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Is African Studies at UCT a New Home for Bantu Education?

I was appointed as the A C Jordan Professor of African Studies at the University of Cape Town in September of 1996, and then as Director of its Centre for African Studies in early 1997. I spent my first year startled that I had only one colleague and no students in the social sciences. I wondered to whom I was supposed to profess. When I shared this thought with a senior administrator, suggesting that surely the decision to appoint a Professor of African Studies must have been taken as part of a larger decision to create a core faculty in African Studies, he did not disagree, but advised me to wait until one of the people in the larger departments in Arts either died or retired to press for more intellectual resources. The thought did occur to me that I may have been hired as an advertisement, a mascot for the Centre for African Studies, and that I should not take myself too seriously. But I shoved this thought out of my mind as soon as I became conscious of it.

The Centre, I realised, was mainly an extra-curricular affair. I could and did organise conferences where South African intellectuals could meet counterparts from the equatorial African academy, as in March and October of 1997, but this left untouched the key problem of the Centre: that it was totally marginal to the real work of the university, teaching and research.

Then came an opportunity that I thought would surely provide me a way out of this dilemma. It was October 1997, and I was by now over a year old at UCT. I was approached by the Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Associate Professor Charles Wanamaker from the Department of Religious Studies, who informed me that the Faculty was taking a bold new step to design a Foundation Semester, one which would be compulsory for all entering social science students. The core of the Foundation Semester would be a course on "Africa". He requested that I design the syllabus for this course. It seemed a golden opportunity to step out of extracurricular preoccupations and get involved in the mainstream of social science teaching. I decided to seize it with both hands.

I put one request before the Assistant Dean at the outset. I said that even though I considered myself a historically informed social scientist, I would need the help of a historian to do the work well. I added that though UCT had a large Department of History, I think 14 in established posts, it had only one person whose research focus was outside of southern Africa. That was Dr. Shamil Jeppie, whose research interest was Sudan. I concluded that I would need to get the assistance of a historian from the University of Western Cape, and that this person would have to be paid. The Deputy Dean agreed. I went on to secure the support of Dr. Ibrahim Abdullah as a consultant, requesting that he provide me with bibliographical

assistance, directing my reading on issues where I felt particularly weak. And then I began work, on the average 6 hours a day for 6 days a week, with a passion that I would say I had not experienced since I left Kampala for Cape Town in late 1996.

In mid-October, I presented a draft outline, called "Problematizing Africa" to the relevant faculty Committee, and followed with a revised outline on October 30. With the acceptance of the outline, I was asked to come up with appropriate readings and to liaise with a Working Group of three (Digby Warren, Mugsie Spiegel, Johann Graaf) for purposes of implementation. The tussle that followed with the Working Group and the Deputy Dean was one for which I was totally unprepared. As it unravelled, it highlighted issues that I think go beyond my personal predicament: the relationship between the defence of academic freedom and the pursuit of academic excellence, administrative decision-making in academic affairs, and the relationship of pedagogy to content. It is because I believe these issues to be of general concern that I have decided to elaborate them before presenting my review of the substitute course that was put together under the leadership of the same team.

Academic Freedom and Academic Excellence

When I met the Working Group, on the 14th of November, the Chair (Digby Warren) began the meeting by distributing the results of a poll. On the sheet I was given were listed the eight section titles from my course outline. Every discipline in the faculty was invited to indicate whether they considered each section title "very important," "of some importance" or "of less importance." The poll showed that most Departments considered the first four sections of the course to be "of less importance" and the remaining four to be "very important." I was asked to revise the syllabus in light of this result. I asked whether this was the procedure normally followed for every new course introduced in the faculty, or whether it had been designed especially for my benefit. I was told that it had been designed especially for my benefit, since this was to be a faculty-wide course. I was, frankly, amazed. I pointed out that whereas a poll can give us facts, it cannot give us the interpretation of facts; the poll could be read as indicating either deficiencies in the proposed course or it could illuminate something about the respondents themselves. Was it not illuminating, I asked, that the respondents seemed to think it "of less importance" to teach the history of Africa before colonialism?

