

The Challenges of Anti-racist Education Research in the African Context*

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Résumé: Cet article traite des défis auxquels la recherche et l'éducation anti-racistes doivent faire face dans le contexte africain. L'auteur y indique les points sur lesquels l'attention des étudiants, éducateurs et chercheurs intéressés à poursuivre une éducation anti-raciste et à mener une recherche dans l'environnement social africain doit se porter en priorité. Parmi ces points figurent le changement des programmes, le discours et la pédagogie à l'intérieur de la classe, le caractère approprié de la recherche ainsi que les rapports entre les problèmes d'égalité des thèmes par l'éducation, de liberté universitaire, de droits de l'homme et d'éducation anti-raciste. La contribution de l'auteur est de montrer comment une éducation anti-raciste peut éclairer les intérêts académiques et de recherche des éducateurs et participer ainsi à la lutte pour le pouvoir politique la justice sociale et le développement social de tous les peuples africains.

Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to examine the role of anti-racist education and research in a contemporary new epoch, one which is remarkably different in its celebration of cultural fragmentation and pluralism as against '... the universalising, homogenising effects of rationality and scientism' (Lash and Urry 1987:4; Smith 1991:7): I would not attempt to argue that there is a consensus out there on what constitutes anti-racist education and anti-racist research. I only draw attention to certain basic challenges for those interested in the conduct of anti-racist work in the African social setting.

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To begin with the paper raises the question of whether one can talk about anti-racist education in the African context in the same way others, for example, have discussed anti-racism concerns for Canadian or North American society. In this regard I would stress that this is a theoretical paper intended to solicit ideas on how anti-racist and anti-sexist education can be approached in the African context in a way that draws on the discussions in North American society.

One of the problems of theorising on anti-racist education generally is that not much work has been done in the area (at least until recently). Anti-racist education issues are just beginning to be articulated in a comprehensive manner. Nevertheless, it is important we recognise from the onset that scholars like Fanon (1968), Memmi (1965), Du Bois (1965a, b), Rodney (1972), Cabral (1973), Nkrumah (1970), Said (1979), wa Thiong'o (1986), Amin (1989), and Freire (1990) have to varying degrees raised the issue of education of the human mind that would recognise the variety of experiences and the history and achievements of all peoples. The confines of what should constitute anti-racist education in any setting be it in North America or in Africa is open to further debate and discussion.

The discussion of anti-racism is complicated by the fact that terms, concepts and conceptualisations such as race, racism, ethnicity and ethnic boundaries which are essential to a theoretical discourse on anti-racist education are themselves usually subjected to different interpretations and analyses. This is usually the case with the use of conceptual and analytical categories which are themselves social constructs (Samuels 1991:2). The race concept, for example, does not carry a social significance in itself unless it is systematically paired with social rewards and penalties. In the context of Africa the issues can be complicated further because of the view held by some (rightly or wrongly) that race is not as significant a social category in African social analysis. Many see the issue of ethnicity as more relevant than race in the African context given the diversity of cultural groups and the ethnic and religious conflicts that occasionally flare up between these groups in some societies.¹

However, the discussion of anti-racism encompasses the issues of race, ethnicity, class and gender in every society. First and foremost, it is important to see anti-racist education in the African context as a critique of the ideas and practices within the schools and the wider social order that

1 The race concept has generally been defined by socially selected physical traits, while ethnicity, on the other hand, is seen as determined by socially selected cultural traits. But I should caution from the onset that the theoretical exercise of defining concepts can be painful for the student who has lived the experiences been discussed. I am reminded by one of my doctoral student who pointed out to me in my graduate course on 'The Sociology of Race and Ethnic Relations' that when we as academics engage in such theoretical exercises must do well to remember that, for some people, we are talking about their lived experiences.

establish, promote and perpetuate white hegemony over black and non-white peoples. Anti-racist education and research both constitute attempts to develop ways for African educators and researchers to critique and dismantle white hegemony. The major task of anti-racist education in terms of the decolonisation of the human mind should be conceived in political terms. White hegemony has been maintained through colonialism and neo-colonialism, cultural, political and military imperialism and now, through a so-called new world order without responsibility and accountability. The purpose of anti-racist education is for 'black racial upliftment' and to 'recover' Africa from the hands of foreign exploiters and their internal accomplices or allies (Garvey 1986:52, 80-82).

But anti-racist education is also a critique and an indictment of ethnic and patriarchal hegemonies in society, and those institutional practices that have engendered differential sharing and distribution of power and privilege along race, ethnic, gender and class lines.² It can be argued that racism as an ideology has historically supported the system of exploitation and oppression of one ethnic group by another. Likewise certain classes in society have internalised a racial ideology of superiority providing a rationale for their continued domination and exploitation of other people (Bolaria and Li 1988). Viewed in the African context then, the relevance of a term like 'race' in the discussion of anti-racist education lies in its socio-historical construction as relations of power among individuals and groups in society.

