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## **Ubuntu as an Alternative to Western/Enlightenment Human Values**

**Abstract:** This paper examines the practices and philosophies of ubuntu as an alternative principle through which peoples in advanced capitalist societies might negotiate boundaries and live in an academic environment that fosters the success of all. The philosophy and practice of ubuntu, made popular after the Truth and Reconciliation Process in South Africa, created an image of a community in which all people could live in harmony. I use ubuntu to address the challenge of racism in predominantly western institutions of learning, and argue that ubuntu offers intellectual and philosophical models of pluralism in which multiethnic communities can coexist, more so, in a global era. Because ubuntu emphasizes a collective good, it has in-built mechanisms for minimizing conflicts that might be brought by other worldviews which do not necessarily stress the common good. In its struggles to come to terms with issues of *modern globalization*, the West might gain in learning with and from other non-western cultures that have dealt with issues of globalization, immigration and academic achievement. This is especially so at a time when there is an appearance of the West as having values that conflict those from the non-Western world.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Apartheid, Ubuntu; Masakhane; South Africa; Tutu; Reconciliation; Mandela

### INTRODUCTION

The problem of racism in the West and in Western institutions of higher education has occupied the academy for a significant historical period. McLaren (2008) argues that education, as it exists in advanced capitalist societies, serves the interests of the dominant classes. In the United States and most Western countries, class and race often go together so that the interests of one racial group colonize and dominate the academy. As such, one of the challenges facing institutions of higher education is whether they can create a place in which racism is not the norm, that is, whether they can create values that affirm the humanity of all. In the academic production of philosophies about human identity, those who do not fit within the Eurocentric paradigms become illegal and unwelcome in the countries they give their allegiance to. Both knowledge (gnosis) and truth (episteme) are likely to be accepted as such only if they subscribe to Western ways of being. But other countries have also struggled with racism, and perhaps other than France and Germany, the USA's history of race relations closely mirrors that of apartheid South Africa, ( Kozol, 2005; Sartre, 2004). To a great extent, through using the philosophy of ubuntu, South Africa has been able to change the practices of apartheid. The question, then, is whether ubuntu might offer insights that offer new values in higher education.

A significant number of USA scholars and public intellectuals find the illusion of a nation constructed under a singular Europhone memory as problematic, (Baldwin, 1985, Du Bois, 1903, Malcolm X, 1999). Indeed, even when Zangwill (1924) coined the idea/metaphor of the USA as a 'melting pot' he made it clear that the *darker races* did not belong. Educational sociologist Jonathan Kozol (2005) subtitled his book "*The restoration of apartheid schooling in America.*" While Kozol writes mostly about K-12 education in the United States, institutions of higher learning recruit their students from K-12 schools. A quick visit to any institution of higher

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<sup>1</sup> A significant portion of this paper appears in my book, *(Anti) Narcissisms and (Anti) Capitalisms: Human Nature and Education in the works of Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela and Jurgen Habermas*. Boston: Sense Publishers, 2010.

learning is all that is needed to see the extent to which values and practices have changed since then.

In this paper I use the philosophy of ubuntu, common across sub-Saharan Africa, to examine some of the values that institutions of higher education might utilize to reshape their values during times of rapid globalization and suppressed memories and histories. I also focus on South Africa in general, and the transition from apartheid to post apartheid in particular, as well as the educational philosophy of Rolihlahla Nelson Mandela. South Africa, like the United States, has a history of institutional racism. It has also developed and practices policies to undo centuries of racist policies and practices. The development of a 'new' philosophy in South Africa is not meant to imply that the post-apartheid era has solved the problems created by over three centuries of legal racism. Ubuntu predates modernity/racism/apartheid, and as such, some of the solutions to the problems of modern day racism might come from cultures and traditions viewed by the civilized world as 'primitive.'

## EDUCATION AND HUMAN VALUES IN SOUTH AFRICA

As with most cultures and countries, education was one of the ways for creating the kind of society desired by the state in South Africa. It could be easily argued that the earliest European settlers in South Africa set about creating a racial caste system in which people of European heritage placed themselves at the apex of civilization. The educational policy, which in turn defined the state political ideology and practices, was apartheid. Even though many Europeans justified their invasion of, and settling in South Africa as motivated by a desire to bring civilization and enlightenment, many began segregating themselves while exploiting the natives, (Mandela, 1995).

It should be obvious at this stage that there were contrasting ideas on not only the reasons for bringing civilization to black South Africans, but on how to make education perpetuate the domination of blacks by whites. Schools were harnessed to serve the needs of the settlers. Apartheid became a cherished human value for those who benefitted from it. Kallaway (1984) points out that it was not only the loss of land and the military defeats that contributed to the continued subordination of blacks:

The colonized peoples of Southern Africa were not simply conquered in a military sense; did not lose only their political independence, were not simply divorced from an independent economic base; were not just drawn into new systems of social and economic life as urban dwellers or wage labor. Though all these aspects of the process have great importance, the key aspect to be noted here is that it also entailed cultural and ideological transformation, in which schools were major agents, (p. 8-9).

