

Session VI
1st Speaker
Vimbai Chivaura

I want to do things differently. Challenging the hegemony, that's the topic. But I can't challenge hegemony by using forms that are hegemonic. So we will do it our way.

(Recitation in African dialect)

I prefer to call my topic "Scattered Scriptures".

All knowledge is a science. All science is social. How to use science and knowledge for the benefit of humanity, is wisdom. Everything is a knowledge system and every knowledge system has been colonized. The language we use is a knowledge system. This conference, the way we conceive it, the way we exchange ideas is a knowledge system and our minds have been captivated. We are all captive here because we are trying to fit in. The deconstruction of knowledge systems entered a that has already been pre-determined. And that is the problem we have.

Among my people, they say, when you come together to discuss, you do it in the open, so that you are in contact with every person. The very idea of coming together must be drawn by spirit of coming together, of wanting to be together. You don't talk to yourself. The purpose of talking is to commune. To communicate. To communicate means to live for the other, to talk for the other. So you talk with the other. It's a relationship. And that relationship must be symbiotic. It must be equal. No dominance. Where there is domination there is no communication.

The word 'co', means coming together. Correspondence means coming together. Community means coming together. Co-existence. We are here to find ways to co-exist with one another without domination. When you co-exist you don't want to appropriate the dignity of somebody else without permission from that person. You want to inter-animate, to exist for the other. That is the spirit of a conference. It means sitting together and thinking of things you have in common. Those things are not temporary. They are put there by the Creator, God.

In my language we say nobody walks alone. I know that there are those who have been in these lands before myself. I am a descendent of those who have been here. Spirit is everywhere. Differences are simply different forms of the same spirit. My people were in Manila and China, I can give you names. They never come back. One went to Brazil and set up a community there. Some were Jesuit missionaries. Pushkin, the great Russian was black, like some of the original peoples of this place that I see. I teach with those pictures. I say, look, this is not a white man. Even the mother of Queen Victoria, the so called royal family, is black, black, black, like all of us here, peoples of colours, peoples of melanine. Melanine is from mel, honey. Honey has every ingredient that makes people intelligent. This is why I say language, conferences, all these are knowledge systems. Every tree that I mention, every water, every air that I mention, I am indicating a relationship. You don't name a tree just to distinguish from another. When I name a tree I am really telling people how to relate to that tree. When you say Vimbaye, my personal name, I am telling you how to relate to me. I am a text. Everything in this world is a text.

Different people have different ways of coding their knowledge, of coding their information. If you want information not to be forgotten it must be made public, which is different from publishing. Knowledge is not knowledge unless it is made public. It has to benefit society. Knowledge is not knowledge if it is locked up in books or in reference journals. It is not knowledge if it is kept in the head of the professor for purpose of being promoted to the Vice Chancellor of the university. Because if you walk in the streets of your people they will say Professor, what do you profess? And you find that you are nobody in that community. We must bring the university to the community so that you can co-exist for the community. Not the community existing for the university.

This is why I agree with the Multiversity idea. I have read about the university and I have de-educated myself. I have gone back to the community and I have become a human being again. I now live. I can dance the dances of my people. I can sit down with them. I can worship with them – worship in a way that makes sense to me. So, before I came here I first went to my village. And they told me, before you leave ask for guidance from those who have gone before you, from those who are ahead. They will clear the way for you.

And when you go there don't be like the cockroach. If you send a cockroach to fetch the milk, it will not come back with milk because it will drown in the milk. A lot of us who are sent to the universities go in the ways of the white man and then we drown in the white man's milk i.e his philosophy across the curriculum.

Those stories are not just narratives, they are not just literature, they are codifications of our people's thoughts, of how they see the world. Sometimes we don't see our way out. We try to find out how we can move away from the lion that we call white studies. Some of us here think we cannot cross. We will cross. Listen to the wisdom of my people.

One day the rabbit (rabbi?) and its family had gone to a party. After the party there was heavy rain. They came to a river and the river was infested with crocodiles. So the wife says to the husband "we cannot stay here. How do we cross the river? Go and talk to the crocodiles." So the father goes and meets the crocodile. "Ah ! Mr. Crocodile. I see 5 of you here. Are you the only ones who are there?" "What does it matter to you" "Look. You can see us here a family. There are many more of us coming out from there. I think we are more than you are." "No, no, no, you cannot be more than we are." "Are you sure? Can you line up and see if you can reach that bank of the river." "Yes." "Okay. Line up". So they lined up. Then the rabbit said "Sometimes I am weak in counting, so I want each one of us to count so that when we reach the end we want to see if we all have the same number. Agreed, said the crocodile. So the father walked on the backs of the crocodiles, counting all the way, followed by the others, wife and children and thus they all crossed the river. Then the crocodile said, "now you see how many we are?" The father said, "Yes, I see how many fools you are."