The starting point for anti-racist work in Africa is for the educator to problematise Eurocentrism, male privilege, ethnic privilege and prejudice, as well as the social inequities among groups in society (Walcott 1992). To begin with antiracist education in African schools must emphasise the necessity of developing Afrocentric world views/perspectives as a legitimate body of knowledge to counter the Eurocentrism that still permeates intellectual debates or discourse analysis in some circles in Africa.

Anti-racist education is also a discourse about the social reality of ethnic minorities and women within African schools and the wider social order against discrimination, prejudice, oppression, domination and relative economic deprivation of certain segments of society. An anti-racist discourse therefore relates to the experiences of students in multi-ethnic schools and gendered communities and how these students contend with prejudice, discrimination, conflicts and alienation within the education system. The broad issues of anti-racist

2 In this discussion of anti-racist education and research in the context of continental Africa I include discrimination by ethnicity, class, gender and sexual orientation and to some extent race. For those interested in the theoretical connections between race, ethnicity, gender, and class oppression, see Stasiulis (1991), King (1988), Hooks (1990), Collins (1989, 1990), Mullings (1992), and also Ng (1991) among others. Although these scholars focus on North America their discussions have some relevance for Africa.

education apply to most multi-ethnic and multi-racial societies that have to contend with racial and ethnic dictatorships as well as cultural alienation.

This general view of anti-racist education recognises the theoretical inadequacies of any hegemonic discourse that does not correspond to the variety of human experiences that have shaped human growth and development and does not lead to a deeper understanding of ethnic, gender and class relations in society (Buck 1991:23). The social construction of reality does not take place in a vacuum. The world is experienced differently according to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, and one's place in the world's economic system.

The pedagogical approach to anti-racist education in the schools would relate individual and group experiences of students to the power structure and institutions of society. The school is a site where differential levels of influence and power imbalances can be clearly exhibited. Anti-racist education should expose how such power imbalance on students' learning in terms of identity with and alienation from the school. Such form of education should also focus classroom discourse on how existing socio-economic inequities in society impact upon students' learning, sense of connectedness and belonging to the community.

In the African context, anti-racist education and research would interrogate African indigenous cultures as primary vehicles for social transformation. Anti-racist research in Africa must realise that the sources and uses of data are not apolitical. To do anti-racist work therefore is to develop a sensitivity to the context of data gathering in a way that acknowledges and contributes to the resolution of tensions, needs and wants of all people in society. It involves creating an academic atmosphere where ideas can be sensitised to the environmental demands and needs in a creative, adaptive and productive way. It also involves sensitising educators and researchers to the plight of other colleagues who have had their freedoms taken away because of their political activism and their professional involvement in democratic issues and processes (Lawuyi 1991).

In effect anti-racist education must be presented as political education in order to raise the level of individual and group consciousness, develop critical political thinking and to encourage activism among all students, teachers and staff for meaningful change in society. Instead of reifying power, anti-racist education should seek to question power and its rationality for domination (Thornhill 1984; Hooks 1988; Freire 1990; Walcott 1992)³ This approach to

3 For example, anti-racist education must critique the alliance that some of Africa's political leaders have forged with the international financial community and foreign governments leaving white hegemony intact in Africa. It is no secret that part of African leadership no longer stands with the people in the struggle for sovereignty. The state has become an instrument serving external interests and agents who continually 'bully' the local peoples of Africa (see also the 'Editorial' Ngoma Ya Mano, January 1992, p. 4. A quarterly issue of the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education, Nairobi, Kenya).

anti-racist education should begin with a call for a fundamental restructuring of power and power relations in the school community and the wider society (Thomas, 1984, 1987; Lee, 1985).

Anti-racist education and research must recognise the need to universalise knowledge, but on respectable and mutually beneficial terms to all parties. Anti-racist education must challenge any monopoly over what constitutes valid knowledge. It should also challenge some positivist beliefs and notions about our social world. It should question mainstream scientism and rationality of Western society and the positivist world view that represents social science research and social analysis as an unbiased reflection of reality. Such notions of positivism, as Askins (1991:28) points out, serve to mask bourgeois class bias in mainstream social thought and praxis. It also assumes the superiority of Western society.