As mentioned above most of the schools which were for blacks were run by missionaries. All the same, such schools also contributed to the cultural and psychological conditioning of blacks so that they not only accepted their predicament, but for a long time saw whites as benefactors. One of the end results of this process was the gradual rejection of indigenous African cultures by Africans. Years later, Mandela was to admit that "the educated Englishman was our model; what we aspired to be were "black Englishmen,".... We were taught-and believed-that the best ideas were English ideas, the best government was English government, and the best men were Englishmen," (1994, p. 37). Not many students were able to withstand the psychological and cultural onslaught on their traditions. According to Mahere (personal communication, March 13, 2010) many of the educated blacks began to despise their own culture and traditions, while

adopting those of the colonizers. Most blacks began to look down upon those who did not succeed in colonial or western education, labeling them failures. Mandela, too, experienced the seductive power of English culture and life. Just before receiving his degree he observed that he was already on his “way to being drawn into the black elite that Britain sought to create in Africa,” (Mandela, 1995, p. 97).

## APARTHEID

Descriptions of apartheid vary and reflect a broad response to the nature of racism and imperialism, or the spread of white civilization in South Africa. Legal apartheid ended in 1994. In brief, apartheid was legalized racism or institutional white supremacy. It reflected the most perfect form of capitalism by refusing to conceal its dependence on the exploitation of black labor and resources. Morrow (1990) describes apartheid as:

A form of oppression which has 'disempowered' its victims. By persistently treating them as objects of policy, by refusing to see them as wholly and rightfully 'human', as beings who have moral titles and standing, Apartheid has dehumanized its victims; their dignity and self-esteem as persons, and their intellectual and moral confidence and autonomy, have been damagingly undermined, (p. 176).

Apartheid was built on the myth of a superior European civilization and the belief that European ways were the best with regards to creating a truly better world for all of humankind (even as blacks were being dislocated and robbed of their land and natural resources). Descendants of Europe were entitled to the privileges that came with their heritage, and non-Europeans were bound to minister to whites. The purity of whites would be best preserved by minimizing or eradicating contact with nonwhites while educating them on the role of European civilization. At times it was expressed in terms of the *white man's burden* so that the victims would express gratitude for their unfortunate condition:

At the outset of assemblies, Dr. Wellington would walk onstage and say, in his deep bass voice, “I am the descendant of the Great Duke of Wellington, aristocrat, statesman, and general, who crushed the Frenchman Napoleon at Waterloo and thereby saved civilization for Europe- and for you, the natives.” At this we would all enthusiastically applaud, each of us profoundly grateful that a descendant of the great Duke of Wellington would take the trouble to educate natives such as ourselves. The educated Englishman was our model; what we aspired to be we “black Englishmen,” as we were sometimes derisively called, (Mandela, 1995, p. 37).

The architect of apartheid, according to Kros, (2002) was Eiselen, a western trained linguist and anthropologist. Interestingly, the Eiselen Commission was initially tasked with educational reforms, and as such it gave an *intellectual* justification for apartheid. Kallaway (1994) argues that the younger Eiselen was a racist and believed in the genetic and mental/psychological inferiority of blacks in general. Many inferences have been made about the significance of the years Eiselen spent in Germany and their possible effect on his doctrines and beliefs regarding race. For a while, Eiselen interacted with what could be described as white liberals, and in the 1930s was a member of the Rheinallt Jones Circle which was devoted to the study of language and culture, (Kallaway, 1994). The point here is that Eiselen was an educated (went to formal schools) person with knowledge of the world outside South Africa. But his travels reinforced his racist views. However, one of the reasons for the Eiselen Commission was to find out some of the ways education could be used as an effective tool for controlling the spirit of independence

that was catching on in South Africa. *Bantu Education* was the reform initiative that Eiselen proposed, and it became the cornerstone of apartheid. There was no desire to hide the ideological nature of education and its role in social engineering.

Low, (1958) contends that a significant part of apartheid was motivated by both fear and self-preservation by South African whites. But apartheid was also informed and motivated by the twisted logic of white supremacy, or the belief that European civilization was infinitely better than any other. For some European scholars and anthropologists, apartheid was a preferable alternative to unchecked physical genocide. (European nations had little qualms about genocide in the advance of their interests). Just as they had done in India, settlers presented themselves as inherently better and superior to the indigenous peoples, (Morrow, 1990). Consequently, apartheid has to be understood as a deliberately calculated and reasoned way for engineering society according to racist logic. The South African economy was also dependent cheap black labor, and the way South Africans were to be educated was designed to reflect the social and economic vision of those with power. . Christie & Collins, for example, argue that “‘Bantu Education is geared towards the reproduction of labor as required by the needs of capitalist accumulation in general,’” (1982:73- as quoted in Molteno, 1987, p. 5). As such, it is difficult to separate the aims and ends of education from the social and economic vision of the dominant race and class.