We too will still find a way to cross this river, if we are serious.

Let us not be like the rats. We are all here talking. At the end of the day we will scatter. No follow up. Here is a story to illustrate what we are doing here. If we don't want this meeting to be a waste of time, let's learn something from this story. These are texts, don't forget these are texts.

The rats had found the cats a menace. So the rats sat down to discuss what to do with this cat. After a long deliberation, towards the end, one scholar, an academic of white studies said, "let's just tie a bell around this cat and everytime it tries to come and terrorise us we can hear him from far away. Some of the ideas we are churning here are like that. We must tie a bell around the cat's neck, so everybody celebrates. Problem is over.

The rats conference was about to disperse when one old one said I have just one small word to add: we must select a subcommittee to go and tie that bell around the cat's neck. And everybody backed out. So that conference was useless. So let's not be like the rats, who talk about things and not have a follow up to implement those things.

These stories are used by the west as studies of primitive societies. They call them myths and they think they are useless, but they are liars. To us who have coded them, we know what we are saying. They are knowledge systems. Everything is knowledge system. History is a knowledge system, geography is a knowledge system and religion is a knowledge system. Coded in the way people want to code it. You must know the password in order to reach that knowledge and decode it and when you decoded it you must decipher. To decipher is to know how to read it and when you read it you must evaluate. That's where the wisdom is.

Let me tell you an anthropology story to illustrate this. There was a man called Baker, an explorer. He went to a place of my people in Zimbabwe called Plum Tree. He was studying other people, anthropology. There was a family of 5 brothers with their wives and children. He spoke to the youngest brother and asked: who is the owner of this village?

The man answered: It is he who you are talking to.

Fine. Who is the owner of these wives?.

They belong to him who you are talking to.

And who is the owner of all this jewellery?.

They belong to him who you are talking to.

Which is the eldest wife?

This is my first wife, 2nd wife, 3rd wife, and so on.

What about the children?

This is my first born, 2nd born and so on

After sometime the anthropologist once again returned to the same village and this time he met the eldest brother. He asked the same questions and got the same replies. So he wrote in his diary, "when I met the youngest brother he told me this and when I asked the eldest he also said the same thing.

And what was his conclusion? Africans are so incestuous that their children do not exactly know who their father is. They exchange wives like they exchange their underwear. Everything he wrote was wrong because, at that time we never wore underwear and secondly his understanding

was all wrong. You can find his diary in the archives. So information is not knowledge. It is only knowledge when you know what it means in terms of use for the society.

2nd Speaker

Kantibou Edgu:

I have been asked to speak about my association – Zanadua. It was created in 1998. Zanadua means “You have to stay together to take your because you are the same thing. You are made of the same substance that is why you have to be together.

Why did we form this association? .In my travels to India, Africa, China, Beijing I have met many Africans who have built their lives in these places. In Africa, societies are at war. This made me think that we have to persuade Africans staying in other countries to return to Africa, put their minds together and build Africa, because Africa is presently not for the sons of Africa. Africa is in the hands of European imperialists.

It is not only Africa, but other countries under colonial rule too who are not in control of their lives and the reason is because we don't have our own curriculum. The curriculum we have is programmed by other people so this curriculum cannot build them. Therefore Zanadua tries to undertake activities to recover memory for the Africans. At present African sons are blank, they have no memories. The Europeans say Africans have no history and the Africans agree. If you have no history you are nothing, where do you come from, who are you, where do you want to go. If you don't pose these issues you will not move forward. Zanadua therefore tries to work through universities.

We also do cultural and social activities. We go to the village and speak to the traditional chief. In traditional societies women do not have a good place, so Zanadua goes to the village and speaks to the men and tells them if you want to progress you have to liberate your women and give them rights and let them grow.

In 2005, we will hold a conference called “ Afrosancriscity” At this conference we will invite Africans who have fought a long time to put Africa in centre of their minds. If Africa wants to develop, you have to place Africa in centre of curricula. You cannot develop yourself if you don't have your own curricula. If you want to build yourself you have to give, if you don't give, you don't go anywhere. That is why we are having this conference.

Another thing, in Africa 10 percent speak English or French. The others don't speak either language. But life in Africa is built by the 10 percent – politics, government etc. - it is the 10 percent who decide and control these things. This is unjust. If there are 100 people, 10 cannot take the life of 90 people. So Zanadua works with the 90 percent, in conferences, universities, to make them understand why one should not attend colonial European schools. Those people who do not wish to attend school are put outside by the system. This is wrong. If you want to build our country you have to take charge of all people in the country, the majority of people have to be considered. If you consider only the minority, it is not good for us. This is what we try to show through our activities.

