

UBUNTU/HUNHU¹ IN POST-COLONIAL EDUCATION POLICIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: A RESPONSE TO CONNELL'S SOUTHERN THEORY AND THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS AFRICAN KNOWLEDGES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT In chapter 5 of her book *Southern Theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science* Connell (2007) demonstrates how African indigenous knowledge can be a useful component of 'Southern Theory', an alternative to Northern Theory, in understanding social life. In addition to the cases that Connell cites, a number of African states in their post-colonial era have attempted to incorporate indigenous knowledge(s) from their societies as part of educational policy reforms to counter what has been regarded as colonial pro-western ideologies. In Southern African states 'Ubuntu/hunhu' (literally meaning 'being human') became a central philosophy for education in society. This paper traces this notion of Ubuntu/hunhu as it has appeared in Zimbabwean curriculum reform from the time of political independence in 1980 when the notion was invoked to strengthen the country's new socialist ideology. In so doing, it takes a self-reflective approach to the discussion of Ubuntu/hunhu. As an indigenous person of Zimbabwe who went through the education systems both during and after the colonial period, this topic is of considerable personal significance to me. Discussing the topic based on my experience invalidates the usually scholarly discussion where the researcher aims for emotional 'detachment'. Ubuntu/hunhu is a philosophy that shaped who I was as a child in Zimbabwe and continues to underpin how I see myself in Australia, the country of my current residence. Weaving my personal

¹ **Ubuntu** is a Zulu and Ndebele native language word while **hunhu** is my native Shona language word. They both mean the same thing. If you travelled to South Africa and the Ndebele region of Zimbabwe you would use **Ubuntu**; in the Shona region of Zimbabwe where I come from you would use **hunhu**.

narratives of village socialisation and formal western schooling throughout the discussion, I explore the following questions: How successful have post-colonial governments been in implementing aspects of Southern Theory; and can we do without Northern Theory, especially in this age of globalisation?

KEYWORDS Ubuntu/hunhu, indigenous knowledge, post-colonial, Atlantic North, socialism, globalisation

Introduction

Raewyn Connell's (2007) *Southern Theory* calls upon us to seek knowledge produced outside the Northern metropolis as an important intellectual resource. Her call challenges the 'business as usual' in social science where the South serves as a 'dare mine' for theoretical development and refinement which take place primarily in the Northern metropolis. Positioning '*Southern Theory*' as an alternative to '*Northern Theory*' (see also Hickling-Hudson in Coloma 2009, p.365 – 375), Connell identifies four sources of *Southern Theory*: 1) Indigenous knowledge, 2) Alternative universalism, 3) Anti-colonial knowledge and 4) Southern critical engagement with Northern Theory (see Introduction to this Special Issue).

This paper explores the notion of *Ubuntu/hunhu* as a case of Indigenous knowledge, that is, 'the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings' (UNESCO 2015; see Introduction); important for indigenous people in decision-making processes and interactions in their day-to-day lives. Indeed, in Southern Africa post-colonial governments have attempted to reform education policies with a view towards including African indigenous knowledges or philosophies considered relevant to their societies in contrast to colonial policies viewed as hegemonic and oppressive. For example, as transitional markers of change, Tanzania promoted *Ujamaa* (self-reliance) or African socialism (Ibhawoh & Dibua, 2003); Zambia had humanism (Oliver, 1981) and Zimbabwe promoted scientific socialism (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). However, arguably some of these are still regarded as foreign ideological labels not sufficiently indigenous to these societies. In addition, these and other post-colonial governments in the region (South Africa and Mozambique, for example) attempted, in one way or other, to model social

reforms on the basis of the philosophy of *Ubuntu/hunhu*, an African Bantu philosophy regarded as being capable of meeting both the individual's and community needs locally and beyond.

Ubuntu/hunhu philosophy has long been discussed among academics and other writers in the Southern African region. Some writers on post-colonial policy reforms in Southern Africa, for example Hapanyengwi & Makuvaza (2014); Mungwini (2013); van Binsbergen (2002); and Pearce (1990), believe that *Ubuntu/hunhu* is one of the most relevant philosophies for African societies in general and that this should be central in post-colonial policy reforms in education. Drawing on and extending such African literature further, this paper recognises *Ubuntu/hunhu* as a rich intellectual resource not just for African societies but with possible global relevance. In so doing, it aims to challenge the knowledge hierarchy that Connell (2007) and Syed Al-Alatas (2010) problematise; in many colonised states colonial powers and academics have considered indigenous knowledge inferior and irrelevant to western knowledge production.

