Renegotiating agency in knowledge production, innovation and Africa’s development in the context of the triage society

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It is increasingly being noted that the action and thought that sustained and gave credibility to modern ideals of social emancipation are being profoundly questioned by the phenomenon of globalization, which, though not new in itself, has reached in the past couple of decades such an intensity that it has effected a redefinition of contexts, objectives, means, and subjectivities of social and political struggles. However, this globalization, though hegemonic, is not the only form, and has, in fact been confronted by another form of globalization, constituted by a series of initiatives, movements and organizations that combat neo-liberal globalization through social and global linkages, networks and alliances. Their motivation is the aspiration to a better, fairer, and more peaceful world which they deem possible, and to which they believe they are entitled. Its most dramatic manifestation occurs annually with the World Social forum of Porto Alegre (Porto Allegre 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005; Mumbai 2004) and the polycentric World Social Forum of 2006 which took place simultaneously on three continents in Caracas, Bamako, and Karachi.

This new globalization has sought to develop articulations from the perspective of the ‘global south’ in diverse areas such as social, economic, political and cultural activity. Some of the activities include participatory democratic practices; alternative production systems; emancipatory interculturality; cultural and cognitive justice and citizenship; the protection of biodiversity; and the recognition of other knowledge systems, creating totally new platforms for the fundamental rethinking of - among other things - the intellectual property systems itself (Sousa Santos, 2007).

Tensions between individualistic liberal conceptions of law and rights and grassroots’ collective intercultural conceptions of human dignity for instance, bring to the fore of human rights and their construction beyond the Eurocentric matrix, new forms of legal pluralism, the right to self determination as fought by indigenous peoples, and the creation of spaces for new, transnational solidarity. Human rights, one of the creations of Western modernity, is being appropriated by a politics of emancipation that takes into account both the recognition of cultural diversity and the common affirmation of human dignity.

These articulations have also brought into the spotlight two central epistemological debates of our time: the internal plurality of modern scientific knowledge (i.e. different ways of conceiving and practising science); and the interconnections and conflicts between scientific knowledge and other knowledges. Here the manner in which the very concept of ‘information’ itself blurs the distinction between nature and culture in areas such as biodiversity and traditional knowledges associated with it are increasingly being brought to light.

This paper seeks to re-examine the developmental challenges for Africa in the twenty-first century as the continent stands at cross-roads, with bitter memories of its colonial past, and a future she is destined to determine. It is a future in which knowledge has become a key transactional currency. The core argument in the paper is that what matters to Africa is not so much the hype around the knowledge economy or
information society and some mad rush into it. Rather, the paper contends that the information revolution that has greater significance for Africa is not a revolution in technology, machinery, techniques, software, or speed, but a revolution in concepts, and thus the way we think about issues.

The paper posits several questions such as what is the meaning of information, and what is its purpose? In what way or ways do the existing flood of information actually assist Africa find its bearing in a globally competitive, but also globally predatory world system? Which concepts have outlived their usefulness and have to be reframed? Central to this contribution is the proposition that we need to move firmly towards acknowledging that knowledge primarily rests in people rather than in ICTs, databases or services, and thus that for Africa the challenge has to be that of how to build on local knowledge that exists in its people as a concomitant to working with global knowledge and information.

As we survey the wreckage and note the unprecedented evacuation of billions of people from the arena of substantive innovation essential to their existence, we need to turn with force to the task of redefining key concepts such as “innovation”, its link with the goals of building sustainable societies and cognitive justice as key to the attainment of long-term, and sustainable development. Innovations would then go beyond the formal systems of innovation done in universities and industrial research and development laboratories, to innovations from below, by which is meant taking into account the full participation of all producers of knowledge including in informal settings of rural areas.

The Problem of the Modern Triage Society

Triage is a French word which in the 18th century referred to the sorting of coffee beans or pelts. It acquired stability in certain medical dictionaries as the method for screening patients to determine the priority of treatment, particularly when the demand for medical treatment outran the supply of medical facilities and personnel (McKinley, 2001). Social triage is a deliberate decision or act of State to define a target group within its territory, such as a minority, as dispensable. The decision is usually based on rational grounds. Thus even genocide in such a framework would involve the rational imposition of death on those regarded as refractory to the power-holders’ gaze. Once again, the concentration camps are a good example of efforts to rationalize the use of those who were defined by society as waste (the poor, or ‘refuse’ in Bentham’s time or ‘useless eaters’ in Hitler’s Germany).

Triage is different from “vivisection” in that vivisection is the infliction of pain on ‘lesser animals’ for the purposes of scientific research. Pain and suffering are justified in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. The notion of scientific detachment inherent in vivisection has been linked to the culture of calculated indifference to suffering. Triage goes beyond the rational utilization of such categories of people e.g. slave labour, to include a discourse on their death, re-conceptualized as a problem of disposal. Triage converts tutelage to erasure in that in tutelage, there is the classification and exploitation of the marginals in a society. In erasure, the focus is on the elimination or death of those regarded as marginalized, and obsolescent.