The majority of intellectuals are not conscious of these things. The structure of France is not good. I think that English societies gave the colonised people the chance to speak their language

but not the French. They never accepted us or allowed us to speak our language. If we spoke in our language when the French were in Africa they would put a head of a donkey on us. So we could not speak our language. In my country there is no newspaper, journal in my own language. It is all in French. There is an institute now which translates many books into our language. So maybe one day we can give up French. But not today. People are afraid that if we don't allow French, or if we do not speak right French our country will disappear.

This is a great problem of African people who were colonised by the French. They don't want to say they are black. The primary thing is to be glad to be black, to be what we are. You don't have to put on something to become white, it is a mistake. But this is what happens in Africa. We have a big job to save our country.

DISCUSSION

Anu: I would like to know whether people in your country are decoding indigenous knowledge systems and making the wisdom of that particular knowledge available to a larger audience.

Vimbai : The university has always been the doyen of the colonial education or mis-education of the Negro. But after we obtained our political independence (which is different from ideological or cultural independence), for the first time in the history of the country, the vice chancellor, who has a legal back ground, was given a brief was to transform education in order to serve society. The Ministry of Higher Education found that a lot of things that we are calling education are actually training programmes. There is too much of schooling, but too little education. So it came up with a package to introduce education which distinguishes it from schooling.

I was appointed on the curriculum committee, called the Academic Regulations Committee which proposed a structure, empowering each teacher. We started changing things from inside while starting to make changes in the curriculum. We also found that the faculties and departments were still manned by people who were products of the University of London. So we had the University of London in the heart of Africa. Many of us were proud to be brought up in the British tradition, and to be alienated from our society.

Outwardly we had exorcised the white man but inside we were black skins, white masks. We started renaming courses. There was a course called Pre-history of Africa. We changed it into Early History of Africa or African Classical History. Traditional Medicine was named as African Classical Medicine or Medicine in Classical Africa and Contemporary Society. The naming itself will change the conceptualization of the content. The Department of English is now renamed as Department of English, Communication and Media studies. We don't teach English literature only. We now teach Pacific literature, Chinese literature, Russian literature, Indigenous literatures. In Zimbabwe, we have created community based theatre where our university students communicate what they have learnt using communication methods which the people can understand.

So, things are changing. It is a struggle, there is still some resistance from our own people who prefer to re-cycle the same old knowledge. But our students are now the ones who demand a change. There are three things we are now looking for in lecturers we hire in the university: ability to teach, to research and to do community service.

Anu – How many universities are now modeled on this shift you have talked about?

Vimbai : 10 universities. Those who are running those universities are actually our products.

Anu: What is the language of instruction?

Vimbai: The official medium of instruction is English but in the Department of African languages and literature they instruct using their own language. For all the subjects that I teach, my students are free to speak any language. However, the colonial legacy still prevails and one has to pass in English if one wants to continue higher studies, no matter the subject one intends to pursue. In our society, elite urban homes actually encourage speaking only in English.

Norma: I want to offer a comment about language and educating in the mother tongue. In India too, many schools actively discourage the local language and children are punished for speaking in it in school. Parents too support this as they feel they are sending their children to be educated and education means speaking language which distinguishes the person from the illiterate. But in fact, speaking in the local language helps a child to understand concepts because there is only one hurdle to cross i.e understanding the concept. Learning in a foreign language means having to overcome two hurdles – the language and the concept. This is why a number of students do badly in school, not because they cannot understand the concept but because they cannot cross the hurdle of language to reach the concept. And so they fail and are labeled failures and dropouts. Therefore when we take a re-look at the curriculum, it is as important not only to look at content but also the mode in which this content will be taught. As long as you remain in the grip of a language which is not yours, you will always in some sense subscribe to the dogmas, the theories, the anthropologies of that culture all which come as baggage with that language.

Claude: I have a great admiration for the people in Africa. Even when I was preparing for this meeting, and I was surfing the internet looking for people who had written or worked on the subject of re-looking at their curricula at universities, I could not find any Asian site at all. But for Africa it was quite extensive and here were many web pages dedicated to Afro-centricity. I want to know what is your estimation of the decolonization process at university level? Are there any departments or centres, where there are revolts or protests about this continued colonization? Are there any groups of scholars in Africa working on these issues whom we can call together for a meeting on Multiversity in Africa? Can we have a meeting between African and Asian scholars who are thinking on the lines of blackening white studies?

Ali (Kings College, London): As I understood you, the students in Zimbabwe liked the taste of the new pill you have given them and are demanding change in the curriculum. I

have the impression that students of Asian descent are more readily absorbed into White Studies. How come the Zimbabwe case was different? Second, how important are student desires in reformatting the curriculum?

Jorge: Has there has been any spillover of your programme to the scientific, technical and engineering side?