To someone who has grown up with the philosophy of *Ubuntu/hunhu* in my childhood and much of my adult socialisation in Zimbabwe, this topic is very close to my heart. For me, a discussion of this Southern African philosophy cannot be pursued without invoking memories of the times when I was a child and a teacher in a village where *Ubuntu/hunhu* permeated my personal and professional life. Hence, I have chosen to take a self-reflexive approach to the subsequent discussion and analysis. I will weave my recollections before, during and beyond my days of Western schooling into the subsequent discussion and analysis of *Ubuntu/hunhu* in Zimbabwe. Standing back and reflecting now from this distance in time and place would enable me to critically examine some experiences I rarely questioned because I was then immersed in the situation (Denscombe, 2002, p.170). Reflexivity is a process that allows me to "look beneath the surface of events, analyse, evaluate, inform and draw conclusions" (Reid, 1993, p.305).

My discussion makes a series of moves briefly outlined here. Firstly, I will start with the discussion of my personal experiences in Zimbabwe where *Ubuntu/hunhu* was deeply ingrained in my village life. Through this personal account,

coupled with scholarly literature, I will develop the conception of *Ubuntu/hunhu*, or what it means to be 'human or being human', from an African indigenous point of view. Then I will move on to review the debate about Indigenous knowledge within which my subsequent articulation of *Ubuntu/hunhu* as a Southern African indigenous philosophy will be situated. These preliminary discussions serve to contextualise the subsequent analysis of the attempts by the post-colonial Zimbabwe government at incorporating *Ubuntu/hunhu* in education reforms. Based on suggestions from various writers, and in spite of the apparent policy failures and inherent limitations of *Ubuntu/hunhu*, I will still call for the need to incorporate important implications of *Ubuntu/hunhu* in the education system of Zimbabwe. In the last two sections, I will reflect upon the position of *Ubuntu/hunhu* in a globalised knowledge society, while debating whether or not *Ubuntu/hunhu* can offer educational promises beyond its indigenous context of Southern Africa.

Before proceeding however, it is important to recognise the kind of politics of knowledge that my discussion participates in, the contradictory politics of knowledge associated with doing Southern Theory. Here, George Sefa Dei's (2011) view on African knowledge is pertinent: "Africa is a community of difference consisting of diverse cultures, traditions, religions and languages" (p.2). Dei cautions us about the danger of generalisations when talking about African indigenous knowledge. Indeed, the identification of a particular indigenous concept out of many as 'the' African indigenous philosophy can become a hegemonic project. *Ubuntu/hunhu* can be appropriated to erase the internal struggles within, or to reinforce the existing unequal power relations based on gender, 'race' and language within the region or in a given African country.

It could be appropriated to erase the existence of multiple, and often contested, intellectual traditions and worldviews, including those developed by the marginalized groups. While being reflexive of this homogenizing tendency of a pan-African philosophy, my intent in this paper is to save the notion of *Ubuntu/hunhu* from its highly politicized history of appropriation and reclaim it for explicit educational and political ends. I argue that it is a concept that can serve pedagogic purposes for the Global North (Atlantic North),

while at the same time helping to achieve justifiable social ends in Southern Africa and beyond.

The term 'post-colonial' comes up several times in this discussion. Subedi & Daza (2008) have noted the many interpretations sometimes associated with this term. They add, "...the term post-colonial...has generated much misunderstanding and confusion...it is a contested term associated with premature end of colonialism, a salutary reminder of the persistent neo-colonial relations" (p.1) (see also Rizvi in Coloma, 2009; Lavia & Mahlomaholo, 2012). While acknowledging this wider debate over the term, in this discussion I will use post-colonial purely in its historical sense as a geo-political concept describing countries that did away with colonialism to move to an 'after' (post) colonial position.