The Problem of Racist Education

Only few scholars today would deny that colonial education in Africa was Eurocentric and ignored the achievements and contributions of the indigenous populations and their ancestries. Colonial education for the most part did not cultivate the African student's self-esteem and pride. Education in Africa today is still struggling to rid itself of this colonial legacy. Even today, in many circles, Western education and research are alive and well and continue to distort, misappropriate and misinterpret African peoples lives and subjective experience. This situation is adding to a long history of Euro-American dominance of what constitutes valid knowledge and how such knowledge should be produced and disseminated internally and internationally. Fortunately, such dominance is being challenged in the postmodernist call for the introduction, validation, and interrogation of 'other' voices and ways of knowing in order to provide other and perhaps more complete accounts of the history of ideas and events that have shaped human growth and development. In the new cultural politics of difference, there is emphasis on the importance and contributions of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity of ideas while rejecting the homogenous and monolithic (West 1991).

Anti-racist education and research can make significant contributions to the search for a more inclusive body of knowledge. Among the areas in which anti-racist education in Africa can contribute to this task is the development of an Afrocentric world view as an alternative, non-exclusionary system of knowledge (Asante 1980, 1987, 1990). Afrocentricity can provide a framework and a rallying point for black identity and unity and the liberation of all people oppressed primarily for reasons of their race and cultural heritage (Henry 1991; Dei 1992a). Anti-racist education and research must de-mystify the myths about the continent and help to recover and restore the sense of pride in continental and diasporan Africans. Through anti-racist education the existing curricula in the schools can be reformed and education could be made to address issues of

social discrimination and justice as well as serve local needs rather than those of white hegemony and its allies who control power.

The Challenges of Anti-racist Education and Research

The School Curriculum and Anti-Racist Education

One of the greatest challenges to anti-racist education in Africa lies in the area of curriculum reform and development. Educators must be aware of the critical role of teaching materials in effective learning (Farrell, 1989). There is an urgent need for a comprehensive curriculum reform at all levels of the school system in Africa. The goal is to ensure that education serves the needs of local peoples by addressing issues of social justice rather than helping to perpetuate white, ethnic, and patriarchal hegemonies and class biases. The issue of educating the human mind in a manner that recognises the variety of human experiences and the history and achievements of all peoples is fundamental to any anti-racist work in the schools. Certain questions have to be asked about educational texts in Africa and the messages being conveyed by the texts and instructors in the schools, and the current state of research been conducted on the continent. For example, how much about Africa and the achievements and contributions of her peoples to world civilisation is taught in the schools? How much of the existing African system of education is developed to seek legitimacy from the 'outside'? Should we be using the language of the oppressor in education (wa Thiong'o 1986)? How do the schools take up the issues of ethnicity and/or ethnic differences in society and provincialism? How much of the discourse on African development has changed over the years? Why do we continue to make both the colonial and post-colonial periods our points of academic references as if Africa had no history before the coming of the white person? Do we as African scholars have to write back?⁴ And, given current economic constraints how much are we (as African educators and researchers) actively engaged in creation of analytical systems based on indigenous African concepts and their interrelationships?

Classroom Pedagogy and Anti-Racist Education

Anti-racist education means training people in the true meaning of equality and justice through a critical teaching praxis which addresses issues of social inequality, ethnic oppression and sex discrimination in the classrooms and

4 I will like to acknowledge the ideas of Handel Kashope Wright of the Department of Curriculum, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, in this regard which formed the basis of a panel session on: 'Why Write Back: Going Beyond Post-Coloniality' that I have organised at the Learned's Conference at the University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, May 29 - June 4, 1992.

schools. The method for anti-racist education should seek to provide students and teachers with a lens through which to examine society. Through the lens we will all be able to understand what we think we know about others, and more importantly, what we all do not know about ourselves (Buck and D'Amico-Samuels 1991:2). To this end, anti-racist educators must arm themselves with the relevant knowledge in order to adequately prepare students against all forms of discrimination, and to deal with the institutional structures that foster social inequities (Llanusa-Castro 1991:34).

It is extremely important that anti-racist education seek to enhance the development of a counter-hegemonic discourse in the academy by insisting on the representation of alternative viewpoints in the writing and teaching of history, social science, and other academic disciplines. It should start with the unmasking and deconstruction of hegemonic ideologies facilitating the exercise of power in society. It should encourage all students to challenge any existing Eurocentric and patriarchal knowledges about their own societies and communities (Casey 1991:9).

The observation that culture or tradition can be used as a means to perpetuate and legitimise certain practises that may be exploitative and disempowering for certain groups in society (e.g., women and children) is correct particularly in the context of Africa. Many scholars find the term 'tradition' very problematic (Hountondji 1983; Ranger 1983; Smith 1987; Minha-ha 1989:106). However, we must be careful not to allow the problems one may have over 'tradition' to justify any calculated attempts to negate or denigrate African cultures wholesale (Wright 1992; Muteshi 1992). As Scalon (1964) long ago pointed out, tradition is inescapable whether one reaffirms or repudiates it. Anti-racist education in Africa should encourage students to challenge the on-going problem of the systematic negation and denigration of African cultures both inside and outside the continent. This has roots in the justification of slavery and in the colonial process in general, and in colonial education in particular (Wright 1992).