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 segregated South African education from elementary up to university level. After the act was adopted, the South African government drastically reduced subsidies to all schools that were meant for blacks. At the same time, it upgraded schools for white students while providing free and compulsory education for whites. On the other hand, black students had to pay for their education. Since the government provided free education in superior schools for white students, black students were disadvantaged from the beginning. Free education meant whites could invest their resources on other needs while the lack of money frequently meant the end of possible education for most black students. White students generally did not have to work, since ‘Zulu boys’ did all the manual work. Black students, on the other hand had to do manual work at home as well as occasionally at school so as to pay for their education

But the philosophy behind apartheid education was not solely based on economics, at least in the liberal mindset. Anthropologists and sociologists supplied the research that gave credence to the claims of the Eiselen Commission with regard to education. Among such claims included the belief that black South African students were not achieving academically. Various reasons and hypotheses were given for the low achievement rate in of nonwhite students. One of the recommendations of the Commission was that African students receive instruction in their mother languages. This benevolent gesture was supposed to make apartheid education more acceptable to blacks. Ogbu, (1982) observes that sometimes anthropologists did not do enough research on the ways nonwhite children were reared so as to make Western theories of child development universally applicable. The cultural discontinuity theory can also be interpreted to imply cultural deficiency as the reason why nonwhite students do not do well academically. While there could be legitimacy to the claim of cultural incongruence between the school and home environment for most black students, other factors were at play, and the use of mother languages for instruction was used as a ploy to give an inferior education to black South Africans.

It is easy to discount the fact that the architects of apartheid were also cognizant of the reality that educated blacks (those who attended formal schools) were also becoming restive as

they became aware of the reality that education did not translate into any meaningful opportunities. In addition, there were claims that literate blacks sought to integrate with whites or perform jobs that had been exclusively for whites. Mandela, (1995) notes that, “in those days a black man with a B.A. was expected to scrape before a white man with a grade school education. No matter how high a black man advanced, he was still considered inferior to the lowest white man,” (p. 34). The superiority complex led to awkward relations at work when blacks were more knowledgeable or in higher positions. Mandela gives an example of a time when he was dictating notes to a white secretary. However, when another white person entered she sent Mandela on an errand so as to appear superior. To be literate and black did not necessarily mean that there would be better opportunities. Rose (1965) argues that aspects of apartheid education were designed to quell the desire for political independence. The creation of Bantustans gave a semblance of autonomy to different tribes while also keeping them apart. In other words, white South Africans could claim that blacks had freedom and independence in the areas that had been created for blacks. In explaining the mission and purpose of apartheid education, one of its designers, Dr. Verwoerd stated:

When I am controller of Native Education I will reform it so that the natives will be taught from childhood to realize that equality with Europeans is not for them ... The Bantu must be guided to serve his own community. There is no place for him in the European community above certain forms of labor .... Education must train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life-according to the sphere in which they live, (Birley 1968:153, as quoted in Johnson, 1982, p. 219).

Again, there were many interwoven and sometimes conflicting philosophies of Bantu education as it was designed by the Nationalist Party.

Clark and Worger (2004) contend that the immediate intention of the Bantu Education Act was to deskill blacks so that they would only be qualified for, and directed towards the most menial jobs. By under-educating blacks, the government would be leaving them ill-prepared for high paying and other quality jobs. According to Shepherd (1955), one of the first steps the government took was to inform missionaries that it would cut off subsidies and stop paying salaries for teachers who worked in African schools. The government continued paying salaries for teachers in white schools. Shortly after the passing of the Bantu Education Act most mission schools that were for Africans closed down and most qualified teachers either left the profession or moved to areas where they could get competitive salaries. The adoption of the Bantu Education Act confirmed that South African education was in fact “structurally bound to reflect, and thereby help to reproduce, the relations and structures dominant in society at large. From this perspective schooling was seen as necessarily serving to reproduce the exploitative, sexist and racist structures of capitalist societies,” (Molteno, 1987, p. 4). In addition to the Bantu Education Act, the South African government adopted and passed the Colored Persons Education Act in 1963, and the Indian Education Act in 1964, (Morrow, 1990). Each of the Acts consolidated and reinforced apartheid and the myths carried by apartheid. Johnson (1982) concluded that “through its content, South African education acts as an agent of social control. It implants norms, values, myths, beliefs, and ideology that legitimate and reinforce the existing stratification,” (p. 222). Occasionally the need to spread the gospel and convert Africans to Christianity necessitated the education of blacks. However, like everything, even churches were segregated in South Africa.

In some regards, the Bantu Education Act did not achieve its intended goals. Its architects wanted it to reinforce the tribal divisions in South African blacks. Instead, Mandela, (1995) argued that schools were one of the few places that people from different tribes met on equal

footing and formed friendships that otherwise might not have been. Some of his earliest contacts as well as his knowledge of the ANC were within the context of high school and college education. The interactions with students from other tribes also made it easier for students to learn other African languages. Mandela also traced the genesis of his pan-African identity to his experiences at both high school and college. On some occasions missionaries sent students to evangelize in the villages, and during these expeditions students not only discussed politics: they also formed friendships across denominational lines.

During apartheid there were very few post-secondary institutions for Africans. The most famous, according to Mandela, (1995) was Fort Hare. Even though blacks were segregated, they saw Fort Hare as the best university where they could obtain the best education in Southern Africa. According to Mandela:

The University College of Fort Hare ...was the only residential center of higher education for blacks in South Africa. Fort Hare was more than that: it was a beacon for African scholars from over Southern Central and Eastern Africa. For young black South Africans like myself, it was Oxford and Cambridge, Harvard and Yale, all rolled into one," (p. 43).