The fundamental discourse is underpinned by a feeling that the object in question is somehow irrelevant, the irrelevance (in the case of the Third World for instance) coming about because developments in technology have made them so. The Third World, previously a raw materials exporter, is now something to be cast away once its riches have been plundered and its cultures smashed — like a child’s ruined toy (Visvanathan, 1997).
But because the “new inequality” is global, the triage which attends it is also global. The effect is to reduce whole classes of people within otherwise bountiful countries, and whole countries themselves, and whole regions in some cases, and even continents, to one or other of the hopeless categories (McKinley, 2001) – deemed irrelevant to their use.

In triage, the notion of “political will” is replaced by “political feasibility”. In this transformation, the abundance of information concerning serious inequality is inversely related to the willingness to act on it, by those who can act on it. Thus to those with power, the interest is in palliative or minimalist reform actions rather than transformative actions, the main point being the maintenance of the status quo that can make them - even after the tinkeringings are over - still recognize themselves (in Rorty’s usage) as the holders of power (Rorty, undated). With this as a backdrop, let us then go inside the knowledge production triage tent, from which we daily get our subsistence and execute our daily tasks of research, teaching and community outreach just as nurses, medical aids and doctors do in the medical tents on many battlefields, and revisit that of which we are all, daily, a part.

Origins of the Epistemological Triage

One of the consequences of colonialism and apartheid for the knowledge debate was the fundamental erasure that was effected over the rich knowledge heritages of non-Western people. Colonialism, and colonialists in particular, began by declaring non-Western lands as “empty” - i.e. devoid of people or ideas - and the diverse sciences and innovations that steered and maintained those societies as “non-science”. Canonical jurisprudence made Christian Monarchs of Europe rulers of all nations ‘whenever they may be found, and whatever creed they might embrace’. The Charters and patents were anchored on the principle of ‘effective occupation’, the ‘vacancy’ of occupied lands by Christian princes, and the ‘duty’ to incorporate the ‘savages’. The Papal Bull, the Columbus Charter and the patents granted by the European monarchs thus laid the moral and juridicial foundations for the colonization and extermination of non-European peoples.

The decimation of indigenous peoples everywhere was justified morally on the grounds that they were not really human; they were part of fauna. Aborigines were equated with their half-wild dogs. Being animals, the original Australians and Americans, the Africans and the Asians, possessed no rights as human beings. Their lands could be usurped as terra nullius – lands empty of people, vacant, wasted, and unused. The Native American population for instance, declined from 72 million in 1492 to less than 4 million a century later (Shiva, 1997, pp. 1-2).

The assumption of empty lands, terra nullius, is now being expanded, right before our very eyes through World Trade Organization (WTO) protocols, to “empty life” seeds and medicinal plants. That same logic is now used to appropriate biodiversity from original owners by defining their seeds, and medicinal plants and medical knowledge as nature, as non-science, and treat the tools of genetic engineering as the yardstick of “improvement”. In this strategy of “conquest by naturalization” the cultural and intellectual contributions of non-western knowledge systems were systematically erased (Shiva, 1997). They were not taught in schools, they were omitted from history text books, they were not allowed into public domains, which were then reserved exclusively for knowledges, heritages, cultures, institutions, norms, and idiosyncracies of Western society. Most public institutions including universities throughout Africa and in South Africa are still structured in this way. To sustain this default drive, all we have to do is maintain this routinized indifference.
Piracy, and later bio-piracy, associated extractions without recompense (of which we in the academy are fully complicit), exploitation, violence on the “Other” including slavery and forced removals, was established as the natural right of the colonizer. Today, bio-prospecting still renders invisible the fact of prior use, prior knowledge, and prior rights associated with bio-diversity. As the original economic and ecological systems disappear, the Western prospector is projected as the only source for medical or agricultural uses of bio-diversity (Shiva, 1997). Yet among peasants and tribal inhabitants of rural areas and tropical forest are men and women who are versed in the cultural diversity and uses of local plant life. These folk perpetuate legacies of cultural knowledge and have few peers as stewards of biological resources. Peasant doorsteps and dooryards are often de facto botanical gardens of incredible complexity – stores of biological diversity and natural compounds, providing sources of new hybrids, yet this stewardship by these rural farmers and inhabitants is neither recognized nor rewarded (Brush, 1996).

During the ten millennia in which humans have developed the originally domesticated plants into complex populations with tremendous phenotypic and genetic diversity, with some exceptions, crop diversity to this day is still concentrated in the regions where intensive domestication has occurred – in the rural areas. This concentration derives from the presence of wild ancestors and hybridization, environmental heterogeneity, long-term crop evolution and human selection (Harlan, 1992). In fact formal systems such as the Linnaean taxonomy and Western pharmacology originated in indigenous knowledge systems (Attran, 1987).

**Triage in Practice: Science, Scientism and the Political Economy of “Othering”**

A more opaque process less discerned by the average citizen except in its effects, is the subject-object divide characteristic and endemic to scientific practice. First of all, what we need to do is distinguish the performative aspects of science i.e. the creations, the technologies and discoveries associated with it, from *scientism* which is the ideological use of “science” defined Eurocentrically, as an activity which sanctions all thought and behavior, and posits science as sacred, the highest standard of morality in knowledge production (Odora Hoppers, 2001). It is this ideological use of science that uses objectification as a key cognitive modality; and it is this objectification that designates everything other than the “self” as object (Visvanathan, 1997). But that ‘self’ is also turned into an ultimate manipulator, a spectator, a recorder of events, which is itself an act of alienation.