My experiences and conception of *Ubuntu/hunhu*

Ubuntu/hunhu in Rhodesia: A brief socio-economic and political background

Zimbabwe, formerly Rhodesia where I was born, grew up and attended school, was a British colony from 1896 until independence in 1980, with a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) break from 1965 to 1979 when Britain refused to recognize white minority rule in the country. It is during this UDI period that the country's land was divided into Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs) or Native Reserves for indigenous Africans on one hand, and European areas for settlers on the other. The former, where indigenous people were crowded, were agriculturally unproductive because of arid soils and an inhospitable climate compared to the latter.

This information is important for the discussion of *Ubuntu/hunhu* because these conditions tended to reinforce a sense of unity among indigenous people of different tribes; a unity resulting from a shared social, cultural and physical togetherness in an environment of racial and socio-economic discrimination. Even at the peak of the independence struggle when villagers were forced into barbed wire fenced "protected villages" (Moorcraft & McLaughlin, 2008) indigenous Africans continued to worry about *Ubuntu/hunhu* for their children and taught each other, the old and young, what it meant to be 'human' (*Ubuntu/hunhu*) within and beyond their communities. This is perhaps why Kay (1970) had this to say:

...by comparison with western society members of the African society are closely bound into a network of groups by bonds of kinship, by affinal relationships and membership of clan or tribe. Membership of such groups confers privileges and security but it also involves obligations and responsibilities (p.82).

Part of these responsibilities and obligations was the need to teach *Ubuntu/hunhu* to young people like me by any adult member of the community. This is the environment in which I was born, grew up and attended school.

A young boy's experiences of ubuntu/hunhu at home and village community

The teaching and learning about *Ubuntu/hunhu* was part and parcel of my everyday life both in the village and at school, a primary mission/church school a 'walking' distance of some kilometres away from home. As Kay (1970) notes, being born in the village means that you are a child of the village community, you are related to every member of the group. Besides your family, village members are responsible for your up-bringing in terms of who you become, the human qualities expected of you by society beyond your family and local community. *Ubuntu/hunhu* is about "who you are because you belong to a community": "It describes the significance of group solidarity...It is a concept of brotherhood (*and sisterhood*) and collective unity for survival. A man (*or woman*) can only be a man (*or woman*) through others....ubuntu stands for personhood and morality" (Mbigi & Maree, 1997: pp.1-2, *italics: my addition*).

In the village there was no policy document on *Ubuntu/hunhu*. It was and is still a lived experience that is informally passed on from one generation to the next. So, as young people, we used to be taught 'how to behave and be responsible' towards family members, community members, friends and strangers - even those who did not belong to your 'racial' group. In fact, I distinctly remember some white settler farmers close to our village who had made efforts to practice rudiments of indigenous culture and who were addressed by indigenous totems by their 'surnames' - a sign of respect in accordance with *Ubuntu/hunhu* tradition. Everyone is your relative: brother, sister, mother, father, uncle, etc. All these also had a responsibility to discipline you if you misbehaved. It is a shared responsibility bringing up children. We had a

responsibility towards those who were younger than us; to bring them up as expected by the community. We also looked up to those older than us to guide us in all that we did (they were our 'brothers and sisters'). If you were described, in my dialect, as "*mwana asina hunhu*" that meant you were a child who lacked *Ubuntu/hunhu* qualities. You were a disgrace to your family, community and nation (*nyika*). That would also be important in determining your future social relations, for instance in marital matters, as people would be keen to know your status in terms of *hunhu/Ubuntu*. Mbigi and Maree (1997) correctly note that the solidarity spirit of *Ubuntu/hunhu* helps forge new individual and group alliances transcending parochial ethnic cleavages that often characterize societies where people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds live together. This is the way I grew up and how I conceptualise *Ubuntu/hunhu*.