Among the courses offered when Mandela was a student at Fort Hare included anthropology, Roman Dutch Law, English, politics, and Native Administration. Partly because of its academic excellence as well as the international students, Fort Hare was arguably the premier university for incubating and nursing African revolutionary consciousness under apartheid conditions. Among Mandela's classmates included Oliver Tambo and Z. Matthews, both of whom held posts in the African National Congress. But Fort Hare also counted Steve Biko, Robert Mugabe, Seretse Khama, Julius Nyerere, Desmond Tutu, Joshua Nkomo, and Govan Mbeki among its alumni. In the process of segregating blacks, apartheid inadvertently made it possible for pan-Africanism to take root. Many of its alumni became staunch opponents of apartheid within and outside South Africa. Mugabe, Nyerere, and Khama later became heads of state with varying degrees of success and failure as creators of a qualitatively better world. It was also within the context of university education that Steve Biko became active in, and later led the Black Consciousness Movement which was credited with affirming the humanity of blacks in the face of the dehumanizing onslaught of apartheid. While there was only one university for black students, there were more than four for Afrikaners, including Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Potchefstroom, and Rand Afrikaans. Afrikaner universities rarely, if ever, accepted black students prior to the abolition of apartheid as recorded in Mandela's autobiography. Mandela (2003) saw it as ironic that institutions of higher learning had become cornerstones for defending racist ideologies, particularly apartheid.

Prior to the Extension of University Education Act of 1959, some English-speaking universities in South Africa accepted black students. One such university was Wits, and it is there that Mandela began to interact with students from other racial groups. The culture shock and transformation that came with learning at Wits are reflected in Mandela's observation of the significance of his Wits days:

Wits opened a new world to me, a world of ideas and political beliefs and debates, a world where people were passionate about politics. I was among white and Indian intellectuals of my own generation, young men who would form the vanguard of the most important political movements of the next few years. I discovered for the first time people of my own age firmly aligned with the liberation who were prepared, despite their relative privilege, to sacrifice themselves for the cause of the oppressed, (Mandela, 1995, p. 92).

The university, which the apartheid system had designed to depoliticize students, became one of the few places for charting pathways to undoing the system. A significant number of the white students who renounced their privileges were Communists or sympathetic to Communism. Although Habermas (next section) was to later describe student revolts as fascism of the left, within South African universities student politics was closely tied to undoing apartheid and all forms of oppression. However, the fact that English-speaking universities were open and accepting of black students did not mean they were devoid of racism or racist practices. In an experience eerily reminiscent to that of Malcolm X, (Chapter Two) Nelson Mandela describes his law school experiences at Wits as not encouraging for black students:

Our law professor, Mr. Hahlo....held a curious view of the law when it came to women and Africans: neither group, he said, was meant to be lawyers. His view was that law was a social science and that women and Africans were not disciplined enough to master its intricacies....My performance as a law student was dismal, (Mandela, 1995, p. 90).

In many respects, racism and sexism were closely tied within the teaching practices of apartheid education.

Although Mandela prized the education he derived under apartheid, he was also aware of its many shortcomings. To begin with, he was aware that he had to rely on the village elders and people that the academic world would consider uneducated for information and knowledge on issues related to the African world. Sometimes the *imbongi* was a richer source of African history and knowledge since British textbooks of the day did not include African history. But although he had immersed himself in aspects of European culture, academic oriented education had left him inadequately prepared to respond to the everyday challenges he faced in urban South Africa:

Even as I was receiving my degree, I realized that hardly anything I had learned at university seemed relevant in my new environment. At the university, teachers had shied away from topics like racial oppression, lack of opportunities for Africans, and the nest of laws and regulations that subjugate the black man....No one had ever suggested to me how to go about removing the evils of racial prejudice, and I had to learn by trial and error, (Mandela, 1995, p. 89).

In outlining the history of apartheid action my intention is to help the reader understand that a plan for South Africa's educational future that does not take into consideration the effect and impact of apartheid is not likely to be that helpful in changing conditions. Without such knowledge it might not be that easy for the young generation of westerners to understand the poor conditions and lack of facilities in predominantly black areas in contrast to the opulence in areas populated by whites. As mentioned in this section, the apartheid government provided free education and built many good schools for white children while making black students pay for poor education without developing any infrastructure. It would be false to say that white South Africans worked hard for better schools, or that white students have more desire to learn compared to black South African students. It would be equally false to say that black parents have/had no concern for the education of their children. Indeed, many black parents sold all they could to send their children to poor schools while white South African parents knew the apartheid government was providing the best and free education for white children. In many respects, western democracies were complicit in the workings of apartheid.