Another area of challenge from anti-racist scholars and students is in Women/Gender/Feminist Studies in Africa and the segments of that scholarship dominated by colonial discourses (Mohanty 1991a, b; Amadiume 1987). There is ample evidence to support a contention that in traditional African societies varied forms of domination, exploitation, and gender inequalities existed and continue to exist today. However, as Wright (1992:3) points out, attempts by some scholars to '....perpetuate or establish male advantage and dominance in African societies through selective recapturing or misreadings of traditional African cultures' must be questioned or challenged. Anti-racist education must equip students with the necessary intellectual and cultural capital to do so. The complete rejection of feminism by some African scholars or even the African state in the name of

maintaining tradition or on the basis that it is Western is problematic. Equally problematic, as Wright (1992) goes further to argue, is the uncritical acceptance of feminist analysis of traditional African societies in the name of women's upliftment and solidarity. While social movements are necessary in order to deal with some of the major problems of humanity today, we must also caution against trivialising the issues through a simplistic comparison of the social injustices been suffered by poor women and men in developing societies and their counterparts in the so-called developed societies. The misguided attempts to dichotomise the sexes in the African social setting and to see the opposite sex as the 'other' is very problematic. Anti-racist education should help African students reclaim the positive elements of their culture and cultural values in favour of a preoccupation with the 'negatives' as sites of empowerment and for developing a collective consciousness (Steady 1990).

Anti-racist education should incorporate the individual and group lived experiences of students and teachers into critical pedagogical practises in the schools so as to understand social reality (Henry 1991). Anti-racist educators must use relevant and critical teaching materials in their curricula and also secure institutional attention focused on ethnic bias, classism, and sexism in the schools (Higginbotham 1990:15). Efforts to tackle issues of ethnicity, class and gender oppression in the schools are inexorably linked to the need for an alternative curriculum. Educators must reassess their pedagogical practises so that they cease to reproduce inequality and instead draw on student's lived experiences as well as alternative worldviews to Eurocentric perspectives to develop an empowering, non-alienating curriculum for their schools (Prince 1991:37).⁵

Anti-racist education should also encourage students to examine their own educational 'histories/herstories', their roles as beneficiaries of ethnic, class and gender privileges or how they have been disadvantaged in the context of existing structures of inequality (Freire 1990; Bolles 1991:7). Classroom pedagogy should focus on the examination of the ways in which ethnicity, class and gender have differentially shaped the experience of being African for different groups at different points in time (Francis-Okongwu and Pflaumm 1991:25; Collins 1986, 1990). It should discuss power and privilege across race, ethnic, class, gender lines, as well

5 It is important that the concern with the introduction of alternative perspectives and curriculum in the schools is not based on exclusionary politics. This can have the danger of alienating many groups. Anti-racist education can accent the individual and collective group identities and agendas of racial minority students without losing touch of the humanness or the universalism that ultimately binds us all as one humanity. To this end, anti-racist educators must also be concerned about the implications of alternative pedagogical practices for all students.

as across other differences. It should acknowledge and 'educate' that an important aspect of institutionalised discrimination is the systematic misinformation about our own group and members of other groups, including both the privileged and the oppressed (Cannon 1990:130; Higginbotham 1990:19): Anti-racist educators must make it 'safe' for students to challenge the status quo and to equip students with the intellectual and cultural capital to do so.

Casey (1991:12) pointed to another challenge for the anti-racist educator when he argued that the nurturing aspect of a teacher's role in recent years has expanded to include respect for and sensitivity to cultural and ethnic differences. Some teachers in their pedagogical practices emphasise this aspect of avoiding conflict in the classroom. The idea apparently is to try as much as possible not to hurt anyone's feelings. This can pose a problem for the anti-racist teacher if s/he is to confront and engage the hurt, pain, anger and confusion that can ensue in a classroom discussion in response to expressions of sexism, ethnic and anti-working class bias. It is important the teacher makes students aware about the legitimacy of taking the issues that bring pain to students, particularly minority students in the class.

Through a dialectical pedagogy of anti-racist education the teacher could tap students' anger and rage to rupture preconceived ideas or notions and stimulate critical analysis of the entrenched status quo and rigid orthodoxies (Casey 1991:12). For the anti-racist educator, the challenge is to structure an environment of trust and respect in the classroom that would be conducive to a productive discussion of all forms of social discrimination. It is only through such a process that students can be equipped with a language⁶ and the intellectual capital to argue against those in the wider society who take discriminatory positions. Students can be collectively empowered from the engagement of these issues, particularly when teachers combine their anti-racist work with the need to provide students with valuable resources in terms of leadership skills and energy for human development.