Indigenous knowledge(s): African Bantu *Ubuntu/hunhu* philosophy

Concepts of Indigenous knowledge(s)

George Sefa Dei (2002) defines indigenous knowledge(s) as encapsulating the common-good-sense ideas and cultural knowledge of local peoples concerning everyday realities of living. This is relevant to my experiences described above. These knowledges or ideas are part of the local cultural heritage and histories, referring to the cultural traditions, values, belief systems and worldviews that, in any indigenous society, are imparted to the younger generation by community elders. Dei points out that such knowledge constitutes an indigenous informed epistemology. It is a worldview that shapes the community's relationships with surrounding environments, a product of the direct experience of nature and its relationship with the social world. Indigenous knowledge constitutes not only the social aspect of the lives of indigenous people, but also what they know about their physical environment and how these two (social and physical) interact for the benefit of both. Illustrating this is my experience as a young boy with my friends, in which we were always reminded of the need to be respectful of some areas within and around the village during hunting, fishing and child games. Indigenous knowledge is crucial for the survival of society; it is

knowledge that is based on cognitive understandings and interpretations of the social, physical and spiritual worlds. It includes concepts, beliefs, perceptions and experiences of local peoples and their natural and human-built environments. As pointed out above, it is important to note that *Ubuntu/hunhu* is not just about the social world but also about the relationships that develop between the social and natural worlds. It is knowledge of processes and relationships between these two worlds – the natural and social.

However, Roberts (1998) provides a slightly different view of who the owners of indigenous knowledge can be. For instance, he sees the term ‘indigenous’ as referring to knowledge resulting from long-term residence in a particular place; knowledge “...accumulated by a group of people, not necessarily indigenous, who, by centuries of unbroken residence, develop an in-depth understanding of their particular place in their particular world” (Roberts, 1998, p.59). This means, depending on how long they have resided at a particular location, people may, in the end, develop a deep knowledge of that particular place, how to relate with the physical world around them; a knowledge and relationship that is specific to them and to their environment. In the case of my country, Zimbabwe, this would imply that colonial settlers who have had generations there since 1896 can also claim *Ubuntu/hunhu* as their ‘traditional/indigenous’ knowledge.

With reference to Aboriginal indigenous knowledge in the context of Australia, Castellano (1999) identifies three broad aspects of knowledge relevant to the discourse of all indigenous knowledges: ‘traditional knowledge’, which is what he says is inter-generational knowledge and is passed on by community elders to younger generations; ‘empirical knowledge’, which is based on careful observations of the surrounding environments (nature, culture and society); and ‘revealed knowledge’ which is provided through dreams, visions and intuition (the spiritual world). Dei (2002) lists a number of what he calls characteristics of indigenous knowledge(s): they are personal/personalized, meaning there are no claims to universality; trust in knowledge is tied to integrity and the perceptiveness of the ‘speaker’; orally transmitted (for example, as is Australian Aboriginal spirituality); and their sharing is directly related to

considerations of the responsibility in the use of received knowledge.

According to Dei (2002), indigenous knowledge(s) are experientially based, that is, they depend on subjective experiences and the inner workings of the self to generate social interpretations, meanings and explanations. They are holistic and relational, meaning that such knowledge(s) relate the physical to the metaphysical realms of life. They connect economic, cultural, political, spiritual, ecological and material forces and conditions. Indigenous epistemologies are grounded in an awareness and deep appreciation of the cosmos and how the self/selves, spiritual, (known and unknown) worlds are interconnected. The dimension of spirituality in indigenous knowledges provides the strength and power in physical communication. Indigenous knowledge(s) are expressive and narrative and are metaphorical in the use of proverbs, fables and tales. Indigenous people view communalism as a mode of thought, emphasizing the sense of belongingness with a people and the land they share. It is grounded in a people and a place. It is this last bit of Dei's details about indigenous knowledge that I find most appropriate to the discussion of *Ubuntu/hunhu* as indigenous knowledge.

To what extent can *Ubuntu/hunhu* be regarded as indigenous knowledge?

van Bisbergen (2002) notes that *Ubuntu/hunhu* has become a key concept evoking the unadulterated forms of African social life before the European conquest.

...Africa, which the force of Atlantic North (*Western ideas/Global North: my addition*) hegemony has for centuries relegated to the periphery of global social, economic, and cultural life, proudly and defiantly declares that it possesses the spiritual resources needed to solve its own problems even though the latter were caused by outside influences — and recommends the same spiritual resources as remedy for the ills of the wider world beyond Africa (p.5).