Dr. Mugsie Spiegel of the Department of Social Anthropology objected; social science, he said, was about modernity, and history had no place in it. I said he must be the first anthropologist I had met who seemed to have embraced modernity as a faith. Dr. Johann Graaf of the Department of Sociology joined in and said that he wanted to teach Marx's notion of class and he could not do this with a section on slavery, and that he needed a focus on modern society to do this. I doubted that I had ever met an ahistorical Marxist in my life, and I said so. The meeting closed with the chair asking me to prepare the tutorial readings so the full course could be ready before I left town on December 4. I agreed.

Administrative Decision-Making

Sadly, the very day I finished this task, but before I could communicate the final results of my labour to the Faculty, I received a letter from the Deputy Dean formally suspending me from the course for 1998. He wrote that I needed more time to complete the course design, a bit of reasoning that made no sense to me since I had just finished the course. Even more perplexing was information casually included in the letter: that the faculty intended to go ahead with the course in 1998 as "an interim arrangement." I realised that while I was being asked to take a year's sabbatical, another group was being invited to prepare a substitute course with haste. Was I wrong to take this as a vote of no confidence in my competence as Professor of African Studies?

I left Cape Town two days later for Kampala, but before doing so, I protested this decision by administrative fiat. The Deputy Dean remained silent, however, and stayed so for the next three months. The institution remained complacent while senior administrators passed the buck back and forth. The Dean of the faculty said the matter should really be handled by the

Chair of the Board of African Studies (BOAS) since the Centre for African Studies was an inter-faculty unit, and the Chair of BOAS regretted he could not interfere in an internal faculty matter.

On my return, I was called in by the Vice Chancellor (February 10) who suggested a roundtable of all parties concerned, a suggestion her Deputies, Professors Gevers and West, modified in a meeting (February 26), recommending a Mediation Commission / Commission of Inquiry, instead. When another two weeks went by without any sign of action, I decided to call a one-person strike. "Faced with a complacent institutional response, and a disabling institutional environment," I wrote members of BOAS and the university authorities on March 9, "I have no choice but to suspend all institutional involvement until the subject of my protest has been effectively addressed."

Pedagogy and Content

This is when the institutional wheels began to turn. The Roundtable was held two days later, on March 11. Deputy Dean Wanamaker said that faced with a difference between the Working Group and myself, he had decided "to take the soft option" and suspend me. He said I did not seem to realise that the choice of Africa as subject matter for the course was "purely arbitrary," that "the real point of the course was to teach students learning skills." Since they had to peg this to some subject matter, "that subject matter could just as easily have been Cape Town or South Africa," possibilities they had considered earlier. My point of view could not have been more different. I argued that no matter what the subject matter - the Cape, South Africa, or Africa - once it had been chosen, it was the obligation of those with expertise in the field to ensure that concern with pedagogy not become an excuse to teach sub-standard content. He said he thought this was really a cultural problem. I pointed out that he would not get away with this statement in an American academy, even in the American South, where I understood he came from. I said I thought they had a word for this.

There followed two formal, printed apologies, one from the Dean and the other from the Deputy Dean, circulated at the Faculty Board of 19 March. I circulated a statement that "warmly welcome(d)" the apologies, but with two reservations, both on grounds that the apologies did not identify the injury concretely enough to come up with appropriate remedies. Apology itself could not be remedy enough, I argued. My first reservation was that there had been "a clear violation of my academic rights, and not just my personal sensibilities." I wrote that the second injury was "not to me personally, but to the students, to this Faculty, and to this university," for the substitute syllabus taught to students was not only substandard but its content "a poisonous introduction for students entering a post-apartheid university" and "wrestling with the legacy of racism." I concluded that the appropriate remedy in this context was two-fold: one, to lift my suspension from teaching the course, and two, "to review and radically revise" the course "under the intellectual leadership of the Professor of African Studies so as to ensure minimum conditions for the pursuit of excellence."