Over time, the gaze of science over the so-called “non scientific” has become a gaze of surveillance, not co-creation or co-determination. Visvanathan argues that the way science is constituted prevents the entry of pain and compassion, leaving the “I” of science an impoverished self without a backstage. He argues that science is not only political, but goes beyond politics to create its own micro-physics of power, with its own capillaries, by pre-empting and terminally judging the way one thinks (Visvanathan, 2002).

To many indigenous people, the scientific method, combined with the colonial enterprise, stand highly implicated in the worst excesses of imperialism. According to Māori scholar Linda Smith (1999), the term “research” itself stirs up in local communities a silence, conjures up bad memories that still offend the deepest sense of our humanity. It galls non-western societies that western researchers, intellectuals and scientists trained in that tradition, can claim to know all that there is to know about other societies, on the basis of brief and superficial encounters with those societies. It often
appalls indigenous societies that Western science can desire, extract, and claim ownership of people's way of knowing, and then simultaneously reject those people who created those ideas, and deny them the opportunities to be the creators of their culture and own notions (Smith, 1999).

**Impact of Triage within the Higher Education Tent**

The higher education belt in any country is the most powerful level in the education system. It is the central producer of “official” and “legitimate” knowledge. It provides leadership to the other two lower belts in terms of training teachers and the middle level lecturers for colleges. It is also the apex of the ancestral pyramid that has deluded the reform efforts of so many countries, as well as the harbinger of the national elite, with all the baggage that goes with the idea of “elite”.

In any traditional establishment, it is in higher education that lead ideas, ground breaking notions, paradigms, and concepts are supposed to be generated and disseminated to the rest of the system below, or to civil society. Of necessity, the higher education level should be equipped with the most sensitive of intellectual radars capable of picking up signals, questions, issues, opaque zones in discourse, and to timely articulate, amplify or elucidate them. Thus, when things do not happen, when no new ideas or bold propositions seem to be forthcoming, when the radar system of a higher education system appears incapable of picking up signals of burning issues, when that belt appears incapable of giving the relevant or required leadership to the levels beneath it, or appears to be led by energies that are obtuse to concerns of civil society, policy or the other sub-systems, then something is awfully wrong. In a situation in which research paradigms and deep questions about the nature of knowledge, the procedures and protocols concerning knowledge generation, the social construction of reality, the ethical premises for practices within the scientific paradigm are being raised, it is the higher education system more than any other level that is assumed to have, or supposed to be equipped with, the capacity to respond.

At the end of the twentieth century, Africa stands at cross-roads, with bitter memories of its colonial past. It faces awesome challenges in its efforts to overcome its experiences of history and search for a way forward. Through the four to five development decades it has been difficult to crystallize a vision of Africa that has progressive and generative points of departure from the well worn platform of denial of the continent’s heritage and knowledges (Odora Hoppers, 2002).

Africa wanted to modernize, but was never sure about on whose terms this should occur. We wanted our people to learn to read and write, but instead of looking at literacy as a continuum in different modes of communication from the oral to the written, we equated being ignorant of especially the western alphabet with absolute ignorance. We had no qualms in pitting what is not written as thoughtless, as a weakness, and at its limit, as primitivism (Hountondji, 1997).

Instead of putting education at the service of a complex range of African knowledges - in botany, crop and animal husbandry, climatology, medicine and midwifery, philosophy and pedagogy, architecture and metallurgy - knowledges that we know have been subjugated by the processes of colonialism and modernity, we promoted a default drive in education that arraigned education tailored on western cosmology as the only way to progress. Instead of letting education serve an organic function to enable our societies to engage in the critical but active re-appropriation and authentication of our cultures and knowledge (i.e. to strengthen what we have) and to put this shared resource alongside that of the rest of humanity it was our absolute conviction that education was some neutral business, and was not a cultural matter at all. In the
combined cleansing and purgatory, even the bits that had not yet been touched by colonialism – for example, the deep philosophies, the ethos of solidarity, of extended family support systems - nearly ended in the rubbish pile (Odora Hoppers, 2002). We did not link our acts in educational institutions with the vestiges of social Darwinism embedded deep in the groins of development practice that had, in the first place, turned us into an inverted mirror of western identity, a mirror that belittled us, and sent us to the back of the queue (Esteva, 1992). We forgot that part of our obligation (as the class that had finally proven that we could read and write in the correct alphabet), was that we were to turn this Darwinian curse on its head, and make it our goal-post to return humanity to the centre, to drown the jingles of individualism with an overwhelming chorus of human solidarity and ethics of responsibility to the “Other”, which is our gift of heritage from this continent, to be brought out as a contribution to globalization.