To a great extent the philosophies that gave impetus to the end of apartheid no longer hold that much sway in the dominant global discourses where privatization has replaced the ethos of collective responsibility and government or state obligation for public services. The call

for privatization in the field of education worsens the poverty of those who were hit worst by apartheid. Privatization is in many ways a continuation of apartheid christened in terms that are palatable in the age of globalization. While the apartheid government had no qualms about building the best schools and facilities for white students, with privatization, the obligations of the state to intervene are limited. If anything, black South Africans have already experienced privatization: they had to pay for their education at a time when the government provided for the superior race. On the evidence of what the apartheid government was able to do for white citizens and students, state intervention trumps privatization.

While the general trend and belief by many whites in Western countries is that people live in a post-racial society, the same is not really true in South Africa (or in the West for that matter). To claim that there is a post-apartheid South Africa soothes the conscience of many who would rather quickly forget the 400 year advantage that South African whites held, and the unimaginable poverty that affects most blacks. The emerging black middle class/petit bourgeois and overnight millionaires whose children attend predominantly white schools (which are now privatized and priced out of the reach of many of the poor) gives an illusion that all is well. The point here is that undoing apartheid and its effects requires both its benefactors and victims to work together, sometimes with the help of the international community, but always with a critical take on the western logic of capitalist development/ underdevelopment and/or privatization. This is the context in which Mandela outlines his vision of the nature of schools and education the rebirth or renaissance of human nature.

#### EDUCATION AND THE PROSPECTS OF ALTERNATIVE HUMAN VALUES

The legacy of apartheid poses many challenges on fashioning new directions regarding the function of education in present day South Africa. Mandela (2003) was also aware of the role played by education in engineering society towards desired goals. He placed education at the core of recreating South Africa and the entire continent and observed that South Africa's "reconstruction and development effort, the renaissance of the entire continent and our successful interaction in the global village depend largely on the progress we make in educating our populations," (p. 251). Although he was cognizant of the ways that apartheid had benefitted white South Africans in all spheres of life, particularly education, he refused to cut or reduce funding allocated to white and Afrikaner universities in favor of black institutions of learning. He strove to address the injustice of apartheid without punishing its perpetrators or those who benefited from it. The end of apartheid transformed not only South African higher education, but that of Southern Africa in general.

Cognizant of the blame game typical of most capitalist and post-colonial societies, Mandela did not shy away from pointing to apartheid's responsibilities. However, he was also quick to point out that blaming anyone would not solve the problem. Instead, he grounded his philosophy of education on the two principles he saw as important in understanding and working towards a better humanity: the concern for all children and the importance of *masakhane*. Both of these were geared toward establishing "for the first time in ...history the framework for a single, national public school system....to work together to realize ... a nonracial, nonsexist and fair system of schooling," (Mandela, 2003, p. 247). Just as schools had contributed to building apartheid, Mandela believed schools had a large role to play in undoing apartheid. As such, the reality of a *new* South Africa was dependent on the willingness of students to unlearn apartheid and work toward a radically different society.

It is important to remember that within ubuntu, especially in the work of Mandela, (2003, 1995) children play an important role. Mandela had argued that the true measure of a nation or a civilization's soul was on how it treated its children. Likewise, in his vision of the role of education in the creation of a better world stressed the importance of caring for children. There seems to be a seamless transition between the past-present-future; individual-community-nation-world with regards to the role children play in society. For Mandela:

Children are the rock on which our future will be built, our greatest asset as a nation. They will be the leaders of our country, the creators of our national wealth, those who care for and protect our people.... Education is the key to that process. It is also the door which opens from every village and city onto our larger society and indeed onto the whole world, (2003, p. 253).

The transition from childhood to adulthood, or the full humanity of children is taken as a given. Investing in the education of all children is seen as central to making a qualitatively better world. Because he accepted the full humanity of children, Mandela was also able to challenge them to be responsible for their own education. There is a deliberate refusal to idolize poverty and unemployment/ underemployment, as well as isolationist tendencies. Mandela was also aware of the role played by student politics in general, as well as the role of Black Consciousness and the Soweto Uprising in changing the political climate of then apartheid South Africa. For him, education offered promises of a better future for those who had been trapped in the material poverty and illiteracy created by apartheid. However, even though there is an admission of the need to create wealth, human worth is not measured in terms of material acquisitions. The crushing impact of poverty did not mean that the pursuit of material gain was the highest good.

While apartheid educational policies were overly prescriptive and oppressive, the Education Bills proposed by Mandela, including the National Qualification Framework, gave educators more freedom while challenging them to be accountable for the academic achievement of all students. Mandela was also aware of the effect of apartheid policies on the quality of teachers in predominantly black schools. Again, without making apartheid an excuse for the quality of those in the teaching profession, he challenged them to work for the good of those entrusted to their care:

Our message to teachers on this occasion is this: Let your watchword be unqualified commitment to the interests of those whose education has been entrusted to you. Amongst other things, this means meticulous punctuality; thorough preparation for every lesson; dedication to ensuring that every student learns something from each lesson. It involves keeping abreast of developments in your subject areas and working co-operatively with both colleagues and management to ensure that our schools truly educate the nation. In short it means upholding the highest standards so that dignity is fully restored to the teaching profession. On your shoulders lies an enormous responsibility, especially for teachers in historically black schools. All our students should be able to compete with their counterparts, not only in South Africa, but in the rest of the world, (Mandela, 2003, p. 249).