Ubuntu/hunhu as indigenous knowledge is that philosophy which creates a moral community, admission to which is not necessarily limited by biological ancestry, nationality, or actual place of residence. This links with my reference to settlers in my country Zimbabwe and appears to support Roberts (1998) views above in that participation in

this moral community is not viewed as a matter of birthright in the narrower, parochial sense. If birthright comes in at all, it is the birthright of any member of the human species with the right to express concern about conditions under which her or his fellow-humans must live, and to act on that basis. This moral community consists of people (not just Africans) sharing a concern for the present and future of a particular local or regional society, seeking to add to the latter's resources, redressing its ills, and searching its conceptual and spiritual repertoire for inspiration, blueprints, models, encouragement in the process (van Bisbergen, 2002, p.6).

Several other writers have expressed similar views about *Ubuntu/hunhu* (see, for instance, Hapanyengwi & Makuvaza, 2014; Mungwini, 2013; Ramose, 2003; Pearce, 1990; Mudzamba, 1982). Generally, *Ubuntu/hunhu* means that:

A person is a person through other persons (Shutte, 1993, p.46).

To be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others in its infinity variety of content and form (Louw, 1998, p.3).

Perhaps one of the best descriptions of *Ubuntu/hunhu* as indigenous knowledge comes from Desmond Tutu who, as Chairman of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), described it as:

...the essence of being human. It speaks to the fact that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours. I am human because I belong. It speaks about wholeness, it speaks about compassion. A person with *Ubuntu* is welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, willing to share. Such people are open and available to others, willing to be vulnerable, affirming of others, do not feel threatened that others are able and good, for they have a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong in a greater whole. They know that they are diminished when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed, diminished when others are treated as if they were less than who they are. The quality of *Ubuntu* gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them (Hord & Lee, 2008, p.26).

This discourse was appropriate to a South Africa of that time as it was moving from a system of racial apartheid to democracy. Arguably the discourse would be just as relevant to other societies but its exact 'fit' would be partly dependent upon local factors at any given time. In my country, Zimbabwe, the Presidential Commission Report (1999) describes *Ubuntu/hunhu* as, "being human in the fullest and

noblest sense” (p.61), while Venter (2004) says *Ubuntu/hunhu* is evident in a person who is “caring, humble, thoughtful, considerate, understanding, wise, generous, hospitable, socially mature, socially sensitive, virtuous and blessed” (p. 150). *Ubuntu/hunhu* stresses reciprocal and ethical responsibility that flows from interconnectedness and common humanity: that is, communalism as opposed to individualism. It is a philosophy that represents a traditional African conception of the moral and political community. Its central values are reflected in the way people conduct themselves. It is that familiar picture of traditional social relationships in which people help each other and commit themselves to the common cause without permanently looking to their personal benefit (Mungwini, 2013). It advocates the “interdependence of persons for the exercise, development, and fulfillment of their potential to be both individuals and community” (Battle, 2009, p.3). The “individual identity is replaced with the larger societal identity and collective unity will see to every person’s survival” (Shizha, 2009, p.144).

These views show that *Ubuntu/hunhu* is about human conduct in relation with others. “A human being is a human being through other human beings; human being only exists and develops in relationship with others” (Venter, 2004, p.152) or, in my indigenous language, “*Umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*”. As a philosophical thread of African epistemology, “*Ubuntu/hunhu* focuses on human relations, attending to the moral and spiritual consciousness of what it means to be human and to be in relationship with others” (Swanson, 2007, p.55).

There is a more political reading of *Ubuntu/hunhu* when considered from the perspective of the anti-colonial South. Here *Ubuntu/hunhu* is an essentially oppositional perspective whose tenets are against violence, greed and individualism that are alienating, exploitative and internal to colonialism and neo-colonialism (Hwami & Kapoor, 2012). “The greatest strength of *Ubuntu/hunhu* is that it is indigenous, a purely African philosophy of life” (Venter, 2004, p.152).

However, in spite of these many positive comments, and with reference to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in post-apartheid South Africa, van Binsbergen (2002) cautions:

Ubuntu may serve as a liberating transformative concept (*in the first*

place: my addition) in the hands of those who wish to build the country, but it can also be wielded as a mystifying concept in the hands of those who, after the post-apartheid reshuffle, were able to personally cross over to the privileged side of the huge class divide, without being over-sensitive to the wider social costs of their individual economic and status advancement. This process is widely noticeable in South Africa today. It is what people euphemistically call the 'Africanisation' of that country's economic and public sphere. Those using the concept of *Ubuntu* do so selectively for their own private gain (p.18).