Confronted with a routinized superiority of the West and the overwhelming presence of its artifacts in all crevices of human existence in Africa, we were filled with ambivalence and could not begin the task of demarcating the parameters of the new dialogue for the collective futures of both those in Africa and elsewhere. We could not find the words to invite the West to abandon its superiority complex, abandon its intolerant and exclusive assumptions of all others (Luyckx, 1999) and give others a breathing space to reframe their own realities. Even worse, we forgot that we were to become crucial links in recontextualizing global processes; to create a globally oriented, yet indigenously rooted future; to return to the roots with a future oriented point of view.

We found ourselves tongue-tied whenever we had to find conceptions of learning that did not stigmatize, that enhances, and that grows from what is there... because we had been taught, and learnt well, that there is nothing there. For years, we helped make deeper the ravine between the oral and the literate, and now, challenged by new trends in thinking globally, we are trying to find a bridge between the two, because the search is to create learning societies, give content to culture, and pursue injustice in the big and small spaces with all the courage we can muster.

So what are those emerging propositions and conceptual reversals that are emerging in the groundswell of an alternative project of globalization in confronting the epistemological triage? Here I will outline several new points of departure in rethinking the future of knowledge, innovation and social justice within a new conception of knowledge economy and information society.

**Confronting the Epistemological Triage**

**Knowledge and Innovation**

As we survey the wreckage and note the unprecedented evacuation of billions of people from the arena of substantive innovation essential to their existence, lets us turn with force to the possibilities that exist before us, and identify the tools we need to sharpen to enable us to attain the goals of anchoring this institution into African society.

Here, I invoke the insights from Ramesh Mashelkar, the advisor to the Government of India on Science and Technology, in which he states that the twenty first century will be the century of knowledge, indeed the century of mind. Innovation is the key for the production as well as processing of knowledge. A nation’s ability to convert knowledge into wealth and social good through the process of innovation will determine its future. Issues of generation, valuation, protection and exploitation of intellectual property (IP) are therefore going to become critically important all around the world. Intellectual property will no longer be seen as a distinct or self-contained domain, but rather as an
important and effective policy instrument that would be relevant to a wide range of socio-economic, technological and political concerns.

The development of skills and competence to manage Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and leverage its influence will need increasing focus, in particular, among the developing countries. At the same time, an understanding of the role of IPR in the process of innovation and the role of innovation itself in the process of development is crucial. Innovations go beyond the formal systems of innovation done in universities and industrial research and development laboratories. For proper development to occur, innovations from below have to be taken into account and appropriate support at national level accorded (Mashelkar, 2002).

By innovation from below is meant taking into account the full participation of all producers of knowledge including in informal settings of rural areas. Indeed many societies in the developing world have nurtured and refined systems of knowledge of their own, relating to such diverse domains as geology, ecology, botany, agriculture, physiology and health. Within this, the emergence of terms such as ‘parallel’, ‘indigenous’ and ‘civilizational’ knowledge systems are also expressions of other approaches to the acquisition and production of knowledge. Indigenous knowledge and innovation systems must therefore be sustained through active support to the communities who are keepers of this knowledge, custodians of their ways of life, their languages; their social organization and the environments in which they live.

Bio-diversity Erosion, Sustainable Ethics, and Livelihood

While innovations promise to be a key factor in promoting equitable and sustainable development, it is recognized that there is a gross asymmetry in the rights and responsibility of those who produce Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in local communities and those who go about valorising it in the formal sector. This brings to light the issue of the ethics of extraction and responsibility (Gupta, 1999). Experiences with development efforts during the decades since many countries in Africa and the Third World attained their independence show that development that is not embedded, and development that does not build on what people have, is bound to fail. At the same time, other experiences are emerging which demonstrate that Research and Development (R&D) activities can be undertaken directly with local communities and custodians of IK provided that adequate protective protocols, terms and conditions are worked out and agreed upon.

From the perspective of bio-diversity, it has become clear that a major threat to the sustainability of natural resources is the erosion of people’s knowledge, and the basic reason for this erosion is the low value attached to it. Indigenous veterinary experts, human herbalists and pastoralists know a lot about the habitats, life cycle, various aspects of plants and other resources. In this context, it is important to understand the fact that biodiversity erosion starts a chain reaction. The disappearance of one species is related to the extinction of innumerable other species with which it is interrelated through food webs. The crisis of biodiversity is therefore not just a crisis of the disappearance of the species which serve as industrial raw materials with potentialities for spinning millions of dollars for corporate enterprises. It is, more basically, a crisis that threatens the life-support systems and livelihoods of millions of people in developing countries. Yet efforts to build upon knowledge systems of people who have maintained their natural resources so far are quite inadequate (Shiva, 1997).

The issue of value addition to innovations going on in local communities is key to authentic development. In the area of bio-diversity, value addition will help local
communities co-exist with bio-diversity resources by reducing primary extraction and generating long term benefits. There is also a need to connect creative people engaged in generating local solutions which are authentic and accountable, thus facilitating people-to-people learning. The discussion on bio-diversity can only become authentic if we probe deep enough into knowledge traditions of each part of the world to discover the roots of the sustainable ethics. But this discovery requires preparing our minds for visions which may collide with the dominant materialistic world view. Local communities are ‘knowledge-rich, but economically poor’. The search is therefore for a middle way in the development of the linkage between IK Systems and the formal processes, including the development of clear strategies that aim at the development of IKS specifically.