The Faculty Board immediately lifted my suspension from teaching, but did not confirm my intellectual leadership of the course as Professor of African Studies. Instead, it asked me to present in detail my objections to the course content to a meeting involving the Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, the Dean, those who had designed the substitute syllabus and those involved with the introduction of Academic Programmes in the university. I did this on 23 March. The Group resolved to invite me on board the course team, but only as one of its members. In other words, the team would consider my critique and make changes only where they were persuaded to do so. I said I could not with intellectual integrity join and share responsibility for a course I had argued was seriously flawed intellectually and morally. The meeting felt my critique had not been discussed fully for lack of sufficient time and that it should be available in writing for full consideration. I said I would be delighted to write it, but that I would present it, not to a meeting, but to an open seminar, for review by my peers. Thus this paper, which takes the critique out of the administrative domain and into the academic domain.

The key question before us is: how to teach Africa in a post-apartheid academy? To answer this question, I will begin with some remarks on how Africa has been taught in the past. Historically, African Studies developed outside Africa, not within it. It was a study of Africa, but not by Africans. The context of this development was colonialism, the Cold War and apartheid. This period shaped the organisation of social science studies in the Western academy. The key division was between the disciplines and area studies. The disciplines studied the White experience as a universal, human, experience; area studies studied the experience of people of colour as an ethnic experience.

African Studies focused mainly on Bantu administration, customary law, Bantu languages and anthropology. This orientation was as true of African Studies at the University of Cape Town as it was of other area study centres.

Introductory courses in African Studies usually followed a threefold division. Part One would cover Africa before the White presence, then would follow Africa under White control, and finally, there would be a section on Africa after the departure of the White Man. The moral of the story, implicit or explicit, would be that things fell apart once the White Man departed.

The meaning of Africa would change with the beginning of white control. Africa would cease to be the entire continent. North Africa would become part of the Middle East, considered civilised, even if just barely. White-controlled Africa in the south would be considered an exception, an island of civilisation, studied separately. Africa, popularly known as 'darkest Africa', would refer geographically to equatorial Africa, and socially to Black Africa, or Bantu Africa, or Negro Africa, variously so-called.

I would like to say a few words about my own work. I wrote a book in 1996 called *Citizen and Subject*. One of its objectives was to locate South Africa in the African experience. I argued that the South African academy, even when it was opposed to apartheid politically, was deeply affected by it epistemologically. "The notion of South African exceptionalism," I wrote, "is a current so strong in South African studies that it can be said to have taken on the character of a prejudice."

In my first seminar at UCT in November of 1996, I said the following: "To create a truly African Studies, one would first have to take head-on the notion of South African exceptionalism and the widely shared prejudice that while South Africa is a part of Africa geographically, it is not quite culturally and politically, and certainly not economically. It is a point of view that I have found to be a hallmark of much of the South African intelligentsia, shared across divides: white or black, left or right, male or female."

My point is simple: At no point did I hide my views. I spelt them out both to the UCT Selection Committee that interviewed me in early 1996 and to over 100 members of the Faculty who came to my opening seminar in late 1996. No one should claim surprise.

Let us now come to the design of the Africa core course in the Faculty's Foundation semester. Let us look at the lecture outline so I may make a few observations.

One, the course is divided in three parts, titled pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. But the headings are misleading. Part two actually does not begin with colonialism but with the European slave trade. The study of colonialism really begins with lecture 15 in week eight. The pre-colonial section is actually half the lectures in the course. The point is that the periodisation is highly racialised. Part One is Africa before the White presence; Part Two is Africa under White control, and Part Three is Africa after the White Man relinquished political control.

A second observation. Once slavery begins in equatorial Africa and the White presence in South Africa, South Africa ceases to be part of the course. In fact, both North and South Africa move out of the picture. The focus of the course narrows to equatorial Africa.

The relevant question at this point is: Could this course have been designed differently? Are there other ways of teaching the African experience that could have formed the starting point for the Africa core of UCT's Foundation Semester? My answer is: YES.

The starting points of a different curriculum, a de-racialised curriculum, were forged in the academy in independent Africa.