While it appears as if the burden fell on teachers, Mandela was uncompromising in making it clear that even the community, including parents and traditional leaders had to be involved in the educational enterprise. In many respects teaching and education for Mandela were at one and the same time a profession and a vocation.

Even though Mandela was aware of the need for an educational program that addressed the needs of the nation, he was also cognizant of the importance of a global or international education. For him it was crucial "to develop South Africa's capacity to innovate and draw

effectively from the world's scientific and intellectual activities. But our universities must also make a decisive impact in addressing the nation's basic needs. We must ensure that the paradigm of reaching and learning accords with the country's social condition," (Mandela, 2003, p. 258). Internationalizing or globalizing education in ways that were not related to the immediate needs of the nation was seen as not beneficial. In this regard, Mandela's vision of the role of universities is almost parallel to that of Julius Nyerere for whom:

A University in a developing society must put the emphasis of its work on subjects of immediate moment to the nation in which it exists, and it must be committed to the people of that nation and their humanistic goals. This is central to its existence; and it is this fact which justifies the heavy expenditure of resources on this one aspect of national life and development. Its research, and the energies of its staff in particular, must be freely offered to the community, and they must be relevant. (Nyerere 1967:3, as quoted in Samoff and Carol, 2004, p. 79).

However, even in the work of Nyerere, the local community is always tied to the extended or global human family. But the guiding philosophy for Nyerere was *ujamaa* which closely resembled *harambee* from Kenya.

## EDUCATION IN THE USA AND THE WEST

In this section I utilize the educational thought of (West) German educator Jurgen Habermas. Habermas's ideas of education not only build the educational philosophy and practices of the West, but he has also written extensively on education in the United States, as well as on the nature of the public university. In addition, his ideas build on, and sometimes diverge from those of Talcott Parsons. Parsons (1984) is considered a leading authority in understanding the practices and philosophies that guide USA organizations. But Parsons also focused, to a great extent, on what is called 'white America.' In many ways, Habermas (1971) also confined most of his studies with regard to values in higher education, and often drew parallels and comparisons between what he saw in West Germany and the United States.

Instead of political activism and developing a social consciousness, Habermas saw the primary purpose of higher education as that of acquiring academic knowledge and technical skills that could be used in the labor market. As such, the university was an integral part of the capitalist life-world. It was important that students "understand themselves as the future elite of the nation, responsible for a large-scale modernization process," (1971, p. 13). They were being groomed to be part of the upper class, the elite. For Habermas, this was the norm. However, for Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela, the preparation of an elite class meant being severed from the masses while becoming part of the oppressive and oppressing international capitalist class. On the other hand, it was the task of the university to ensure "that its graduates are equipped, no matter how indirectly, with a minimum of qualifications in the area of extrafunctional abilities...those attributes and attitudes relevant to the pursuit of a professional career," (p. 2). Students were at the university to be initiated into capitalist economic and social relations. Kelly (2004) points out that for a significant period in the West, university education had been one of the pathways to the life of high society, whether in state bureaucracy or ecclesiastical professions. However, in the twentieth century, the glamour and prestige of the church was being steadily replaced by secular professions in the sciences.

Habermas was also aware of the changing nature of the university as well as the functions of the university, especially within the context of Western Europe, (Habermas & Blazek, 1987).

While acknowledging that the university had obligations to its community, he also pointed out that “the university should institutionally embody, and at the same time motivationally anchor, a life form which is intersubjectively shared by its members, and which even bears an exemplary character,” (Habermas and Blazek, 1987, p. 3). As such, it appears that the university is a self-legislating body accountable primarily to the local community. The specifics of what constituted an exemplary character are left undefined, neither are the obligations to the wider human community spelt out. Habermas was also cognizant of the general friction between German universities and the government. Although German universities often resisted government directives on ways to reform, the government also afforded them a substantial amount of freedom in terms of organization and administration.

In many respects Habermas saw the university and its personnel as apolitical and committed to an ideologically sanitized endeavor, if such were possible. It had a detached indifference to the everyday world while simultaneously having an impact on that same world:

Thus, the idea of the university produces, on the one hand, a promising emphasis on scientific autonomy which points to the functional independence of the scientific system. Of course, this scientific autonomy is supposed to be perceived only in "solitude and freedom," at a clear distance from bourgeois society and the political public sphere. And on the other hand, the idea of the university produces the general, culture-shaping power of a science in which the totality of the life world should reflexively concentrate itself, (Habermas and Balzek, 1987, p. 10).

Among the tasks or duties of the university, according to Habermas and Balzek, included the production of new personnel to perpetuate the very life-form of the university, general research and generation of new ideas and information, technological innovation, and “contributions to cultural self-understanding and intellectual enlightenment, on the other,” (p. 16). Although the younger Habermas had participated in movements that protested nuclear proliferation, (Habermas, 2009), the older Habermas had little qualms with seeing the production of arms and armaments, (1971). As such, it was important for the university to be closely affiliated with industries so that it was a relevant part of the various industrial complexes. The possibility of education for the sake of education was a naïve hope, and although the humanities in general were important, technical control and technological development in general were viewed as more important. In brief, and in the words of Habermas, the reality was that “in Europe and the United States the university has narrowly circumscribed functions, namely preparation for qualified career positions, the production of technically exploitable knowledge, and the transmission of a culture which for centuries science and technology have been rooted in rather than uprooting,” (Habermas, 1971, p. 14).