Sunil: Vimbai started with a formulation about knowledge systems and the reality thereof, with a thematic consideration, which is more contemporaneous in my view than others have done so far. But he ended up identifying the enemy again in terms of producers of knowledge, not in terms managers of knowledge as the case should have been in consistence with the first part of his presentation. If you talk about knowledge systems the way you did, and about co-existence and communication the way you did, then the enemy is the new emerging establishment who are not the producers of knowledge but the managers of knowledge. The producers of knowledge are already on the decline. They have been replaced by managers of knowledge on the basis of a different kind of knowledge system, which is not even known as knowledge till date. A new concept of knowledge is coming into existence, which we could very well confront with the kind of ideas that you started with. With the emergent arrangement of things and men, with virtuality, with new knowledge managers etc. starting to occupy the top, perhaps the situation will be a much better starting point for a new kind of politicization which can challenge the new shape of things.

Shao Lung: If the decolonization process that we are trying to undertake is successful, particularly in terms of language of instruction and of practice, in a sense we will be breaking down the Tower of Babel and all the languages will come out. As a practical issue, how do we communicate among ourselves within the movement? Are there any lessons we can learn from the African experience? What is the practice now to communicate between different language groups within the African university?

Chiu: What we see is a very obvious uncoding process with a sign which we now change into the vernacular. This vernacular translation is uncoding in a vocal monolithic way. So the problem is what does the curriculum mean? Are we talking about the same curriculum, in the same set up, with the same function, playing the same role and only change the possible uncoding? What will be the consequence? Will it be decolonising? Do we want to just change the content of the curriculum? What is the impact of the form itself regardless of what's in it? If it is used in the same way as it was in the university, at best we can achieve only a minor part and create some other question by upholding the whole system. I think it is the form with the role curriculum plays. I will give you an example in the field of law. There is judicial process and procedure justice of the law. If the judicial process remains the same or procedure justice is ignored will this be able to change the law?

(I am not able to transcribe Chiu well at all. His speech is difficult to follow. Norma).

Edju: In African universities it is very difficult to talk about black studies because the curricula of the universities is not done by us. There are some disciplines which refer to

African traditions but in reality the university is not really trying to promote African history and culture. We have to build our history because the Europeans have distorted it. But not all Africans think this way. Only some do.

Vimbai: I take most of your questions and comments as recommendations and that is very positive. But I will also try to answer some of your questions. Claude asked whether there are any individuals or organizations that are really working in this area which we can network with in terms of decolonizing not only the syllabus but the mentality of entire communities. There are some. In medicine, in Zimbabwe, there is the National African Traditional Medicine Association whose president is the former Vice Chancellor of our university. It does not only discuss medicine, but also health, spiritual healing, culture, psychology - all from an African centered point of view. The NATM liaises with professors at the university on the efficacy of African medicine. There is also the Zimbabwe Cultural Preservation group which looks at African culture in general and Africa as a diaspora in which we include all non-white societies. We also have media organisations which have a mandate from the government to introduce 90% local content in television.

Jorge asked about the spill over. We have a Ministry under the President's office which looks at technology and engineering, developing it locally and also liaising with the university in terms of technology.

As far as language goes, in Africa the language is one but there are several local dialects e.g. Zulu, Shona, Ndebele, etc. so we speak the same language in different tongues (dialects). The transcription may be different but the conceptualization and even the syntax will be the same. During the liberation struggle people actually threw away white means of communication because if you communicated in the white man's language you couldn't carry out the struggle. It's like Martin Luther King holding hands with a white man and singing "We shall overcome". So we come from a tradition where we went back to our spirituality, to our religions, to our cultures, to our languages, to our dress during the liberation struggle. But then we went back to speaking English again. But generally that spirit is generally there with the people in Zimbabwe. For young people we have a programme on television in Shona and in Ndebele, which is called Mazinga which means our own histories and we invite the community to come and speak in our own language.

Language has its own rules of thinking. The rules of a society are contained in its language. To speak a language is to carry a world, to carry a culture. It is to belong. All colonized people have come face to face with the colonizer's language and the colonizer's culture. When I want to name my world, I conceptualize it in my own language. I am in control. When you use words in another's language you begin to think like them and their problems become yours too. For e.g. the word gender makes no sense in my language. All my maternal relations are my mother whether they are male or female. And all my father's relations are my father, male or female. Their roles in my upbringing are the roles of my father or mother. That's how we relate to one another. I have no doubt simplified it, but as you can see, in our context gender does not make any sense at all. So we need to control the knowledge systems and to manage them ourselves. Sometimes they are managed by the same people who we are fighting against.

Lastly, as regards the practical problems of communication. How do we communicate if we speak in our own languages? We have as an example the language of commerce where everyone must learn the language of the other person as a lingua franca in order to do business .If it can be done in business ,it can be replicated in other areas as well.

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