Doing *Ubuntu/hunhu* in education in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe

Colonial era

Kay (1970) makes an interesting point about the resilience of 'tribal ways of being' that survive Westernisation. "Tribal society, in fact, has proved to be conservative and has demonstrated a remarkable ability to absorb the impact of western society without losing identity" (p.82). Part of that absorption of Western impact happened in education in colonial Zimbabwe. As young people growing up in colonial times, my friends and I kept the *Ubuntu/hunhu* teachings that had been built in us in the villages. However, we were also adventurous and were encouraged to learn what the western society brought: from settlers and missionaries who seemed to sympathise with us. We went to mission/church schools. These were the only schools available to black Africans as the colonial government did not provide public schools in Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs). In the over 90 years of colonialism different racial groups experienced legalised differential treatment based on race and colour. This was true in all sectors: political, social and economical (Chung & Ngara, 1985).

Like other service sectors in the country segregation was the mainstay of white supremacy in the education system; glaringly reflected in its division into European Department of Education for white, Asian and mixed race ('coloured') children; and the Division of African Education for black children. Mission/church schools catered mostly for the African children but had to follow policies set by the colonial government. Because they were located in the TTLs missionaries saw it appropriate to informally include aspects of *Ubuntu/hunhu* in the mostly Eurocentric curriculum.

However, this was not official and therefore not examined, as there was no policy on it. After all, the Christian religion was supposed to be about 'building a human being to be human', whether as a child or adult. Most teachers were indigenous Africans who had also been taught and learnt *Ubuntu/hunhu* during their days as youths in the villages so it was easy for them to informally teach this social/cultural expectation of the community.

I moved from one primary school to another and later from secondary education to teacher training and finally to university level. There were, however, times I felt the tensions and contradictions between what and how I learnt through *Ubuntu/hunhu* at home and what and how I learnt Eurocentric ideas at school. Western schooling stressed individualism (you were graded by ability through written examinations and tests, copying from a friend was forbidden and punishable, competition was terrible if you were in the high ability class/stream; and so on). This was and is still contrary to my experiences of *Ubuntu/hunhu* at home which encouraged sharing of ideas and resources. It became worse when I 'moved up the ladder' of western schooling – physically moving away from home and spending a larger part of the year at the mission boarding school, learning 'to be Western'.

Western education, my people thought, would perhaps some day take me abroad: to America where our missionaries came from, to the United Kingdom(s) who had been our colonisers, or even to Australia where the colonisation of indigenous people like us, we read about from history books (some of these books were biased in favour of settler versions, now I realise). Going abroad would equip me with the power to challenge the colonial conditions we were living in, so my people thought; however and sadly it also meant challenging my *Ubuntu/hunhu* upbringing.

I trained to be a teacher during that colonial era and taught in mission schools in rural communities.

Teaching at mission schools meant teaching the same western values I had learnt during my schooling – individualistic tendencies that were contradictory to my *Ubuntu/hunhu* upbringing. Teaching at teacher education level also meant training teachers to teach the same individualistic values I had been taught and had also taught at high school. However,

each time I went back to the same villages where I was born and grew up I kept learning and teaching *Ubuntu/hunhu* informally as in the past though at times I had to re-learn what was expected of me as a young person. Today, as in the past, I see *Ubuntu/hunhu* as relevant in all educational activities.

Post-colonial Zimbabwe: *Ubuntu/hunhu* in a scientific socialist ideology

At independence in 1980 Zimbabwe introduced scientific socialism as a guiding ideology for the new government in place of the colonial capitalist ideology generally viewed as discriminating against the indigenous population in almost all aspects of social life. To avoid retributions, a number of policy changes were made in most areas including education. However, like in the colonial era, there was and still no official policy document on *Ubuntu/hunhu* as a separate subject in the curriculum. This relates to the current call for *Ubuntu/hunhu* in education from communities and academics. Today, more so than in the colonial era, *Ubuntu/hunhu* is integrated and informally taught in various areas of the curriculum at various levels. At independence a positive discrimination approach in education was adopted; many schools were built in areas neglected during the colonial era, especially rural areas (TTLs); a number of teacher training colleges were established; and opportunities for university education were open to all. Since the majority of teachers would teach in rural communities it was and is still expected that all teachers are familiar with and respect *Ubuntu/hunhu* principles in terms of how they relate to students, to each other as teachers and to their communities. I experienced that transition from colonialism to independence and, as a teacher in both eras, witnessed a number of curriculum changes at independence. However, there was still no formal policy on *Ubuntu/hunhu*.

