority of the students.

To understand these two concepts, decolonisation and decommodification, we need to understand the prevailing concepts that have led to the necessity for these reactive concepts. The basis for my assertion of these concepts being reactive concepts is a logical one- without colonisation we would not need or speak of decolonisation, similarly, without commodification we would not speak of decommodification.

## 2.1. Decolonisation

History and culture go hand in hand, and to rob and reframe a people’s history and culture from an oppressive point of view, or in the interest of imperialism, is to distort and deny that which is most human in each of us: our right to live decent and dignified lives, to walk unmolested in the world, and to develop [freely to our fullest potential] our own unique contributions to the various traditions and heritages that constitute human culture and civilisation. Therefore, any discussion that relates itself to the concept of “decolonisation” must from its departure portend an *Africana Critical Pedagogy*.

Colonisation is a form of normalised dehumanisation. This dehumanisation was a covert exercise; it created the condition for a normalised violent dehumanisation on the indigenous oppressed. To achieve colonisation the colonised created the condition that the colonised could not see themselves outside the coloniser. This violence was by in large a systemic violence that obscured the oppressed idea of self so gravely that they could not identify themselves outside their condition. Their identity is obscured such that even their lived material condition is constant affirmation of the futility of their condition in affirmation of the superiority of the oppressor.

W.E.B DuBois, the African –American father of Pan-Africanism and a critical contributor to the decolonial project and struggles of the *Nineteenth Century* brought to our understanding the imperatives of education as a liberatory instrument, the Du Boisian conception of education [as with the Du Boisian dialectic in general] is inherently and radically humanist, multicultural, transethnic, and often uses history and culture as a basis to apprehend, interpret, and create critical consciousness concerning life and world-threatening conflicts and contradictions. Considering Du Bois’s definition of education – a process by which persons are taught to draw out and draw upon human powers and potentialities in the interest of radical [if not revolutionary] self and social transformation.

Africana critical pedagogy is pivotal in the explication of a decolonising project, it employs a critical theoretical framework and methodology, which say that it is inherently interdisciplinary and inter-transformation. Similar to critical pedagogy in general, Africana critical pedagogy combines philosophy of education with radical politics, critical social theory, class analysis, and cultural criticism. It stresses the need for education that empowers and inspires individuals to struggle against [neo] imperialism in its many global and local manifestations and machinations. Following in the footsteps of the Brazilian radical educator and political activist, Paulo Freire, Africana critical pedagogy is a “pedagogy of the oppressed” that seeks to create and accessibly offer oppositional and alternative educational theories and praxes.

Decolonisation is thus about the unlearning, deconstructing and dismantling of the cultural violence of dehumanisation as a culmination of the systemic oppression of the colonisation. It is about gaining

and building a national consciousness that independently and progressively allows for the optimum actualisation of the self without bondages to the oppressor. This would require the creation of alternative knowledge and knowledge systems, the accurate relation of historical evolution of the oppressed and unfettered acceptance of the oppressed by the oppressed and the oppressor.

## 2.2. The critique of Indigenous Knowledge Systems- Propounding our critical assessments of alternative

The renaissance of African indigenous knowledge production, furthermore, suggests a redemptive or revivalist assertion that posits that African knowledge systems have been largely ignored in modern knowledge circles. This of course emanates from the history of colonialism and the dispensation of an oppressive system of colonial authority which in its form, content and nature imposed on African societies European ideas in exchange for African subservience.

This suggestion carries with it a renaissance of African epistemology, which in return challenges us to ask if the *IKS* can re-think or refashion a new praxis, that is to say, a new approach that will at the same time prevent us from falling into the perpetual trap of a constant search for “newness”? A new praxis that will allow us to thoroughly deconstruct all European categories, the current South African curriculum, to be precise, produces knowledge in the form a European kind, which promises a future beyond the arcane. From this point, one can deduce that its sole intent carries with it a continuation of a colonialism of a special type.

