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African Voices in Education

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Preface

With the ending of apartheid in South Africa and two consecutive democratic elections that, since 1994, have confirmed black majority rule, Africa will enter the next century free of any formal colonial domination by the Europeans. However, the systems and structures of education inherited in many countries throughout the continent, including those which acquired their independence four decades earlier, particularly at the levels of higher education, reflect the predominance of Western traditions. These institutions of learning educate the intelligentsia, who as either educators or decision-makers shape development policy design. Unfortunately, the mechanisms and processes of selection that policy-makers use have in general terms left out the majority.

Political nominal independence has not been translated into an African autonomous space of knowledge production. Philosophical questions as to what kind of education is required for what type of society, and the formulation of epistemological questions that should guide learning and knowledge production, remain as pressing at the dawn of the twenty-first century as they were in the twentieth-century when arguments of human capital theory were appropriated in educational analysis and policy-making. Specialists in different disciplines, in being confronted with more complex problems that education is expected to resolve, are once again raising these questions in their attempt to uncover the reasons behind Africa's persistent inability to produce relevant systems of education needed for social and economic development.

The volume *African Voices in Education* gives us an opportunity to have a constructive dialogue with scholars who have Africa in their heart and who have, with great insight, produced extremely valuable materials to be used by researchers, educators and policy-makers in the process of rethinking African educational systems. Despite its focus on education, the volume is interdisciplinary in scope, and represents a forum for raising pertinent questions regarding the nature of knowledge through African voices. In the context of the failure of the majority of the African countries to construct even a policy of universal and relevant primary education, the African voices in the volume focus on epistemological issues and offer elements of response and possible paths for rethinking and reconstructing a relevant education for Africa. This volume is, therefore, timely and offers a context for specialists and the layperson to debate issues relating to the wellbeing of Africa, and in so doing to be inspired to take action. As a resource, it will be a useful reference for those in the field of education, philosophy, political economy, developmental studies and gender issues. The volume addresses a diverse audience that might well include politicians, policy-makers, academics, researchers, educationists and students. In short, the volume can be regarded as a powerful instrument in preparing for the transition between the end of this century and the beginning of the new millennium in the context of Africa and its quest for an authentic African voice.

Editors:

N'Dri Assie Lumumba, Philip Higgs, Thobeka Mda, Ntombizolile Vakalisa

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African Voices in Education: Retrieving the Past, Engaging the Present and Shaping the Future

Catherine A Odora Hoppers

INTRODUCTION

The African voice in education at the end of the twentieth century is the voice of the radical witness of the pain and inhumanity of history, the arrogance of modernization and the conspiracy of silence in academic disciplines towards what is organic and alive in Africa. It is the voice of 'wounded healers' (Richards 1995) struggling against many odds to remember the past, engage with the present, and determine a future built on new foundations. It invokes the democratic ideal of the right of all to 'be', to 'exist', to grow and live without coercion, and from that to find a point of convergence with the numerous others. It exposes the established hegemony of Western thought, and beseeches it to feel a measure of shame and vulgarity at espousing modes of development that build on the silencing of all other views and perceptions of reality. It also seeks to make a contribution to the momentum for a return of humanism to the centre of the educational agenda, and dares educators to see the African child-learner not as a bundle of Pavlovian reflexes, but as a human being culturally and cosmologically located in authentic value systems.

But the African voice emerging at the turn of the new millennium is no longer a pure voice. It is coming into being at a time when the concept of 'African society' itself has been literally expunged from mainstream discourses. It is entering 'adulthood' when new orthodoxies of structural adjustment, the market and globalization have become far more pernicious than the overt colonialism of the past, are barely deciphered by African nationalists, and are routinely posited as new eras of human freedom. The African voice is coming through at a time when education has firmly ensconced itself as the fourth pillar of Northern governments'

foreign policy, with the native's hunger for the same having become part of a democratic demand, even a 'human right'.

Thus while the African voice seeks to dig deep in the project of retrieving its philosophies, its major challenge lies as much within that project as without, for it must simultaneously seek clear space for the products of that excavation to be laid out and assimilated in *real time*. The project of making quality space available within which the emerging philosophies-in-articulation are to be positioned in a grossly distorted globalized world entails a high-precision re-examination of the techniques that have led to such successful stultification of an entire people's cognition. It also requires the development of counterpenetration techniques deep enough into the mainstream to enable strategic negotiations for that space to be undertaken.

The focus of this paper is therefore to draw attention to the challenges that will confront the newly retrieved African philosophy as it shall seek to embed itself in real time at the turn of this century.