The Budapest Science Agenda

The Agenda for Science in the Twenty First Century recognizes that science has become a powerful intellectual institution with a far reaching and profound influence on our daily lives, our relationship with the environment, our system of values, and our world view. However, notwithstanding its prominence in mainstream society, science remains but one knowledge system among many. Other knowledge systems, embedded in a panoply of cultures and sustaining a broad spectrum of ways of life, constitute a rich and diverse intellectual heritage that has began to attract increasing attention world wide (Nakashima, 2000).

Whatever name is applied, the fact remains that knowledge systems such as IKS have guided, and continue to guide human societies across the globe in their innumerable transactions with the natural world: agriculture and husbandry, struggle against disease and injury, hunting, gathering, naming and explanation of natural phenomena, maintenance of equilibrium between society and milieu, adaptation to environmental change etc. They represent the dynamic products of an extended history of fine-grained interplay between distinct cultures and specific local environments. This explains their diverse structures and content, their complexity, versatility and pragmatism, and their distinct internal logic anchored in specific world views (Nakashima, 2000, p. 432).

When confronted with IKS, the first response from scientists is usually to go prospecting. Traditional knowledge is taken as information useful to science in a one-way trajectory. However, grave concerns have arisen, and continue to arise with greater intensity and force, about the misappropriation of traditional intellectual property, often for economic profit and with total disregard for equitable sharing of benefits with local knowledge holders. In this way, the blind excursion of science and the imposition of science-centred approaches as the sole criteria for developing IKS pose more problems to indigenous knowledge. IKS possess a cultural logic of their own.

When screened on the sole basis of science, knowledge judged useful is selected and the remains are discarded as ‘superstition and belief’. Such a process dismembers, debases, and destabilizes knowledge systems, jeopardizing their continued existence. By ‘mining’ these systems for short term intellectual gain, we undermine their very social and cultural foundations and menace the traditional societies that have sustained them.

This view was affirmed during the UNESCO World Conference on Science for the Twenty First Century that took place in Budapest in 1999. This milestone conference established what efforts should be invested to make science advance in response to both social expectations, and the challenges posed by human and social development.
Among other things, it reiterated the commitment to the scientific endeavour, especially to finding solutions to problems at the interface between science and society. It also made recommendations as to capacity building in science, and the use of science for sustainable development. Pertinent to IKS, however, are the pronouncements contained in Section 3 of the Science Agenda: Framework for Action entitled “Science in Society and Science for Society”.

The Declaration on Science for the Twenty First century therefore emphasizes, among other things, that all cultures can contribute scientific knowledge of universal value, and therefore that there is a need for a vigorous and informed democratic debate on the production and use of scientific knowledge. It states that the scientific community is expected to open itself to a permanent dialogue with society, especially a dialogue with other forms of knowledge. Modern science does not constitute the only form of knowledge, and closer links needs to be established between this, and other forms, systems, and approaches to knowledge for their mutual enrichment and benefit. A constructive inter-cultural debate is in order, to help find ways of better linking modern science to the broader heritage of humankind (UNESCO, 2000, p. 21).

Science must therefore become a shared asset benefiting all people. Scientific research and its applications can yield significant returns towards economic growth and sustainable development including poverty alleviation. However, scientists have a special responsibility to seek to avert applications of science which are ethically wrong or have an adverse impact, thus the need to practice and apply the sciences in such a manner that is inclusive of, among other things, the participation of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. It is also essential that the fundamental role played by women in the application of scientific development to food production and health care be fully recognized and efforts made to strengthen their understanding of scientific advances in these areas.

Institutional Level Challenges

In taking on this issue, I make the assumption that one of the key challenges for universities is to handle change and transformation intellectually, develop frameworks for rethinking plurality, and adjust their paradigmatic narratives to contextual realities. Universities are also centres or part of a powerful system of ‘discourse coalitions’, armed with disciplines which control crucial resources that can delimit or make possible the generation of new visions of society.

I also believe that there are ethical imperatives we need to take into account as senior professionals in the academy.

Firstly, responsible research requires us to identify practices that give research a ‘bad name’ (e.g. the vampirish quality of research conduct towards marginalized groups, denigrative undertones when researching local communities, unethical/unscientific attitude to the usurpation of knowledge derived from communities). Secondly, taking “communicative action” as essential in a situation in which plurality of viewpoints exist; there is a need to continually challenge our theoretical habits of thought and combine a recognition of the existence of multiple perspectives in society with a rational understanding of social phenomena. Thirdly, first you are human, then a scientist. This means that we develop a deep recognition that we are part of the problem and thus part of the solution. Fourthly, we have to develop person (rather than structure) centered-ness, recognition of history (histories), of values (technocracy is a flower that blossoms in periods of political conservatism), and promote cultural and epistemic tolerance. Fifthly, we have to commit to challenge students to identify their coordinates
as the starting point for creative work. In this way they can own the process and outcome of their work and defend it in any fora (Odora Hoppers, 2001).