While the production of skilled personnel is a desirable outcome of university education, the promise that a university education guarantees entrance into the elite classes or the middle class creates a legitimation crisis for the university in particular, and educational institutions in general. It could be argued that university education on its own is not a guarantee of employment. While “academic education in Germany served to define a special class of academics, a social class of *Bildungsbürger* following the model of the upper-level civil servant,” (Habermas and Blazek, 1987, p. 13) the general trend in the twenty-first century, in both developing and developed countries has been chronic unemployment and underemployment of university educated graduates. Granted the current realities of capitalism’s inability to provide employment for all graduates churned out by universities that lure students with the promise of a

well-paying job upon completion of specific programs, what rationalizations can be offered to legitimate pursuing higher education?

Habermas's views on the nature of the university and education have a number of implications for students and educators. To begin with, Western education as outlined by Habermas implicates learning processes in mechanisms that consolidate capitalism, male domination, and Eurocentrism. While Habermas pointed out that knowledge is historically and socially conditioned, and that human interests are oriented toward technical control and emancipation, he himself rarely transcends his own provincial worldview. But the depoliticization of the students in Western universities also means those same students feel disempowered when it comes to fighting for their own rights or working in solidarity with students in the nonwestern world. Consequently, most student causes have splintered into groups that focus less on global human rights but on issues related to the environment and animal rights. This is not meant to belittle the importance of the environment or animal rights. But when oppressed peoples in the nonwestern world see that people in advanced capitalist countries care more about animals and the environment compared with human beings it leads to suspicions about the conscience of the West. For the developing world's peoples to vie with trees and animals for the attention of the West leads many to believe that the West might not care that much about the *Others*. The few student groups in western universities that highlight the plight of Darfur, Native Americans, Cambodia, and/or South Africa, for that matter, find their concerns delegitimated by the isolationist tendencies advocated by isolationist philosophies of human identity/nature. Still, within advanced capitalist countries, it is rare for students to indulge in organized student politics for the betterment of their own lot, whether it is making education affordable or policies that affect students in general. Student protest and solidarity, at least in advanced capitalist societies, seem to belong to a bygone era.

It is tempting to take Habermas's interpretation of student political activism as authoritative and rational, or as designed for the good of humankind. Yet a study of student activism in other countries, including the United States, paints a different picture. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee reveals a cadre of young scholars who were committed to creating a better world. While its origins were in the Historically Black Colleges (in the United States), SNCC quickly transformed itself into a multiracial revolutionary student protest movement which rejected the deceptively simplistic constructs between outsiders and insiders, male and female, communist and socialist. While Habermas blamed the student protests in Germany on the absence of masculine domination, SNCC had black and white women in leadership positions. *Hands on the Freedom Plow* details and highlights the leadership roles by women in SNCC at a time when some of the enlightened philosophers were urging for controlling and disciplining the female sex. At a time when Habermas was discouraging German students from participating in a global student protest movement, SNCC was internationalizing the problem of racism, and SNCC students engaged other students in Africa, Asia, and Europe. The first rallying calls against the war in Vietnam came from the SNCC. For a brief moment in history, students became the conscience of not only the nation, but of western civilization.

## MASAKHANE

Although *masakhane* might sound esoteric to non-Africans, it is a concept that reflects attempts to ground development imperatives and the search for new directions in an African worldview. But the concept itself is also rooted in ubuntu. *Masakhane* was also adopted to meet the multiple challenges of the day without being overly prescriptive and proscriptive. Among the myriad of

problems inherited by Mandela's government included the issues of language, manpower, black student access to universities, and the emergence of globalization as a motif for describing new trends. According to Bengu:

What this government inherited from our fractured history is a collection of systems of education so different in the quality of provision, in ethos, organization, management traditions, in learning culture, output and outcomes in short so distinct and so unequal that they could as well be taking place in different nations, (Bengu, as quoted in Hugo, 1998, p. 13).

South Africa has about nine official languages, and apartheid had reified some of the languages by associating them with certain regions/Bantustans. Even institutions of higher education were affected, with some universities offering instruction in Afrikaans and some in English. Although the post-apartheid government was aware of the need to quickly transform educational structures and policies, university personnel/faculty were predominantly white South Africans, many of whom had been with the same institutions prior to the abolition of apartheid. *Masakhane* was an invitation for those who might have been previously committed to apartheid to join in the process of building a new and different society. There was an alternative to apartheid. *Masakhane* is closer to the formation of a new consciousness than to, or rather, differs from revisionism.