Given the many issues that the anti-racist teacher has to deal with, institutional support for anti-racist work is extremely important. If as change agents anti-racist educators do not have the support of institutional resources, as well as the full and enthusiastic endorsement of anti-racist education by school authorities their work will remain incomplete. The schools will only continue to offer truncated responses to the problem anti-racist education hopes to address. This is why it is important that the state gets actively involved in anti-racist education in the schools.

6 I use the term 'language' in the poststructuralist sense to connote how meaning is socially constructed, specifically, the means by which actors perceive themselves and their social relationships to others.

Educational Equity, Academic Freedom, Human Rights and Anti-Racist Education

In discussing anti-racist education in the schools, the issues of educational equity, academic freedom, free speech and fundamental rights of individuals are extremely important. These issues present some basic challenges for the anti-racist educator. For example in the area of educational equity a fundamental question can be raised. How can anti-racist education achieve some of the key goals of social justice and a radical transformation of the power relations and institutional structures within which learning, teaching, and the administration of education take place in the schools? A starting point to accomplishing this goal is making our institutions of learning more accessible to the disadvantaged in society, particularly, women and those from poor economic backgrounds, as well as those ethnic minorities who have been marginalised in the distribution of political power in society. The greatest threat to educational accessibility in Africa can be found in the educational reforms currently underway in a number of countries inspired by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund's (IMF), Structural Adjustment Policies (Moock and Harbison 1988). African educational systems are being privatised as the state cuts down on its subsidies for social services (health and education). As more costs are shifted to parents, the poor are finding it extremely difficult to provide for their childrens' education. The most affected are the rural people and particular women and young girls who are passed over for boys when parents have to make a determination as to which child to educate given the financial constraints (Dei 1992d).

Other basic challenges relating to academic freedom and human rights can be posed in the form of questions for us to ponder over. The school community, particularly the institution of higher learning, prides itself on the right to free speech and expression. The issue is how do anti-racist educators protect this right and also preserve respect and recognition for the basic human rights of all ethnic minority members? As Ramcharan (1991:22) recently pointed out, the values of liberalism and tolerance arguably are the theoretical hallmarks of our educational institutions and yet the practical experiences for many students remain one of prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviour. At issue, as far as developing a favourable environment for the conduct of anti-racist pedagogy is concerned, is whether the proof of intent to discriminate or show racial bias should be allowed to flourish under the cloak of academic rights to freedom of expression? Anti-racist educators must question whether such ideals or concepts as 'truth' and 'freedom' are meaningful at all in the abstract without an understanding of the concepts in relation to the human experience.

The institution and enforcement of critical standards in the selection and evaluation of all teaching materials utilised in pedagogical practices in the

schools is not tantamount to a closure of academic enquiry or the human mind (Bloom, 1990).⁷ No one should have the right to falsify 'history/herstory' or degrade racial and ethnic minority groups and women all in the name of academic freedom. Fortunately, many educators while upholding the principles of intellectual freedom would also support the promotion of non-discriminatory teaching materials and non-racist and non-sexist discourse. Many educators agree that for every earned right is married a responsibility or an appropriate duty. It is for this reason that any piece of academic research should be seen as political. Therefore any academic work that ignores the political implications for society ought to be faulted.⁸

Human dignity is critical to freedom and every youth has the right to grow up with positive self-esteem and an accurate image of the humanity of others. Ethnic and class bias as well as sexism within the schools inhibit the development of a positive self image and human dignity, as well as the pursuit of personal happiness and liberty.

Freedom of expression is crucial for the survival of any democracy. Democracy could also sow the seeds of its own destruction if the rights of some segments of society (e.g., the poor, women) continue to be abused and peoples do not have fair access to the valued goods of society (e.g., health, education, jobs). Certain limitations are necessary to prevent the abuse of individuals whose action trample on the rights of others. There are also the collective rights to society to protect its ethnic minorities, as well as the poor, women and children. It is a challenge to the anti-racist educator and researcher to make his/her students aware of the contrast between the

7 For those so hung up on the issue of academic censorship, it should be argued, as Taxel (1979:67) long ago pointed out, public schools and other educational institutions generally transmit a body of knowledge and set of values shared by the members of the community. Therefore, some measure of public regulation of classroom pedagogy is inherent in the very provision of public education. A challenge for anti-racist education then is for the schools to redesign teaching and learning styles not typical of the ideas and thoughts of the groups that hold power in society and define institutional practises (Moore 1983:3; Bolles 1991:7).