We now have enormous reservoirs of intellectual, conceptual and networking resources that have been developed and which we can put to the service of this and succeeding generations. We are aware of new methods, multiple levels of approaches for dealing with conflicts, including psychological research on forgiveness as well as the tensions that underlie the dual goals of revenge and redress. From these assumptions, I make the following demands on institutions (Hoppers, 2002).

**The University and the African Society: The Search for Fraternal Co-existence**

Latouche (1991) has argued that critical scholars and practitioners should let the indisputable real impasse of non-development become a motivation for questioning the rationality of the continued adherence to the ideal itself. Behind this search for new ways lies the imperative for us to rethink our connection of those forms of knowledge which have been subjugated, and their carriers whose development paths have been circumscribed by the gate-keeping functions of Eurocentric development paradigms.

He thus posits that behind this valorization of the informal, and the choice to see it as the heralding of social forms is an ethical stance, which is anchored in the possibility of an authentic dialogue between cultures that could also become the guarantor of an authentic co-existence of different cultures. This may imply that certain cultures renounce their barbarity in order to have the other renounce its own. In the meantime, the hope is to propagate willingness to tolerate contradiction, and to act generously in situations of unresolved antagonisms.

Thus if over the past 200 years the west has taken a monopoly over the very definition of the problems of existence of all societies in the world, then the crucial challenge for those in the west wishing to afford genuine respect to those “other” than themselves would be to relinquish this monopoly, and listen more openly to the discordant messages of silenced populations. The search for reciprocity - of a ‘space of fraternal co-existence’- is itself an ethical choice which carries some real implications. It implies affirming the richness of the other, even in their material poverty. It implies affirming that this is not a matter of quantity but quality of life, and that all helping is reciprocal, just as learning must be reciprocal. This respect for the other implies acceptance of dissension, of loss and of death which is translated into a life for the ‘other’ (Latouche, 1991, p. 15-17).

From this point of view, the absence of bi-cultural experts at the epistemological level has made it next to impossible to break the cycle of hierarchizations of knowledge endemic in the structures of the university, the prejudice of science, and the pitfalls of modernization in general. It has made it difficult to create a systems level dialogue, identify and articulate systems difficulties, systems limitations, and new possibilities building on combined strategies anchored in multiple knowledge systems. In short, it has made it almost impossible to contemplate indigenous knowledge systems without strapping it to the “procrustean bed” (Visvanathan, 2000, p. 3604) of western knowledge systems. An experiment in cognitive justice can turn this hierarchy into a circle. The search becomes not just one for equality, but for a method of dialogue. Only with a method for exploring difference and providing for reciprocity and empathy is fraternity at the cognitive level born. It is not just respect for the knowledge system. It is understanding of the life forms, a livelihood and a way of life.
It is fraternity at the epistemological and ontological level that the university needs and it is in this search for cognitive justice as a fraternal act that the future university lies. In other words, fraternity cannot be reduced to community level hosted programmes or summer visits. Local knowledges, tribal knowledges, civilizational knowledges, dying knowledges all need a site, a theatre of encounter which is not patronizing, not preservationist, not fundamentalist, but open and playful. Without this mix of theory and vision, the communities of knowledge one is searching for might be stillborn. The university must encompass not merely dissent and diversity, but also the question of violence relating to the other beyond the fence, or border. In short, Visvanathan sketches out the following:

i. The university must provide the heuristics, the methodological discipline, the non-dominative non fundamentalist space that this reform strategy needs.

ii. It needs to combine the ethical and the political, a theory of the other as a thought experiment, and as a form of life.

iii. Universities must develop theories of development that do not end in the disaster of serial displacements that we have seen over the past four decades.

iv. Universities must remain an enabling environment in which the ‘other’ still needs to articulate its conceptions of an alternative world and its vision of the university in it.

v. The university needs to develop a theory of the ‘West’ within the ambit of an alternative vision of the world (Visvanathan, 2000, p. 3606).

Towards Epistemic Reflexivity - The Researcher as a Cultural Producer

Further articulating the problematic of research, researcher and structures, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) advocate the inclusion of a theory of intellectual practice in any critical analysis. Epistemic reflexivity therefore refers to the role of intellectuals and of the sociologist as a cultural producer. This notion of the ‘return of science upon itself’ implies for the researcher/analyst, both self-reference and self-awareness of the double role the researcher carries at all times: that of being a member of society, and of being the analyst of society and to problematize those processes. The approach refers to reflexivity in terms of a combination of three referents: agency, science and society (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

This links quite appropriately with the humanist framework espoused by Steve Biko who stressed the role and responsibility of intellectuals in political and social movements (Halisi, 1991). Biko constantly referred to prefigurative approaches to politics and asserted that politics had an undeniably psychological dimension. He also strongly believed in the unique capacity of humankind to make and re-make its own conscious life. Quoting Karl Jaspers on the concept of metaphysical guilt, Biko stated that there exists among men (read: ‘human beings’), because they are men, a solidarity through which each shares responsibility for every injustice and every wrong committed in the world, and especially for crimes that are committed in his presence or of which he cannot be ignorant. If I cannot do whatever I can to prevent them, I am an accomplice in them.