In the course design that I prepared before I was suspended from the course in early December, 1997, and in the paper I have circulated for this seminar, I suggested four crucial debates that could provide the starting point of framing a new de-racialised curriculum. An awareness of the debates would have transformed each of the three parts of the substitute course that was put in place after I was suspended.

Debate One: Is a Historical Sociology of Africa Possible?

The first debate was sparked off by the work of the Senegalese scholar, Cheikh Anta Diop. Diop was concerned about how to arrive at a knowledge of Africa before the White presence. Part of the then prevailing wisdom was that, since Africa had few written languages, there were few reliable sources of knowledge - mainly archaeology, maybe oral history - for the study of Africa.

Diop's problem was one of sources of knowledge. Was it possible to go beyond archaeological sources which illuminate the distant past, from a million years ago, and oral history, which cannot go any farther than a hundred years, and link these two through other forms of knowledge? How do you reconstruct the middle ground to give historical depth to the African experience?

Diop looked for written sources in languages other than those European, mainly Arabic sources before the Moroccan invasion of Timbuktu in the 15th century. He also explored linguistic evidence. On this basis, he wrote an outline historical sociology of West Africa for the millennium between ancient Egypt and the beginning of the Atlantic Slave Trade.

Debate Two: Historicising Gender

I want to link Diop to one of his sympathetic critics, Ifi Amadiume. Ifi's work focuses on the history of gender relations. Starting with a distinction between biological sex and social gender, she argues that the history of gender in Africa is not the same as that in Europe. In the process she raises the larger question of the historicity of the African experience. In doing so, she moves away from both Euro-centric and nationalist or negritude historians. Ironically, both Euro-centrists and nationalists were content simply to point out that Africa too had cities, an urban life, specialized crafts and international trade. Her preoccupation, as that of Diop, and the generation of historians like Wamba-dia-Wamba, Mamadou Diouf and Mohamed Mbodj, whether they agreed with Diop or not, was to illuminate the specific trajectory - or trajectories - of the African experience. Like Diop, Amadiume too is concerned to go beyond archaeology and anthropology and construct a historical sociology of Africa.

If taken into account, these two debates would have transformed the content of parts one and three of the substitute course. It would have made the first part truly inter-disciplinary, instead of being confined to archaeology. It would have undercut the essentialist notions of an unchanging African economy and society that are central to the leadings in part three.

While debates one and two problematic the long duree of African history, the relevance of debates three and four lies in that they problematise the colonial experience.

Debate Three: Reconstructing Africa from a Political Economy and Civilisational Perspective

It is well known that higher education in equatorial Africa has been mainly a post-independence achievement. As the new intelligentsia in the post-colonial academy reached out to one another, they formed a continental network, called CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Research in Africa). This network provided a forum for debate, a springboard of ideas that could provide a starting point for reshaping Africa as an object of study, this time decolonised and deracialised. A key intellectual contribution to this project came from Samir Amin. In the article I circulated for this seminar, I point to two key readings of Samir Amin, which I think illuminate the relevance of his contribution for an introductory course on Africa.

The first reading that I thought important was his 1972 article in the *Journal of Modern African Studies*. In this article, Samir Amin proposes a way of thinking of Africa, particularly its equatorial and southern parts, as a differentiated unity. The article is written from the standpoint of political economy and it looks at Africa as a contradictory unity of modes of productions, demarcating, for example, labour reserves from peasant economies.

The second reading is the first chapter of his 1976 book, *Unequal Development*. This time, the standpoint is that of civilizational processes, not political economy. The chapter is concerned with the impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on the civilizational trajectory of Africa. What he asks, was the civilizational consequence of the fact that the Atlantic Slave trade undercut the trans-

Saharan trade and the Indian Ocean trade? How crucial was this development in the production of Africa as not only sub-Saharan but also continental (adrift from the Indian Ocean islands)? In historicising it, he problematises the notion of sub-Saharan Africa: Africa is not a given, we make it as we make our own history.