8 In North American scholarship, an example of this can be seen in the work of Professor Philippe Rushton of the Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario, who in 1989 argued that Blacks were the least intelligent compared to Whites and Asians (Rushton 1990). It is very unfortunate that there are even some 'liberal' minded intellectual prepared to defend such racist scholarship on the grounds of academic freedom. Groups such as the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship whose membership include some faculty members in some Ontario Universities have recently argued that sexual harassment policies, employment equity and the suppression of even racist research are damaging to academic freedom (Varsity, Volume 112, Number 49, March 23, 1992, University of Toronto, p.1).

promise of equality offered by the school system and the actual production of inequality through the structures of schooling and how all should work together for social transformation. Anti-racist teaching and research should be education for radical change.

Other Personal Challenges of Pursuing Anti-Racist Education and Research

The pursuit of anti-racist work presents a number of basic challenges for every educator, administrator, non-teaching staff or student engaged in the African context. I want to end this discussion by examining some of these personal challenges. As an African teacher and researcher, a basic challenge in pursuing anti-racist work is to present the histories and cultures of African peoples (e.g., Afrocentric pedagogy) in a positive light while at the same time not idealising or romanticising the past. In other words, the challenge is to present the truth about the past contributions of African societies to world civilisation and in doing so not to gloss over some unpleasant aspects of Africa's cultural histories and experiences (e.g., political repression, slavery, gender exploitation, and ethnic conflicts).

Another personal challenge has to do with the emerging role and place of subjectivity in the academic discourse on anti-racist education and trying to define one's politics within the academy. I share postmodernist calls for the introduction, validation, and interrogation of 'other' voices and ways of knowing in order to provide a more complete account of the history of ideas and events that have shaped human growth and development (Francis-Okongwu and Pflaum 1991:25; Dei 1992a). I believe this objective can be achieved if researchers can undertake the task of presenting those human experiences that have so far been silenced in the discourses on Africa.

However, there is another side to these personal challenges. As Casey (1991:9) points out lived experiences by themselves cannot generate a comprehensive corrective. Such experiences are insufficient to transform social science discourse since personal accounts are developed within the narrative structure and received categories of bourgeois ideology. To me this raises the question of how much anti-racist work one can do in the area of developing an alternative, non-exclusionary Afrocentric pedagogy or perspective and carrying out anti-racist work within the medium of Western hegemonic discourse and language. I want to briefly discuss on the personal challenges of doing anti-racist work in the context of both my previous and on-going research work and academic interests.

African Studies and Anti-racist Research

For a while now I have been concerned with the issues of African development, the need to decolonise research on the continent, and more recently, the need to develop an Afrocentric perspective that speaks to

African realities and experiences. I have come to realise that the discourse on Africa's development among the public in the West is generally plagued or shaped by colonial and neo-colonial Eurocentric biases. By reproducing Eurocentric knowledge, all African scholars and other Africanists must share the blame for this situation having prevailed to this day. The need to decolonise research is imperative if the Eurocentric biases that have historically characterised the search for knowledge about Africa is to be corrected. Such Eurocentrism one must admit is in part a consequence of racism. One could contend, in fact that the racist attitudes to Black peoples all over the globe is related in part to the negative images and views that some Europeans hold about Africa.

It is not an overstatement to say that Africans still do not control nor shape their destiny. Africa is still at the periphery of the development discourse that is taking place in the Western centres. Africans are yet to fully occupy the roles of subjects rather than objects of Western development strategies (Taylor 1992:257). The African agenda (research and development) continues to be set and reshaped by powerful external forces. This is reflected in the wide array of policy experts and their prescriptions under the cloak of modernisation, and recently, neo-modernisation and recolonisation, in the form of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).⁹ SAPs have literally been forced down the throats of African peoples without the due consideration of indigenous historical conditions. The main development agenda under which much of contemporary research is conducted in the context of foreign inspired programs is to promote an export-led development strategy for African countries. Even if one does not have to question the motives behind the pursuit of this development strategy, it should be asked: whose primary interests have so far been served? And, as Asante (1988, 1990) would also ask: is it in the best interest of Africans?

9 Since the 1980s, the World Bank and the IMF have been advising Africa and other developing countries to embark upon a form of national economic restructuring as a conditionality for receiving new international loans. The specific economic policies that have been imposed include currency devaluation, high interest rates to fight inflation, strict control on money supply, cuts in government spending for social services, removal of trade and exchange control, deregulation of prices of goods and services, including labour, privatisation of public sector enterprises, and indiscriminate export promotion. SAPs is seen as a form of recolonisation of Africa because the World Bank virtually dictates the monetary, trade and fiscal policies of governments. The Bank's officials have to approve national budgets, foreign exchange budgets, as well as give clearance certificates before countries can negotiate with other foreign lending agencies. Since the mid-1980s there has been net capital outflow from developing countries to the developed world (Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice, Canada 1990 *Recolonisation or Liberation: The Bonds of Structural Adjustment and Struggles for Emancipation*, p.12).