If I have not risked my life in order to prevent the murder of other men, if I have stood silent, I feel guilty in a sense that cannot, in any adequate fashion, be understood juridically or politically or morally (Woods, 1978, p. 136). Ultimately, he said, no human being of conscience can remain neutral in a moral crisis of conscience, nor are there national boundaries when the welfare of the family of humanity is grossly assaulted, for, somewhere in the heart of human relations, an absolute command imposes itself:
in the case of criminal attack or living conditions that threaten physical being, accept life for all altogether or not at all (Woods, 1978, p. 136).

As we struggle with the way forward, let me invoke the late Archie Mafeje’s message to social science, in which he asserts that normative social science has to rebound and be prepared to confront and objectify social and moral issues such as poverty, racism and globalization implicit in the concept of “social development”. This concept refers to the development of human capital i.e. increased human awareness and capacity to improve the human condition. The role of the critical intellect is precisely to make this human condition apparent and to reveal denied or unrecognised social opportunities (Mafeje, 1993). For the reestablishment of indigenous philosophical knowledge and a basis for resisting past and further imposition, it is absolutely necessary to interrogate all forms of received knowledge, and social science should serve as the consciousness of society and as a reflection of its reality, no matter how ugly (Mafeje, 1993, p. 7).

Knowledge Production, Social Justice and Renegotiation of Agency: Some Pathways to the Future

Social justice is seen as that ideal condition in which all members of a society have the same basic rights, security, opportunities, obligations and social benefits. It is based on the idea of a society which gives individuals and groups fair treatment and a just share of the benefits of society. But when it comes to deciding what is “fair treatment” and what is a "just share", alas! it has been found that social justice has still been largely defined by whatever the strong decided. Social justice is therefore both a philosophical problem and an important issue in politics.

The recognition of what diversity poses compels us to propose that the true challenge before us is understanding the political significance of diversity (Hiley, 2006) – or, as Seyla Benhabib states, it is the challenge to democracy of difference (Benhabib, 1996). It is here that insights from post-colonial theorists that cultural difference is an important heuristic that has the capability to gradually corrode the grand narratives of evolution, utilitarianism and evangelism as technologies of colonial and imperialist governance become inescapable.

According to Homi Bhabha (1995), history is now taking place on the outer limits of the subject/object, giving rise to new moments of defiance that rips through the sly civility of those grand narratives, exposing their violence. Subaltern agency emerges as a process of reversing, displacing and seizing the apparatus of value coding which had been monopolized by the colonial default drive. Bhabha argues it is the contestation of the “given” symbols of authority that shifts the terrain of antagonism. This he states is the moment of renegotiation of agency.

It is the voice of an interrogative, calculative agency, the moment when we lose resemblance with the colonizer, the moment of (in Toni Morrison’s words) “rememoration” that turns the narrative of enunciation into a haunting memorial of what has been excluded, excised, evicted (Bhabha, 1995).

What is unfolding out there is a growing demand that scholarship should not be content with documenting the histories of resistance of the colonized to colonialism. Scholarship should turn those accounts into theoretical events that not only make those struggles relevant for their moment in time, but also relevant for other moments in times to come. The “people without history” then not only get back their central place in history, finally away from the dingy “ethnography corner” to which colonial discourse
would want them to remain cast for eternity, but also become full agents and makers of history current and future.

In this way, the light that began by being cast on colonialism and the legacy of domination and abuse is changed to vigilant analysis of its failures, silences, and a systematic spotting of transformative nodes that were not recognizable before, but which are now released into public spaces. The casting of light at last onto subjugated peoples, knowledges, histories, ways of living unsettles the toxic pond and transforms passive analysis into a generative force that valorises and recreates life for those previously museumised (Odora Hoppers, 2008b; Prakash, 1995). In Prakash’s words, it “throws open for realignment the conflictual, discrepant and even violent processes that formed the precipitous basis of colonialism” (Prakash, 1995, p. 6).

It is a process of engaging with colonialism in a manner that produces a program for its dislocation (Prakash, 1995, p. 6). This dislocation is made possible not only by permitting subalterns direct space for engaging with the structures and manifestations of colonialism, but also by inserting into the discourse arena totally different, meanings and registers from other traditions.

It is here that subaltern and heterogeneous forms of knowledge such as indigenous knowledge systems and related forms of agency that had no place in the fields of knowledge that grew in compact with colonialism and science at last have a place. And by their stirring presence, they become revolutionary heuristics in a post colonial transformation agenda. Of significance here then, is how the victims of unjust and dehumanizing systems go about exercising their power. The immediate task according to Rahnema (1997) is that of deciphering the hidden transcript of the subordinate group’s resistance.