THE AFRICAN AND THE THIRD WORLD 'VOICE' IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY

African voices have been rising in ebbs and tides in the nearly four decades of African postindependence. The call for African voices was most strongly felt in the 1960s when the centre of the universe was moving from Europe, as the countries of Africa and Asia demanded and asserted their right to define themselves and their relationship to the universe from their own centres in Africa or Asia. Independence, after all, was about people's struggle to claim their own space, and their right to name the world for themselves, rather than be named through the colour-tinted glass of the Europeans (Wa Thiongo 1993).

The process of decolonization that unfolded during this period saw the freeing from colonial rule of hundreds of millions of people, representing over half of humankind occupying the great landmasses of Asia, Africa and sundry territories elsewhere, and their constitution into independent states. The African voice, at the time, appropriately blended into the collective voice of the Third World and sought to bring about changes in the make-up of the global political economy in such a manner that would guarantee the inadmissibility of colonial rule on the one hand, and the economic betterment of all humankind on the other (Adams 1993).

In terms of development theory, the 'African voice' was to be heard in scattered jingles in the debate on the crisis in development theory and development thinking. The emergence of social science as a field responding to the transition of European societies from 'traditional' to 'modern' had given a distinct mark to classical nineteenth-century political economists and the founders of sociology and anthropology. As the industrial system consolidated and colonialism and imperialism broadly defined these specifically European experiences as 'universal', an evolutionist perspective common to all the classics gave way to functionalism

equilibrium theories with their focus on specialization, compartmentalization and positivism. A renewed interest in the so-called 'backward areas' gave rise to theoretical and methodological concerns which sought to develop 'corrective' strategies to an otherwise ethnocentric (Eurocentric) bias in the mainstream social sciences. 'Development' as an interdisciplinary field grew out of the assumption that the conditions in these underdeveloped areas ought to be changed (Hettne 1990).

The revolution in development thinking and theory in the mid-1960s originated not in Africa, but in Latin America. It was the *dependecia* approach that challenged the evolutionary Eurocentric perspective in development thinking and practice, and introduced an endogenistic orientation. At core in this new approach was the idea that intellectual understanding of what development was about had been distorted by academic colonialism. An endogenistic perspective therefore also implied self-reliance (Prebisch 1950, 1980). The dependency perspective found swift resonance among the countries of the Third World, the Non-aligned Movement, and influenced the discussion on development strategies at both national (in Chile under Allende, in Jamaica under Manley, and in Tanzania under Nyerere) and international levels (under the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development — UNCTAD; the New International Economic Order — NIEO).

The indigenization of development thinking questioned the capacity of mainstream social sciences to correctly describe peripheral reality and generate feasible strategies for change. Octavio Paz, the Mexican poet, pointed to the existence, in each civilization, of 'certain complexes, presuppositions and mental structures that are generally unconscious and that stubbornly resist the erosions of history and its changes' (Paz 1972:75, in Hettne 1990). Another Mexican intellectual, Vasconcelos, talked of the emergence of a cosmic race, 'a new cultural being' that combined the Indian, African, and even European elements (Vasconcelos 1970:216, in Hettne 1990).

In India, lively debates on the Indian situation, the effects of neocolonialism and of capitalistic extraction led to calls for a new sociology. Africa, with its history of deep intellectual penetration by colonialism, and a comparatively weak academic infrastructure, took on the indigenization idea with diverse emphases. In the period of 'original political ideas' (Hettne 1990:108), a strong thrust of non-institutionalized, politically oriented social science was developed — take for instance the contributions of Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, Julius Nyerere, Leopold Senghor, Jomo Kenyatta, Patrice Lumumba, Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral (Hettne 1990). These perspectives had in mind the issues of colonialism, African identity and alternative strategies for liberation. Later on, new trends such as the 'Dar es Salaam School' developed, which sought to bring about intellectual emancipation, not only in the broader cultural sense, but more specifically in the social sciences.

But elsewhere, the criticism of the status quo usually took the form of Africanization in terms of personnel rather than in terms of fundamental

reconstruction of concepts and theories governing the construction of social reality itself. Africanization, as a change of colour of face rather than a change of total mind-set, became the end of the emancipation process in a manner that was blissfully oblivious of the changing nature of the violences of neocolonialism and global hegemony in the real world order.