The few studies conducted on the impact of SAPs in Africa provide some account of the hardships that many rural peoples, particularly women and children are experiencing since the introduction of the World Bank/IMF economic policies (Elabor-Idemudia 1991; Gladwin 1991; Dei 1992b; C.E.G. 1989; Onimode 1989). Unfortunately, these consequences of SAPs have been glossed over in the attempts to prioritise certain knowledge over others in the research process. Anti-racist education must begin to question why certain voices and lived experiences are being silenced and begin to discuss the consequences of the loss of such knowledge for the understanding of the modern African reality. Contemporary world events do not provide any strong evidence to the contrary that the race structure of oppression and exploitation which slavery and colonialism initiated in Africa still continues to be perpetuated today (Taylor 1989:16).

It is not surprising that some African leaders in proposing an African Alternative Framework (AAF)¹⁰ to SAPs have steadfastly maintained that SAP was designed with the primary goal of achieving debt repayment from developing countries rather than any genuine concern for human development. SAPs have placed African and many developing countries in the Caribbean and Latin America further into dependency status with Western economies. The African state, transnational corporations, and the international financial community are literally forcing local peoples to commit ecocide by mortgaging their environments in order to pay the interests on external debts. The internationalisation of the African natural environment and its productive resources affect men, women, and the rural poor in different ways (MacNeill Cox and Runnalls 1989; Mackenzie 1992). Yet research on these very issues have not been supported by the powers within the international financial community. It has become fashionable for some foreign 'experts' on Africa's development to blame the rural poor for the problem of environmental degradation as if poverty is an independent variable (Dei 1990a, 1992c). Other scholars in their sincere attempts at building coalitions of social movements across the so-called North-South

10 In 1989, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) proposed the African Alternative Framework (AAF) as an alternative strategy of development to SAPs (ECA 1989). AAF gives priority to meeting basic human needs over creditors' demand to introduce policies aimed at extracting debt repayments. AAF policies focus on women as a significant equation in the development process and social change. AAF calls for a human centred development strategy for economic recovery that will involve the full mobilisation and participation of the local populace in the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of the development process. In a nutshell, AAF calls on African governments to utilise the available local resources and talents for internal development and to address questions of social justice in their communities.

have inadvertently trivialised the pain, hurt and suffering of African peoples, particularly the poor, women, and children.

The new buzzword in Africa today is 'political democracy' and many European scholars and some Africans openly show their glee and thanks to the World Bank and the IMF for 'promoting' local democratisation processes. Multipartyism is presented as if it is a panacea to Africa's problems. It is actually a ploy to take the blame away from external meddling in the continent's affairs. While I do not deny that democracy and human rights are essential to the development of every society, certain facts should also be pointed out. For example, the on-going democratisation processes in Africa should be 'democracy' as understood by African peoples and not dictated by transnational corporations and foreign governments.¹¹ Also, there are basic contradictions in the pursuit of adjustment policies of the World Bank on the one hand and the initiatives towards political democracy. Democracy and human rights are not simply one person one vote and free speech. It must include women children and the poor having rights and opportunities to satisfy their basic human needs. Cuts in social spending (health and education) deny fundamental human rights to the poor. Privatisation of social services and the impact on the poor in terms of access to fundamental needs (water, electricity, education, health) may prove in the long run to be the test of the morality of World Bank policies in Africa.

There has to be a positive discourse on Africa in the academic circles, particularly, at a time when SAPs are reaping untold hardships on the rural poor majority. There is the need to decolonise research on the continent in order to push through an alternative development and research agenda free from racist and ethnocentric biases. This agenda should have as its primary goal addressing needs determined by the local peoples themselves. It should reclaim Africa's cultural history and learn from past indigenous solutions to basic human problems. It is no secret that the cultural resource base of African peoples has been the least analysed for its contributions to the development process (Dei 1990; Brokensha et al. 1980; Richards 1985). The root for this bias can be traced to colonial and post-colonial contempt for Africa's cultural traditions and indigenous systems of knowledge held by some European administrators and international development agencies. The work of early British social anthropologists and some historians greatly contributed to this reality. Pioneer European scholars of the African

11 The reader is also referred to a discussion on the on-going debate on 'Democracy and Multipartyism in Africa' that appeared in *Africa Demos*, Volume 1, Number 1 (November, 1990), and also Molaria Ogundipe Leslie's piece on: 'In Search of Citizenship: African Women and the Myth of Democracy' *Index on Censorship*, 1992.

continent gave tacit approval to colonial attempts to diminish many aspects of African culture and traditions on the ethnocentric assumption that these contributed very little to 'development' and human advancement.