It is here that cognitive justice i.e. the right of different forms of knowledge to survive – and survive creatively and sustainably - emerge as the most important criteria of fraternity of knowledge. An experiment in cognitive justice, therefore, can turn this hierarchy into a circle. The search becomes not just one for equality, but for a method of dialogue. Fraternity at the cognitive level is born only with a method for exploring difference, and providing for reciprocity and empathy. But it is not just respect for the knowledge system. It is an understanding of the life forms, a livelihood and a way of life. It is fraternity at the epistemological and ontological level that the university needs, and it is in this search for cognitive justice as a fraternal act that the future university lies (Visvanathan, 2000).

**Conclusion: Reconstituting the “Knowledge Economy” and the “Information Society”**

Taking a step back, perhaps a more accurate way to understand the idea of knowledge societies is that since ancient times, every society has been, in its own way, a knowledge society. Today, as in the past, the control of knowledge goes hand in hand with serious inequality, exclusion, and social conflict. Knowledge was always the domain of tight circles of wise men and the initiated few. Secrecy was the organizing principle behind these exclusive knowledge societies.

Over time, beginning with the Enlightenment and the development of print media leading to the proliferation of books and other forms of written material, right through to the present explosion of information circuits through the internet, one can say that the trend is towards the opening up of the knowledge reservoirs.
However, we need to be conscious of the fact that while information is in many cases a commodity, knowledge belongs to any reasonable mind. Access to information is not necessarily the source of additional knowledge. This is even more so where the tools used to ‘process’ that information are not up to the task. Thus, as long as gross inequality exists in terms of access to the codes for processing information – i.e. education—in order to master existing information with critical judgement and thinking, and to analyse, sort, and incorporate the items considered most interesting in a knowledge base, information will always remain a mass of indistinct data.

The challenge in a knowledge society is therefore not a quantitative but a qualitative one. The qualitative dimensions can be outlined as follows:

a. This means that citizens must be capable of navigating easily between the mass of information that threatens to overwhelm us, and develop cognitive and critical thinking skills to distinguish between ‘useless’ and ‘useful’ information.

b. Another competence that is essential is the recognition that not all knowledges use the same information strategies and not all useful knowledge must necessarily be those that can be turned into profit.

c. Knowledge production also needs to be seen in the long run. The quality of knowledge depends in some instances on the nature of the cumulative information loop between innovation and the uses of that information (UNESCO, 2005).

d. Every society has its own knowledge assets. It is therefore necessary to work towards connecting the various traditions and forms of knowledge that societies already possess. It is impossible to separate the issue of content from that of languages and different forms of knowledge. The increasing importance of cultural and linguistic diversity thus underscores the extent to which problems of access to knowledge are directly linked with the production of knowledge.

e. What is at stake is that we must make space for local or indigenous forms of knowledge within the idea of knowledge societies whose development models highly value the codification forms specific to scientific knowledge.

f. Fostering diversity also means nurturing the creativity of emerging societies. Such a prospect fulfils not only an abstract ethical imperative, but aims at raising in each society an awareness of the wealth of the forms of knowledge and capacities it possesses, in order to increase their value and take advantage of what they have to offer.

In such a situation, each society will acknowledge the capacity of the young and the old to generate knowledge of different kinds. Once this is done, each society will be better armed and in a better position to cope with the ever increasing pace of change that characterizes today’s world (UNESCO, 2005).

A recent review of the impact and utilization of ICTs worldwide shows that the problem is not simply that there is a lag in the diffusion of these technologies or in accessing the new technologies and services. There are substantial problems in embeddings and integrating these capabilities into new policy measures and strategies. Another problem also lies upstream, i.e. in acknowledging that knowledge primarily rests in people rather than in ICTs, databases or services. For Africa and other developing countries therefore, the challenge has to be that of how to build on local knowledge that exists in its people as a concomitant to working with global knowledge and information.

If we begin to rethink some of the fundamentals: i.e. that all humans are born with an innate and unique capacity - the capacity to think, learn and relate - and that this is the basic ingredient to the creation of knowledge, then the creation of knowledge societies
has to start with the incubation of knowledge in human minds - a process dependent both on the individual and the external environment.

Developing countries need to recognize and value the human resource capital in all its citizens and capitalize on it in order to identify the forms of knowledge which work for the poor and promote social equality. The wealth of knowledge in turn will create opportunities for developing countries to emerge from dependence of low-cost labour as a source of comparative advantage, increasing productivity and incomes (UNESCO, 2005).

Avenues therefore need to be created for knowledge incubation to be supplemented by capacity-building support and enabling policy frameworks which provide opportunities for people to use the power of their local knowledge in conjunction with acquired knowledge for propelling their growth (Odora Hoppers, 2006).

According to the recently concluded series of studies commissioned by UNESCO, “knowledge societies” are not to be confused with “information societies”. Knowledge societies contribute to the well-being of individuals and communities, and encompass social, ethical and political dimensions. Information societies, on the other hand, are based on technological breakthroughs that risk providing little more than “a mass of indistinct data” for those who don’t have the skills to benefit from it (UNESCO, 2005).

A knowledge society with “equity” is one where all forms of knowledge are recognised and valued, especially where they originate, and also benefit that society. It is a dynamic process between the people who access information and knowledge, and the ways in which this finds its way to the probable users (Odora Hoppers, 2006).

References