INITIATIVES AND ISSUES IN ENDOGENIZATION IN AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

Within the effort to endogenize African institutions, fundamental omissions were made when underdevelopment continued to be taken as a form of backwardness rather than as a result of the subsumption in the material framework of modernism. Many African countries still miss the point that the history of the advanced countries does *not* contain the future of poor countries (Kabede 1994). Moreover, while 'Africanization' of the disciplines has occurred within subjects like history and other nationally oriented programmes, no deep debate on *approaches* to the study fields has ever emerged (Crossman 1999). Modern and urban sociology predominates everywhere. Political models dominating the postcolonial or post-apartheid African scene, and democratic capitalism and Marxism have neglected with equal force the awareness of ethnic and cultural aspects of social life. In the meantime, what African political schools of thought have emerged have favoured the building of the nation-state, or even Pan-African consciousness that is usually devoid of any empirical content either in terms of indigenous philosophy or knowledge systems.

Where scatterlings of inspired scholars have emerged over time, the absence of a meta-framework for modifying academic agendas has hung like a yoke around the necks of potential innovators. The consequence of this has been that among Africans themselves there is great eagerness to dismiss outright any notion of a return to 'our pure fantastic cultures of long ago'. Others recognize the importance, but are preoccupied with life-level survival issues, leaving only a few to engage in any genuine campaign at all (Crossman 1999). In the middle of all this, Africanization of personnel has been mistaken for endogenization, and African scholars have found it easier to refer to the 'golden past' without contemplating opposing actively the current curricula and/or pedagogical structures.

PRECISION IDENTIFICATION OF VIOLENCE IN A CONTEXT OF HEGEMONY

To begin with, it has been all too easy for African politicians, academics and other progressive educators to forget the Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) injunction that the attack on organic relations and the systematic devaluation of culturally determined behaviour that was encapsulated in colonialism was no matter of

accident, but an act of symbolic violence. It was, and is, part and parcel of the objective of the project Galtung (1996) refers to as cultural violence. Cultural violence works by *changing the moral colour* of an act from wrong to right or to some other intermediate meaning palatable to the status quo. Another way it works is by *making reality opaque*, so that we do not see the violent act or fact, or that when we see it, we see it not as violent (Galtung 1996).

Symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977), for its part, is epitomized *genesis amnesia* which finds expression in the naive a-historical illusion that things have always been as they are. Systematic misrecognition of reality and truths is imposed on the dominated group/classes by positing the ideology of the dominant culture (in this case the Western culture) as the only authentic or universal culture. Looked at in retrospect, the success of this objective in a neocolonial context is seen in the way in which dominated groups (in this case — Africans) have internalized the world-view of the West, its disciplines and censorships, including its false acclamation to the status of 'universal'.

At great cost to societal development, most analysts have ignored precisely the inverse nature in which the increased internalization of the conquering reality simultaneously imposes on the dominated, by inculcation or exclusion, the recognition of the illegitimacy of their own cultural situation. What is poorly problematized (if at all) is the fact that in order to successfully get the dominated to proactively recognize the illegitimacy of their own cultural situation, they must be induced to recognize the new definition of 'legitimate knowledge', and devalue the knowledge and know-how they and their societies effectively command (such as complex indigenous social relations and laws, technology, art and language).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) state quite appropriately that the power of symbolic violence operates and succeeds in reproducing itself only because the arbitrary power which makes imposition possible is never seen in its full truth. The legitimacy of a domination always strengthens the established balance of power because by preventing apprehension of power relations *as* power relations, it also tends to *prevent* dominated groups or classes from securing all the strength that realization of their strength would give them. In such instances, the essence of the violence is harder to perceive because the techniques employed *conceal* the social significance of the pedagogic relations under the guise of some altruistic or purely psychological relationship (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977).

Politicians and educators have too easily forgotten that in a context of hegemony, creativity and attempts to regain 'one's mind' are often immediately constituted as subjects for therapy, a pathology positing demonic possession (Berger & Luckman 1971). Thus Africa and African culture must be posited as devoid of epistemology. Africa must remain a place in which to travel and test one's theories and hypotheses and get promotion quickly to the status of expert on African societies. It is the 'field' full of rats in the social scientist's cage. The moment Africa begins to be taken seriously, a serious disjuncture occurs. Resources get thinner and soon disappear altogether, and legitimacy is gradually

withdrawn. For those who would dare to think that Africa is part of the heritage of humankind, and deserving of similar attention, guilt or panic is created to get one to become convinced that it was a mistake to have even contemplated such a thought. The conceptual machinery of modernization and the institution of science have been particularly effective in arousing this guilt and a state of panic or inadequacy in the non-modern (read un-Western) at a deep structural level.