A redoubled effort in propelling the idea of Africanising our curricular in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa needs a serious study of the idea of Apartheid and if we have completely de-linked ourselves from its rationality. This question will lead us to properly do our analysis as to how we understand the deep lying undiscovered truths about apartheid which was in all fairness a banal system without any scientific logic, other than using other humans it considered through its prejudiced lens as not human enough. Thus, producing a sub-alternity which is it not completely engaged.

Can the *IKS* give birth to a complete epistemology that will challenge the historical dominance of European intellectual imagination? Which will usher in a new framework from which we can escape the epistemological “double consciousness” created and abated by centuries of Western domination? That made us believe that a particular history of Europe was the total history of the world.

*IKS* should lead us to a discussion that will dissect our historic station as subalterns, this is so, because it would assist us in thinking along the lines of our present struggles making us even more determined to develop new ways of understand our struggles. In understanding our sub-alternity will help us in deconstructing the limits which belied and continues to belie the Eurocentric epistemology as a hegemonic structural bulwark that creates docile African minds.

A correct reading of the *IKS* will help one to understand the *decolonial* project, to use Walter Mignolo’s term, as a project of a total severance from European thinking and not from understanding the global questions. However, it will rid us from being at the end of the global designs of colonial knowledge and its knowledge systems that are so embedded in our curriculum.

We should therefore propose alongside *IKS* an epistemic de-linking from the European constructed curricula that will in the long run develop an ‘epistemological disobedience’. This will encourage us

through the to forge a total disbandment of the archaeology and genealogy of European epistemology that will in turn require a total paradigmatic shift from the ever expanding market fundamentalism initiated and absorbed into our African thinking.

This discourse of decolonisation inherits its frustrations from centuries old notions of African despondency, which emanates from an imperial violence inflicted upon the peoples of Africa. Other than that we risk the potential invective that might be in the future directed to us as being patents of a 'salvationist rhetoric' with a condemnatory logic suspending itself towards becoming nothing but nostalgic African euphoria camouflaged as a counter-construct.

It has come as no surprise, when the majority of the students in South Africa stood up to the existential question of their, so to say, beleaguered futures, precisely to reply to the oppressive logic of our current curricula output. This at the centre of it puts in its operation an epistemology with no African linkages other than to create appendages of European thought and philosophy.

Indigenous Knowledge System as proposed by the authors should build a method of critiquing the current imposed European paradigms of rationality and modernity. However, if not so, it would become doubtful that in the long run the criticism will consist of a simple negation of all European categories; of the dissolution of the reality in discourse; of the pure negation of the idea and the perspective of its totality.

### 2.3. Decommodification

In order to understand decommodification we need to understand what a commodity is and what commodification is.

To examine this further we look at Marx's analysis of capital which is based on his distinction between the means of production, literally those things, like land and natural resources, and technology, that are necessary for the production of material goods, and the social relations of production, in other words, the social relationships people enter into as they acquire and use the means of production, the binary of the working class and the employing class. Together these comprise the mode of production; Marx observed that within any given society the mode of production changes, and those European societies had progressed from a feudal mode of production to a capitalist mode of production.

The capitalist mode of production is capable of tremendous growth because the capitalist can, and has an incentive to, reinvest profits in new technologies, that essentially forms the basis of *Historical Materialism*. In general, Marx believed that the means of production change more rapidly than the relations of production. For Marx this mismatch between base and superstructure is a major source of social disruption and conflict, this has led to the affirmation of the capitalist being a violent system, its violence solely being metered out against the proletariat or oppressed class. Under capitalism people sell their labour-power when they accept compensation in return for whatever work they do in a given period of time (in other words, they are not selling the product of their labour, but their capacity to work), I shall venture to give an in depth analysis on why this in my reference to commodities and commodity relations. In return for selling their labour power they receive money, which allows them to survive. Those who must sell their labour power to live are

“proletarians”. The person who buys the labour power, generally someone who does own the land and technology to produce, is a "capitalist" or "bourgeois." Thus the ensuing characterisation of what calls “the estrangement” of the worker from his labour power and value- the alienation of the labourer, reductive essence of the value of the organic contribution of the worker to living testament of the product-cum-commodity.