The need for *Ubuntu/hunhu* as the guiding philosophy in the reform process in Zimbabwe was recognised by a number of writers; for instance, Samkange & Samkange (1980, inside front page) points out that: “Zimbabwe has an indigenous political philosophy which can best guide and inspire thinking in this new era of Zimbabwe. This philosophy

or ideology...exists and can best be described as *Hunhuism* or *Ubuntuism*.”

In the education sector, and as part of the reform process at independence, government introduced a number of subjects in the curriculum which included Education with Production (EWP), Education for Living (EFL) and Political Economy. These and others were meant to address the country's political, social and economic developmental needs (Zvobgo, 1999) and to get students to learn about socialism, the new political ideology (see Sigauke, 2013). However, for various reasons, including lack of teacher support, these were withdrawn from the curriculum. Since then a number of other subjects have been added to the curriculum (see Sigauke, 2013, p.240). However, none of these subjects can strictly be described as incorporating *Ubuntu/hunhu* indigenous knowledge except in some aspects of local languages that were and are still taught as part of the curriculum. This is in spite of the fact that one of the objectives for reform in education was/is to: “promote values of patriotism and *ubuntu* philosophy through citizenship education” (Sigauke, 2011, p.2).

The battle of ideas between the ideologies of Western political economy and indigenous governments of a non-capitalist persuasion set important limits to reforms from western to indigenous policies and actively constitute part of the Western hegemony. It is also worth mentioning here that at some point between 1990 and 2000, and largely because of the negative outcomes of the socialist ideology as defined by Western standards, cost recovery measures in the form of Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) were suggested by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) and were adopted by the Zimbabwean government. This amounted to a complete reversal of the socialist programme put in place at independence. ESAP had a negative toll in a number of areas including the education system which again went on to rely on the Atlantic North in areas such as curriculum content, examination centres (Cambridge, London, AEB examination boards), resources (manpower, materials, funding), qualifications and teaching methods/approaches. This meant that the position of *Ubuntu/hunhu* in the curriculum had to be side-lined, as it was not formally regarded as one of the core learning areas.

This displacement raises a number of crucial, but difficult to be sure about, questions.

I was teaching at high school when the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) was introduced. The school was part of a big mission institution: a primary school, secondary school, teacher training college and a hospital that also trained nurses. The institution served people from all over the country. After the introduction of ESAP you could see the shock and desperation when patients and primary school children were now being asked to pay fees and there were resource shortages in most social service areas including my school. ESAP and the government minister who headed the economic planning and development ministry (he had been working for IMF before getting this post) were given derogatory local names by the public; names that reminded people and government of the hardships they were going through. To me this was a contradiction to the socialism we had been promised and which we had briefly experienced; a turn back to the neo-political persuasions of the west (IMF, World Bank, and others).

Were failures of these policy shifts (including the ultimate collapse of reforms and the lack of inclusion of *Ubuntu/hunhu* in the curriculum) a result of the political/ideological contradictions? What does the above suggest about the irresistible nature of hegemonic structures imported from the Atlantic North in what Silova (2015, p.2) refers to as the “post-socialist transition to Western liberal democracy or neo-liberal free-market capitalism”?

Post-colonial era in Zimbabwe: A return to the Atlantic North?

In spite of the above policy (re)-shifts towards capitalist tendencies I and other writers still make calls for the incorporation of *Ubuntu/hunhu* philosophy as a guide on social behaviour in the economy, politics and other areas of life especially in education. *Ubuntu/hunhu* should become the central guide for policy formation and a strategy of resilience and resistance against neo-liberal individualism. Samkange & Samkange (1980), for instance, have summarised some of what I think would have become *Ubuntu/hunhu*'s positive political contributions to an independent Zimbabwe if this

philosophy had been officially recognised in education.