Under the pressure of this guilt, and the fear of being called primitive, the education industry has also functioned well, oiling its fossilized wheels which have flattened to unrecognizable shapes, the cosmology of African societies. Formal education has placed itself on a peculiarly empty ethical pedestal, hoping that somehow the subjugated groups will forever continue to accept supinely the conceptualization of their own condition which the colonial therapeutic practitioners have bestowed upon them. It is for this reason that education practitioners have no qualms whatsoever in not relating to the round huts that surround the square building of the school. Even the square shape does not bother them, or if it does, the fear of contradicting the hegemony is sufficient to keep mute even the most outspoken of politicians and progressive educators. How are we to view the current democratic demand for education? How are we to view the assertion that 'Africa is now politically free'?

'AFRICAN VOICES IN EDUCATION': SIGNIFICANCE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

To begin with, an education system is the repository, carrier and transmitter of a society's myth, the institutionalization centre for that myth's contradictions, and the locus of the ritual which reproduces and veils the disparities between myth and reality (Illich 1970). *African Voices in Education* would have as its objective the goal of transcending the present eschewed and partially constituted educational thinking and practice which thrives on the hope that African cosmology and indigenous systems have been successfully decimated and do not deserve a place in the universal heritage of societies. It would constitute an attempt to recover the ethical and humanistic principles so lacking in education thinking today. It can also be seen as part of an effort to help develop both a vision and practice of education that goes beyond schooling. Knowledge and minds, after all, are not commodities — that is to say, they are not just human resources to be developed, exploited, and then cast aside, but treasures to be cultivated to improve the quality of life of both individuals and societies (Power 1997).

It is about empowerment, laying the basis for African people to participate in mastering and directing the course of change and fulfilling the vision of learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together as equals with others (Unesco 1996). Learning to know is not just about acquiring a specific body of knowledge, but an approach, an attitude to knowledge and the process of generating it. Learning to live together is not just about tolerating otherness, it

means wishing to understand others, and to be understood. The way in which the education system operates, and especially its relationship with the surrounding community in Africa, influences the pupils more than any combined content. Curricula only pay lip service to the issue of relevance and adaptability, and the ability to work with each other, focusing instead on more easily evaluated cognitive achievements. Learning to *be* remains a running challenge in the context of the Western hegemony, especially how to prepare an African child to accept fully his/her own identity, cosmology and indigenous forms of knowledge as part of a universal heritage and universal resource.

African Voices in Education reminds us that there is also work still to be done in expanding the purpose and process of education beyond its immediate functionality, ascribing to it a major contribution in the formation of the whole human being. Moreover, increasingly, the 'community' and 'society' are fast slipping away from present discourses in education (Odora Hoppers 1998). The new stories about education now hinge on controversies about financing, equity, quality and effectiveness, punctuated with various accounts of indiscipline or violence and pass rates at terminal points. For its part, discussions about reform remain too technical and avoid the issue of defining the word 'public' first before one can talk of 'public schools'. That 'public', moreover, is a varied audience consisting in large part of populations and communities with suppressed cosmologies and identities, but with a deep interest in seeing their children grow to become full adults capable of responding to various problems in society. This response is not just in terms of 'jobs', but also as transmitters of values of the different cultures and societies. Furthermore, in order to participate in the global community, we have to know *that* which we bring to the global community from our roots, our pasts. If, for some reason, that possibility is pre-empted or prevented, then it is a violation of a right to 'be', and thereby a violence.

What is needed is a critical appraisal of the methods and tactics by which particular values in education are constantly upheld, and of the silent and unobtrusive ways in which an entire range of areas in policy visions in education *hardly ever* receive any scientific attention or financial support. Such an investigation would extend into the phenomenon in which high-level cognitive resources embodied in African graduates returning from overseas training consistently define and delimit solutions to problems in terms of the particular understanding of development, or economics, or education to which they have been intensively exposed while abroad. On this issue, Samoff (1993) has argued that neither the explicit, nor the more subtle insertion of specified agendas into policy-making in African education is primarily a consequence of external ignorance or insensitivity to African values, philosophies of education or policy preferences. 'Rather, what is most powerful and most insidious in this relationship is the internalization within Africa, of world views, research approaches, and procedures for validating knowledge that effectively perpetuate Africa's dependence and poverty' (Samoff 1993:186-7).