The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as “an immense accumulation of commodities”, its unit being a single commodity.

We see then that which determines the magnitude of the value of any article is the amount of labour or labour-time socially necessary for its production. Each individual commodity, in this connection, is to be considered as an average sample of its class. Commodities, therefore, in which equal quantities of labour are embodied, or which can be produced in the same time, have the same value. The value of one commodity is to the value of any other, as the labour-time necessary for the production of the one is to that necessary for the production of the other. “As values, all commodities are only definite masses of congealed labour-time. In the higher education sector the most explicit example of this is the basic correlation between years necessary to acquire a certain qualification and expected remuneration in line with duration of mandatory study period.

A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labour. It is as clear as noon-day, that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by Nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him, this may be useful in understanding colonisation and its basic overlap with commodification. The form of wood, for instance, is altered, by making a table out of it. Yet, for all that, the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood. But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful.

Whence, then, arises the enigmatical character of the product of labour, so soon as it assumes the form of commodities? Clearly from this form itself. The equality of all sorts of human labour is expressed objectively by their products all being equally valued; the measure of the expenditure of labour-power by the duration of that expenditure, takes the form of the quantity of value of the products of labour; and finally, the mutual relations of the producers, within which the social character of their labour affirms itself, take the form of a social relation between the products.

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.

Commodities are not just commodities because they are physical/material things but rather are commodities because they are the manifestations of the labour power and labour time exerted by man- a commodity thus, can never be divorced from the man as its character is directly attributable to the man and his ability or lack thereof. A dismantling or affirmation of the commodity is therefore a dismantling or affirmation of the man.

Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs. This predicates the central element in the de commodification process. We must first accept that man, specifically in a capitalist system, is not divorced from his relation with labour. His value is intrinsically linked to his ability to produce, as this lays the basis not only for his ability to survive but for his ability to relate and interact with others.

In all simplicity and for purposes of this paper we will make the statement that Capitalism as a system is based on the exchange and accumulation of commodities, thus, to dismantle capitalism we need to sharpen and unravel our attitudes toward commodities, this will be a process of true humanisation. To understand this further we need to understand capitalism and praxis that underpins a capitalist system.

Capital is accumulated labour which, when appropriated on an individual enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of living labour. Capital is a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures, but it is also the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world.

Depending on the field in which it functions, and at the cost of the more or less expensive transformations which are the precondition for its efficacy in the field in question, capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility. For purposes of this paper we will focus on the latter two in order to give an understanding of the extent of commodification and the necessity of de commodification.

Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee.

The notion of cultural capital is most evident in the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes by relating academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from the different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions. This starting point implies a

break with the presuppositions inherent both in the common-sense view, which sees academic success or failure as an effect of natural aptitudes, and in human capital theories.

It must be suggested simultaneously that economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital and that these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital, never entirely reducible to that definition, produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal the fact that economic capital is at their root.

The more the official transmission of capital is prevented or hindered, the more the effects of the clandestine circulation of capital in the form of cultural capital become determinant in the reproduction of the social structure. As an instrument of reproduction capable of disguising its own function, the scope of the educational system tends to increase, and together with this increase is the unification of the market in social qualifications which gives rights to occupy rare positions.

The commodification of our education is at the base of the perpetuation of our class antagonism and unless we can move to decommodify our education through rigorous engagement with the social structures that have determined life as we know it, we will not move out of the hellish rut of capitalism and its dehumanising systemic indiscretions. Our thinking must move beyond the superfluousness of decolonisation as a historic dismantling of a cultural violence of the most vulnerable and marginalised in our society and move towards decommodification which provides a much more nuanced structural unravelling of an unsustainable elitist system. To poke at the base of capital is to decommodify and unravel the institutionalised oppression that hindered our ability to see our true selves, this must be an intentional directed act not only of massification of our education but of creating knowledge and systems that responded and complement the social need at any given time.

The time we have been waiting for is the present.

*"Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion"*