While ubuntu shaped Mandela's vision of what it means to be a human being, *masakhane* was the philosophy on which he grounded his vision of education. Unlike apartheid (segregation and isolation) *masakhane* implies the coming together of people to form a voluntary and free community in which all work together for the good of all. The assumption is that the spirit of goodwill triumphs over selfishness and greed. Indifference to the plight and suffering of others negates the spirit of *masakhane*. In a way, *masakhane* assumes that there is a better fate for humanity than mutual hatred and evil, that oppression is not the final condition for humankind. Instead of competition and strife, or the quest to be number one, *masakhane* calls for cooperation in building a better world. After the abolition of legal apartheid it would have been easier (but not in the spirit of ubuntu) for Mandela and the African National Congress to impose their political vision on South Africa. Instead, for Mandela, the creation of a better society was the product of a collective vision and labor in which none shirked from their obligations. It would be disingenuous to assume that the conflicting social, political, imperatives that existed in South Africa during apartheid magically disappeared with the election of Mandela. Because the underlying motif in *masakhane* is cooperation, it also fosters a peaceful atmosphere instead of civil strife. It is possible to also read into the word the concept and practice, as well as an invitation to reconcile. But *masakhane* also assumes the equality of all involved in the process, that is, that no civilization is better than the other, and that as people build others up, they themselves are also built. The master/servant dichotomy does not apply. While during the era of apartheid the ideology was for keeping people apart, *masakhane* invites all to come together for the good of all.

Like many African words, *masakhane* has a multiplicity of meanings, and within the context of education can be used as a source of inspiration and information. It presupposes that those engaged in the project of building each other up have living human consciences. Within the field of curriculum studies and education it also implies a mutual exchange of information in which knowledge is used to build up humanity. However, authentic *masakhane* also implies a willingness to know and be in solidarity with the *Other*. Within a framework of *Othering*, true cooperation cannot occur. I would argue that *masakhane* differs from the concept and practice of

partnerships that Western Universities have developed with African systems of education, (Samoff and Carol, 2004). Most of the discourse on and about Africa is generated by non-Africans in non-African languages. For the most part partnerships have always been one-sided, with technical assistance and manpower development, or expertise coming from the West. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with this, more often than not it has created and perpetuated a culture of dependency and patronage rather than *masakhane*. For *masakhane* to be relevant to the African situation, knowledge and information produced by Africans within Africa has to be taken into consideration and utilized for human development rather than monetary gain. That most of the funding for various research projects in African universities comes from Western corporations often leads to tailoring projects and results to be meaningful and applicable to Western corporations rather than local African needs, (Mazrui, 1992). Indeed, the partnerships between African and Western universities differ significantly from the model of cooperation which African universities had with the Soviet Union and Cuba. One of the hallmarks of that cooperation was the absence of racism and paternalism as well as a willingness by both countries to let Africans take the initiative in the development of projects.

While *masakhane* does not provide a step-by-step program on how to teach and what to teach, it gives the reader an insight into Mandela's educational philosophy and the role of education in undoing apartheid. For him "the spirit of the new South Africa must make itself felt in the proud resurgence of a culture of learning and teaching," (Mandela, 2003, p. 248). But it is not education just for the sake of education. Indeed, a different type of education had birthed and sustained apartheid. Gaur had shown him that more often than not, those who had not received apartheid education were in a better position to lead the people from oppressive and dehumanizing conditions. However, with the abolition of apartheid the doors had been opened for all South Africans to participate in rebuilding the nation. In his words: "education is the most important asset that our youth should acquire; and that for the government to succeed in improving education, it must have the support of students, teachers and parents alike. That is what the spirit of *Masakhane* is all about," (p. 242). It rejects the cynicism bred by perceptions that the aim of life is the pursuit of personal happiness and aggrandizement at the expense of, or in isolation from other human beings. All participate in the creation of a democratic society in which the humanity of all is affirmed. That the vision of *masakhane* has not been fulfilled does not necessarily mean it was/is a faulty philosophy. It is, rather, an invitation to examine how the conditions of those who have been the victims and beneficiaries of apartheid can be transformed in a spirit of reconciliation.

That apartheid and apartheid education lasted until 1994 was not due to the strength and resistance of white South Africans alone. The international community, and especially so-called Western democracies, including the United States, supported and gave legitimacy to apartheid for a variety of reasons. Among the reasons given include South Africa's opposition to communism. Through its policy of Constructive Engagement, the United States propped apartheid until the end of the Reagan years. Margaret Thatcher did likewise in the United Kingdom. Jackson, (1970) details the massive involvement of United States and Western corporations in apartheid South Africa. In addition to the United States, some of the other countries which supported apartheid education in principle and financially included West Germany, Netherlands, and Switzerland, (Kallaway, 1984).

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I have argued that in an attempt to shape new and alternative, anti-racist values, institutions in the West might have to look for solutions in the cultures and philosophies that they have traditionally viewed as insignificant. One such philosophy is ubuntu, a philosophy that not only predates racism, but is anti-racist. To create a welcoming environment and culture, institutions of higher education have to rethink, and if necessary, undo the foundations which view the darker races as outsiders in the human community. I offered the example of South Africa well aware of its struggles to undo racism and apartheid, especially in its own institutions of higher education. If education was central to the creation of apartheid, education might also undo apartheid, that is, a new philosophy of education under ubuntu.

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