The above constitute what this volume hopes at least to trigger and at most to achieve. What may need to be addressed further, then, is the way to get there and, to this task, I shall apply insights from Dias' theses of the democratization of education as an operational strategy in transforming the deep structures of the education system towards acceptance of greater diversity and plurality.

THE CHALLENGE OF DEMOCRATIZING EDUCATION

Dias (1993) has put forward a strong Third World case for the democratization of education, starting from the premise that in the context of imperialism, colonialism and now neocolonialism, Africa (and the Third World) came by force under the influence and determination of a militarily and technically powerful civilization. This situation has had the consequence that the defeated ones (the colonized) have not only lost their life space, but also their world (Dias 1993). It is *this* fact, he argues, that makes the struggle for reconstitution of the 'self' in the African sense and the search for a 'true universal' become a *struggle for truth*.

It is this struggle for truth that can enable us to link the search for democratic and egalitarian ideals with the rejection of a Eurocentric perspective of history in relation to which the seemingly idyllic but autonomous and self-sustaining African (read: Third World) societies have become personifications of inhumanity, despotism, superstition, and essentially all evils. The call to find and locate African voices in an education to which all the young children in Africa, as is the case in many parts of the Third World, are to be exposed and entrusted, therefore becomes more than just 'an interest'. It becomes part of a process of deliberate scrutiny of the apparently innocent and emancipatory Western discourse in the area of education, that handmaiden and supplement of power, that '... serves to uphold power and knowledge upon dominated societies by monopolizing the parameters for interpretation, by marginalizing whatever has not been determined by western conquest, and by domesticating other subject positions as historically obsolete and self-defeating otherness — pre-colonial, pre-capitalist, ir-rational, pre-modern, non-modern, non-literate, un-democratic ... etc (Dias 1993:230).

Democratization, in this instance, would mean the process aiming to achieve, theoretically and practically, through a radical transformation of all social aspects, the goals and principles of democracy. It implies, among other things, a fundamental new thinking regarding effective participation of all citizens as subjects of an auto-determined historical process of control over the modes of production and upon the cultural foundations of society (Dias 1993).

For its part, 'education' would mean those intentional processes and devices for the transmission of attitudes, knowledge, norms, skills, techniques and values in accordance with the diversity of educational realities and socioeconomic needs existing in all plural societies. According to Dias, if we want to have a socially useful and relevant education with greater social impact, then we have to rediscover, by a participatory method, the *practical value* of education. We have to

rediscover the *subjects* of this education within specific historical conditions and give them a *real say* in the process of production of the appropriate network of social relations. This implies that in the process of restructuring education, we should place increasing value on the *diversity of educational realities*, and thereby on the multiplicity of learning situations and the realization of different types of formalization.

Democratization of education as a political project to build up a democratic society very much depends on the degree of participation of the members of the society in the decision-making process. Between education as a functional undertaking, and education as a political project (nation-building, creation of a new society, modernization or formation of human capital), the myth of school education as a major force of development, social mobility and equity has been kept alive through the careful strategy of individualizing success or failure.

If democratization of education is not going to blindly become part of this myth, it has to face the real challenge of defining and implementing its aims under specific conditions of continuing authoritarianism and hegemony of Western forms, structures — and even content. The challenge of democratizing education is therefore that of fostering genuine rebirth of the African voice and identity, serious intercultural exchange with those numerous ‘others’ that the process of colonialism and scientism have unilaterally excluded, and to ease the strangeness between the native, now recognized as an active ‘knower’, and the figurative ‘Englishman’, henceforth only one among many others (Dias 1993:237).

The case for democratization implies moving the centre from its location in Europe towards a pluralism of centres, themselves being equally legitimate locations of human imagination. The challenge is not in recognizing the mutual exclusion between Africa and Europe, but the basis and the new starting point for their interaction. It has been acknowledged that knowing oneself and one’s environment is the correct basis for absorbing the world and that a pluralism of languages is the legitimate vehicle of human imagination. Is it so difficult to imagine the possibility of redemption arising from the energy of the oppressed (Wa Thiong'o 1993)?

CONCLUSION

It is only with a heightened consciousness as to the nature of the violences that have been inflicted upon African societies, the violations that have followed in their wake, and the techniques that continue to be applied to keep the diverse realities mute that a volume on the articulation of African voices in education can find its requisite strategic value.

It is the hope of this paper that the rediscovery of African philosophies at the turn of the twentieth century is part of an effort to create a coordinate, reflexive, bicultural or multicultural generation of African children and youth ready to take on the complex world in which they find themselves. The ‘coordinate’ bilingual,