

Book Review

Manthalu, C.H., Chikaipa, V. & Gunde, A.M. (eds.) 2022. *Education, Communication and Democracy in Africa: A Democratic Pedagogy for the Future*. London: Routledge.

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The series of chapters in this book draws together similar themes relating to the intersection of education, inequality, and the struggle for democracy in postcolonial Sub-Saharan Africa. The detailed studies provide insights for policymakers, educationalists, and social and political scientists from a range of disciplines. The failure of equitable participation for all students and citizens in a number of contexts is attributed to, not only the legacy of colonial powers, but the unconscious assumptions which support the status quo in education; the impotence of policy implementation; and the lack of political will of the powerful. The book aims to advance scholarship in democratic citizenship education in Africa through the exploration of various themes relating to the marginalised majority and the causes of lack of any meaningful transformation towards prosperity and a sense of agency and identity. The consistency of arguments across secondary schooling to university students, tutors, teachers, educators, and higher education institutions is interesting. A main recurring theoretical lens in the research is ubuntu, but there are also studies based on decolonial literature, Habermas, Freire, and socio-linguistics.

Many of the rationales provoking inquiry arise from the cognitive, linguistic, psychological, and/or economic damage perpetrated throughout the various contexts and countries in the studies. Perhaps greater cognisance could be given to the counter arguments and gains made in post-colonial eras. The book comes at a time of a plethora of current books from Southern Africa into the need to transform Higher Education, for example: *The Palgrave Handbook of Learning for Transformation*¹, *Reimagining South African Higher Education: Towards a Student-Centred Learning and Teaching Future*², *Reclaiming Public Universities: Comparative Reflections for Reforms*³, amongst others, and following on from Jonathan Jansen's seminal book, *Decolonisation in Universities*.⁴

¹ Nicolaidis, A. Eschenbacher, S. Buergelt, P. Gilpin-Jackson, Y. Welch, M. & Misawa, M. (eds). 2022. *The Palgrave Handbook of Learning for Transformation*. Springer: Nature.

² de Klerk, D.; Krull, G.; Maleswena, T. and MacAlister. F. (forthcoming) *Reimagining South African Higher Education: Towards a Student Centred Learning and Teaching Future*.

³ Priyan, M. 2022. *Reclaiming Public Universities. Comparative Reflections for reforms*. Oxon: Routledge

⁴ Jansen, J. 2019. *Decolonisation in Universities: The politics of Knowledge*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.



This book presents studies from Malawi, Ethiopia, Tanzania, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and other Sub-Saharan countries. A common thread is the ironic cognitive and existential damage perpetuated, and perhaps exacerbated, through formal education at various levels. Access to education is the oft-touted solution to citizen empowerment. However, these authors expose and focus on the continued inequities in participation for students, tutors, teachers, and the majority citizens in public discourse. The discourse, and by implication access to resources, tends to exclude those with disabilities, or those at the margins of a system. Systems that are often patriarchal, partisan and privileging the powerful – whether those exhibiting power be education management, government, supervisors, teachers, or tutors. Even where policies claim democratic principles, the coloniality, lack of ubuntu, or even unconscious power plays impede genuine communication, education, and participation. Within such systems of education, which purports to demonstrate and inculcate principles of democracy and freedom of communication, there appears instead to be a dehumanising culture.

The book's main inquiry is: How do we ensure that, in public discourse, the voices of the disempowered are heard? In the diverse and multidisciplinary approaches to this wicked problem, areas of investigation include policy, disability, gender, student identity and agency, media, language, tribalism and partisan bias, ethics, curricula, and sociolinguistics. The general answer is that we, as educators, are not 'walking the talk' of inclusion. In a continent that is steeped in ubuntu and that has undergone traumas of oppression and loss of identity and belonging, the education systems appear to be largely culpable, or accomplices in the democratic dysfunction that is evident across diverse sectors. Ubuntu is an oft-touted 'given' in the African context (and a search shows up 63 mentions of ubuntu in the book), yet we see in the dilemmas presented, a distinct lack of ubuntu or 'humble togetherness' – especially the 'humble' part in the educational contexts explored here. Ubuntu contains both a dimension of being human through humble togetherness and a dimension of becoming human (Seehawer, 2018). This is what the book is contributing - an expose of a gap and discussion for a way forward.

The following range of topics (briefly touched on) provides some sense of the recurring themes in different contexts and countries. In Chapter 2, Nsanja show up the power plays in tutor–student interactions. In Chapter 3, Manthalu, Gunde and Chikaipa call for more meaningful equality of interactions in teacher education. In Chapter 4, Kayuni, argues that law schools in sub-Saharan Africa, are well positioned to further democratic policies. In Chapter 5, Namphande claims that democratic communication needs to start in secondary school rather than the current voice-suppressing experiences students encounter. In Chapter 6, Getahun and Dana align with Ethiopia's mother-tongue-instruction language policy but question the neglect of Amharic – Ethiopia's lingua franca. Chapter 7 by Kangalawe highlights the lack of political will to implement the language of instruction policy in Tanzanian higher education to accommodate Swahili. In Chapter 8, Gondwe and Mwakilama explore the intersection across teacher education, democracy and ICT and provide a caution for curriculum design here. In Chapter 9, Gunde, Chikaipa and Manthalu critique the practice of affirmative action in Malawian H.E. in a context where regionalism and tribalism are dominant. Kainja, in Chapter 10, exposes the partisan bias

seen in compliance with professional ethics in public state houses in Malawi. Journalism training could mitigate this push against democracy. In Chapter 11, Mutekwe interrogates gender equality in curricula where patriarchy is dominant. In Chapter 12, Jamu, Lamba and Mhango argue that true democracy requires greater inclusion of disability and this should begin at universities. Chikaipa, Chirwa, Manthalu and Gunde (Chapter 13) argue for greater sensitivity to the identity formation of students with disabilities. Moyo and Magudu (Chapter 14) analyse Zimbabwe's policy on education for citizenship in higher education. They claim a need for revising democratic citizenship curricula. In Chapter 15, Sanni's argument starts from the premise that education can either achieve humanisation or dehumanisation. However, while the social-political context of Nigeria is repressive, educational policies will not achieve humanisation. In Chapter 16, Tembo appears ambivalent regarding the hierarchical structures in mission schools and effects of colonisation.

The common call is to consciously trans-form and disrupt the edifices and processes that continue to dehumanise and relegate to the margins those who have the same rights and aspirations as those purporting to lead and teach. Education needs to inculcate a democratic mind-set within its own territory while it claims to be making meaningful contributions to a democratic society.

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References

Seehawer, M.K. (2018). Decolonising research in a Sub-Saharan African context: Exploring Ubuntu as a foundation for research methodology, ethics and agenda. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 21(4): 453-466.