While Samir Amin tried to build a differentiated notion of Africa from a political economy and civilisational perspective, the 4th debate I have in mind pursued this same project from a political standpoint

Debate Four: Reconstructing Africa from a Political Standpoint

The Dar-es-Salaam debate that followed the publication of Issa Shivji's writings in the 1970s focused particularly on the nature of the state and political processes. One outcome of that debate, in the 1990s, has been to locate apartheid within the African colonial experience. The argument is as follows: Did not apartheid, as a form of the state, seek to reproduce race as an identity that would unite its beneficiaries and ethnicity as an identity that would unite its victims? To that extent, should apartheid not be understood as the generic form of the colonial state in Africa, rather than being an exception to it? Also, should we not understand the political identities that colonialism tried to institutionalise as neither positivist (that they exist), nor ideological (that they are invented) but historicised as institutionally reproduced?

My argument is that UCT's introductory course on Africa should have been structured around these four debates. If that had been the case, the first two would have problematised the long duree, and the last two the colonial experience. If you look at the reading list of the substitute course actually taught in the Faculty, you will find none of the key African intellectuals in it.

The required readings in the substitute, instead, come from a single course text, called *Africa*, and edited by Martin Phyllis and Patrick O'Meara. Originally written in 1976, it was revised twice, first in the 1980s, and then in the 1990s. Its structure was, however, cast in 1976: that Africa is equatorial and Bantu. Subsequent revisions were informed by debates in the American academy: leading to an emphasis on political economy in the 1980s, and urbanisation and gender in the 1990s. Needless to say, the revisions left its core orientation unchanged.

In my view, it was a mistake to look for a single text for the course, for the simple reason that African Studies is radically in need of revision that no single satisfactory text exists as yet.

Why then did the course team adopt a single text? Most likely, because it was the easiest thing to do given that they had little time on hand. For those of you who have read Martin Hall's response to my paper, you will recall that Hall was approached to become a part of the course team in early December, 1997, exactly when I was suspended from the course. He says he didn't begin work until mid-January. So, instead of putting together a collection of articles from diverse sources, something that would have required both expertise and time, they looked for a single text; in my view, that was an easy, lazy and irresponsible option.

A Response to Martin Hall

Martin Hall, has circulated a response to my critique. I would like to present a point by point consideration of his views.

First, allow me to redirect your attention to my key question: why did the focus of the substitute course narrow to equatorial Africa with the beginning of the slave trade?

Martin Hall doesn't answer this question. He does not answer it because the narrowing takes place with parts two and three, which he tells us were not his responsibility. He tells us he had nothing to do with designing them, and yet he claims all along us the course was team-designed!

Instead, he defends his own turf, the first part of the course. So he presents a defence of archaeology and misses the point of my central criticism. For my criticism was never that archaeology is unimportant. I had raised Diop's central question: can we go beyond archaeology and oral history and find other sources of knowledge in our understanding of Africa's history? Is it possible to construct a historical sociology for Africa, as is constructed for other parts of the world?

I still think that the exclusion of a historical sociology from part one was something forced on Martin Hall. The absence reflects a key weakness of the History Department at UCT. That department has made choices over the past decade, so that it has no one with a research focus on equatorial Africa. This is in sharp contrast to UWC, whose History Department invested resources precisely in that field. This is why I called on my colleagues to set aside their narrow cliquish camaraderie, their patronising and matronising attitudes, and tap the rich,

intellectual resources at UWC.

This is why when I was asked to design the course in early October of last year, I turned for assistance to Dr. Ibrahim Abdullah, a historian at UWC I said in my paper that he prepared bibliographical suggestions for me, and guided my reading on the historical sections. I should have acknowledged more: for the fact is that he was the person with whom I bounced ideas every time I wrote, or re-wrote, the draft of a section of the syllabus.

The second point in Hall's response relates to my second question: Why did the course team ignore all the key debates in the post-colonial African academy? Hall has three different answers to this question, each equally unsatisfactory.

He begins by saying that the reverse was the case, that he actually taught students the importance of debate and evidence. This, of course, is not the point. My question is about particular debates, those debates in the African academy which established the possibility of decolonising and deracialising the study of Africa.