The rich cultural heritage, histories and civilisations of African peoples were suppressed or minimised under the pretext that they made no contributions to world civilisations, academic scholarship and learning. Africa, it was conveniently argued, had no history before the first Europeans came to salvage the human souls from self destruction. As Banton (1987:9) pointed out such paternalism carried over into serious academic scholarship that was developed and provided the context of a continued mistrust and ethnocentric contempt for Africaness. Such ethnocentric and paternalistic biases have endured both consciously and unconsciously certain discourses on Africa's development 'crisis' to this day.

In recent works on Africa, there has been an overemphasis on the cases of failures and disaster on the continent. Some of those responsible for the failures have shied away from admitting blame. Meanwhile the reported failures have only reinforced the negative images about Africa in the West. But there are also success cases, for example, at the local levels of village communities. No one gets to hear about these. Village studies have not been intensely pursued by modern research in Africa. There is now the need to combine the search for general solutions to human problems with the search for some specificities (Taylor and Mackenzie 1992). The many generalised studies about the continent have inadvertently also served to perpetuate stereotypes about African societies. An even handed research focus on Africa's failures and her successes may provide additional lessons on how local communities can utilise their own creativity and resourcefulness to address contemporary problems of social development. Such research agendas can be undertaken while at the same time we bring attention to the abuse of human rights and the denial of social justice that continue to be perpetrated by brutal regimes in many parts of the continent.

Fortunately, the discourse within the continent itself is gradually changing. Some scholars have been pioneering new analytical systems based on indigenous concepts and their interrelationships (Nyerere 1974 1979; Pradervand 1989, Lawuyi 1991). As one of the strategies of anti-racist education, African schools must strive to develop and maintain their own internal structures of research with the available resources at their disposal so as to loosen the dependence on the North. The schools must lead the way and provide creative strategies to halt the dissipating of African riches by foreigners and repossess Africa's wealth for the development of the continent and her peoples. Anti-racist education and research must contribute to a strategy of development that seeks to break out of the system of oppression and exploitation of minority groups in society and the world community by dominant and more powerful groups. It must assist in

creating a new social order in which the individual, the community and the society as a whole can fulfil their potential.

Conclusion

The search for true equality and social justice for ethnic minorities, the poor and women in Africa is tempered by the realisation that the principle of equal opportunity in an unequally structured society can be an illusion without a fundamental restructuring of society and its institutions. Educators and researchers must search for creative ways to pursue anti-racist education and research in the schools and the African social setting so as to uphold the social, cultural, political and economic rights of all.

In particular, educators in Africa must do more than merely admit to the Eurocentric nature of mainstream knowledge. As Paraschak (1991) has pointed out for all educators, we need to question existing concepts for their appropriateness to non-white peoples, and to reflect on our methodologies, the nature of knowledge, the weaknesses of existing literature and what our appropriate roles as educators and researchers should be. We need to re-examine our classroom pedagogical styles that may alienate any students, including women and other disadvantaged groups in society and which may also be helping to distort a student's perception of reality, promoting a false sense of superiority over other peoples of different sex, class, race or ethnic background (Moore 1983:6). We need to question these discriminatory educational practices that negatively impact upon the ethnic minority students' sense of connectedness and identification with the school, and the development of a positive self-esteem. It is also important that we critically re-evaluate those institutional practices or structures within the educational settings that represent the maximum concentrations of power.

Anti-racist education must challenge the structures of power in society that control the educational system to make the system fair to all students. For all those who are concerned, the issue of improving the quality of education cannot be fully addressed without resolving the fundamental problem of equity and fairness. Social equity must not become a dream for others in society. Anti-racist education must work to give 'voice' to or create a 'space' for the silenced and marginalised. But more importantly, it must challenge power. It should develop strategies to hold people in positions of power and the institutions of society accountable for their actions. It must question privilege and challenge the beneficiaries to take the initiatives in addressing the issues of social inequities.

The pursuit of anti-racist education and research in the African context would ensure that the African identity is not constructed in Western ideology. Anti-racist education and research in Africa can make a definite contribution to the upliftment of African peoples everywhere by becoming part of the struggle for political power, social justice and development for

black peoples and the so-called peoples of colour. For one thing the anti-racist discourse on the continent does not have to be overly sensitive to the context of its production. But, perhaps much more important, anti-racist education in Africa should work towards the unity of all African peoples by linking up with the struggles of Africans in the diaspora who are also trying to rid themselves of the yoke of an imperialistic white hegemony.

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