I was initially thrown by Hall's second attempt to answer this question. In the 2nd paragraph of page 5, he brings out a long list of African names he says are referenced in the text the students read. It is like someone producing a long list of names in an intellectual debate on Freud, Marx, Einstein, etc. and protesting that some of his best friends are Jews! One would dismiss this as a trivial and patronising gesture if it were not also revealing. For Hall shows a half-baked familiarity with these sources. I will cite the most damning instance. The list of African authors he says students read about included Ki-Zerbo and Olderogge, who he writes are from Rwanda. Now, Joseph Ki-Zerbo is from Burkina Faso, not Rwanda, something most historians around this continent would know since Ki-Zerbo was the editor of volume I of UNESCO's History of Africa. And Olderogge, I believe, is not even an African. He is a Russian, a member of the Russian academy who wrote the first Russian study of the West African jihad. A little learning, as the English say, is a dangerous thing.

I found Martin Hall's third attempt to answer this question actually the most revealing. Students, he says, "were not assigned primary sources for the first five weeks," and wonders "at which point in the curriculum students should be required to make use of primary sources." When I read this, I was appalled at Hall's notion of a primary source. A primary source is a source closest to an action. In the language of ^ anthropologist, a primary source is a native informant. The distinction between a primary source and an

intellectual is that a primary source reports, narrates, is the source of empirical data in the first instance, whereas an intellectual sifts through this, analyses, synthesizes and theorises. Now, what makes Martin Hall an intellectual, and Cheikh Anta Diop a "primary source," or a native informant? The idea that natives can only be informants, and not intellectuals, is part of an old imperial tradition. It is part of the imperial conviction that natives cannot think for themselves; they need tutelage. That this notion should have found fertile ground in apartheid South Africa with its project of Bantu education cannot be surprising. But why should it flourish unchecked in a post-apartheid academy whose ambition it is to be a world class African university?

We *need* to put this in context. For the same Martin Hall who writes of natives as informants in one place lavishes praise on Diop at another. Clearly, Hall cannot help acknowledging Diop as a towering intellectual in his conscious moments. But these moments are punctuated by lapses, each a sort of a twitch, returning him to the prejudice that natives can be no more than informants. I suggest we leave further analysis of this to psychologists.

Hall says students read of Diop in his book, and he cites the relevant section in footnote 6 on page 4 of his paper. Listen to what students read of Diop in Martin Hall's book. They read of "the work of Negritude historians such as Diop (who)... has emphasised the importance of Egypt's past in understanding the full sweep of Africa's history, and of Africa's contribution to the history of the Mediterranean and Europe." I have two observations on this. Since when did Diop become "a Negritude historian"? It is also clear that Hall has accessed Diop through the North American academy, and not through post-independence African debates. As I observed in my paper, "While the debate around Diop in the North American academy has revolved around his claim that ancient Egypt is the core civilizational archive of African history, Diop's larger significance lay in the more general question he raised: whether history before the arrival of the White Man could be understood as a social history (a historical sociology), or whether the limits of our understanding were the limits of archaeology, however unreconstructed." Hall, having missed Diop's larger significance, passes on that lag to his students.

We come to Hall's third line of defence. He has a long section statistically describing the students taking this course, underlining the fact that they are mainly from disadvantaged backgrounds. My question is: so what?

If this is meant as a justification of imparting skills through a foundation semester, that is not under discussion here. But Martin Hall's long digression does raise a question that I am sure Hall never intended: Why is this disadvantaged student body being fed a disadvantaged curriculum? Is UCT in the process of creating its own version of Bantu education?

Hall's final defence is to turn to student evaluations. He gives us the results of a student poll. Students loved the course, he says. And students, I suppose the implication is, could not possibly be wrong. My view is different. I think Martin Hall has given us a self-serving interpretation of the poll.

I have argued that the problem with this course is the result mainly of what the course team left out of the course, not of what they included in it. My critique is mainly about what they did not teach, not about what they did teach.

Students only know what they were taught; they do not know what they were not taught. If a course confirms student prejudices, prejudices instilled through Bantu education -- that Africa lies north of the Limpopo, and that this Africa has no intelligentsia with writings worth reading - and if the students say they love the course, do we have anything more than successful Bantu education? Now taught to Black and White students in the same classroom, rather than in separate segregated facilities?

Student appraisals cannot substitute for a peer review process. Only demagogues would trade in one for the other, trying to silence critics by waving student appraisals in their faces. Who does not know that every enlightened dictator habitually organizes popular referenda while silencing critics through perks or punishment?

The Role of Expertise in a University

I want to deal with the final point in Martin Hall's response, because I think it deserves consideration on its own. Hall argues that there is no room for expertise in a democracy. He posits two alternatives: either there is 'professorial control' or 'a democratic model of participatory course planning and teaching.' And he holds up the substitute course as a model of participatory design. I have already pointed out that when it comes to taking responsibility, he takes responsibility for only the first part of the course. He says literally nothing in defence of parts 2 and 3. Is the claim to participatory planning and teaching any more than posturing?

But I want to examine the theoretical significance of Hall's argument, the argument that opposes the recognition of expertise to a democratic process. What are we to make of this latter-day Luddite position?

Universities, I hope we all agree, are about the pursuit of excellence, the reason why universities like to recognise, honour and encourage expertise. That, in my view, does not rule out democracy in an intellectual setting, for democracy combines acknowledging expertise alongside keeping it open to question, professorships along with peer review. This is why scholarship needs to go hand in hand with humility. Expertise is never final. Debate is never closed. This is why Vice Chancellors should resist the temptation to close debates administratively, and why - in spite of Hall's claim - intellectual leadership is not the same thing as intellectual hegemony.

So long as intellectual activity is pursued within institutional boundaries, its organisation hinges on decisions which impact on the lives of others. Who is qualified to make these decisions? Who is qualified to design a course syllabus? Anyone?

Let me bring this closer to home. When the university established a Chair in African Studies and recruited an academic from outside, was that not saying the university lacked expertise in the field, I might add, for understandable historical reasons?

Is not that why you invited this same person, the holder of the A C Jordan Chair in African Studies, to write the syllabus of an introductory course on Africa in October 1997?

Why then, when three of your members disagreed with him, instead of calling a meeting to discuss that disagreement, you, the Assistant Dean, suspended the person from the course the day before he was to hand you the final syllabus?

To your credit, you recognised a mistake had been made and apologised. In the meantime, you had put in place a substitute course. When your Chair in African Studies told you the substitute introductory course on Africa was seriously flawed intellectually and morally, you turned around and accused him of wanting to establish intellectual hegemony!

He has elaborated his critique of the substitute course and its three parts. In the face of the critique, Martin Hall has defended the first part. No one has defended the second part, or anyone the third part. And no one even admits to having designed the whole course. I would like to ask: Who designed the overall course? Anyone? Or did three people design three separate parts and just slap them together?

Is participatory democracy the name of a new game in which faceless people can make decisions and hide behind the wall of democracy to avoid accountability? Is participatory democracy turning into a slogan for defending faceless decision-making? Are we in a brave new world where democracy is the swansong for a regime of non-accountability, a non-transparent regime?

Conclusion

I am aware that sections of the press have tried to sensationalise this debate, and package it as a race issue. I am also aware that some in the university have helped them do so. I want to be honest. Race is not absent from this issue, but this is not a question that pits black against white. Broadly, it is a question about curriculum transformation, and about who should be making these decisions. Narrowly, it is a question about how Africa is to be taught in a post-apartheid academy.

Students are being taught a curriculum which presumes that Africa begins at the Limpopo, and that this Africa has no intelligentsia worth reading. This version of Bantu education, of Bantu Studies called African Studies, is already being taught to every entering student in the social sciences, and will be compulsorily taught, force-fed, to every first year social science student from here on unless we, the Faculty, say no.

I say that the Faculty has a right to decide what students will be taught, not just how they will be taught. This decision is normally made through appointments. By all means, appoint as Professor of African Studies the person whose vision of African Studies is in accord with that of the Faculty. But having done so, for all our sakes, leave that person room for intellectual creativity and intellectual leadership - whoever be that Professor of African Studies!

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