As Gade (2013) points out “...*Ubuntu/hunhu* has not had a marked influence on politics in the new Zimbabwe” (p.31). In fact, I want to agree with Mungwini (2013) who notes that the only marked political influence of *Ubuntu/hunhu* is that it has been used to benefit those in political positions of power. At independence this value of forgiveness (*Ubuntu/hunhu* and reconciliation) was used to pacify people and prevent them from demanding a just reparation. They persuaded, in the name of *Ubuntu/hunhu*, the general public to forgive those who used to oppress them.

This same strategy was employed in South Africa at independence to pacify the general population. There appears to be some justifiable suspicion that the new leaders could have been fighting a factional class war and once they gained entry into that class they had to make the peasants content with what they had by calling on reconciliation in the name of *Ubuntu/hunhu* to avoid any more problems; and reminding people of their unique quality of humaneness. In Zimbabwe today the very same people are being asked to ignore their ‘relentless love and ability to forgive’ (a feature of *Ubuntu/hunhu*) and to reclaim what is their own: the land, but now with much more disastrous consequences, and again for someone’s political survival (Mungwini, 2013, p.783).

As is the case elsewhere in Africa in general, education in Zimbabwe has been and is still a true child of modernity especially given its acceptance of the liberal ideology. Notwithstanding government claims to the contrary, there is ample evidence within the country’s constitution, its education system and life in general that the country is guided by ideals rooted in the philosophy of liberalism. Schools in Zimbabwe are teaching students to transform themselves into autonomous and aggressive competitors. Competitive individualism makes it difficult to implement demands of traditional morality like *Ubuntu/hunhu*, communalism and cooperation (Mungwini, 2013, p.775). I agree with Hapanyengwi and Makuvaza (2014) who propose the adoption of *Ubuntu/hunhu* as the philosophical foundation for post-colonial education in Zimbabwe: “*Hunhu* would provide the values that would guide Zimbabwean education. It has the greatest potential to restore human dignity and respect for other human beings. We are not arguing that *hunhu* be one of

the aims or goals of the education system, but that it should be the foundation” (p.6).

As Venter (2004) rightly observes at some point in Zimbabwe after independence there was a relapse into philosophies operative during the colonial era which, contrary to African beliefs, went on to entrench individualism and emphasised individual separatedness from other members of the community. This is contrary to the *Ubuntu/hunhu* African philosophy which stresses the “essential unity of self and other, self and the entire Kosmos” and “being-human-together” (Foster, 2007, p.47). Most schools in Zimbabwe have continued to follow the colonial model of education. What is needed now is an education unique to the Zimbabwean circumstances, an education inspired by the philosophy of *Ubuntu/hunhu*, an indigenisation of the curriculum through infusing Zimbabwean content in the form of events, rituals, prayers and other issues (Horton, 1982; Mudzamba, 1982). This is because, as Kaulemu (2004) observes, people no longer seem to know how they should relate to each other as human beings since dehumanisation seems to characterise their daily existence. This is all evidence of the lack of *Ubuntu/hunhu* in our daily lives.

Ubuntu/hunhu is based on the view that the source of morality is society itself. You do not educate your child for yourself alone. At school the headmaster is the eye of the parents and the teacher stands in place of the parents and all the above stand in for society. Professional teachers like me, who may or may not be part of the particular community of the school, are expected to take up and extend the role of an adult or elder in the community by teaching, among other things and in the traditional way, *Ubuntu/hunhu* (Samkange & Samkange, 1980). The concept of *Ubuntu/hunhu* is strongly reinforced by, as well as oriented towards, a collectivist social morality (Pearce, 1990). Young children are expected, therefore, to always display *Ubuntu/hunhu* (personhood). But, as Pearce (1990) observes, teaching *Ubuntu/hunhu* at the classroom level in a neo-liberal free market capitalist society may bring up contradictions in terms of traditional and modern values:

In the classroom where *Ubuntu/hunhu* is practiced we do not expect, therefore, to find children challenging their teachers or even spontaneously asking questions or initiating discourse. A 'good' child does not question adults but tries to imitate the moral

model and learn the moral rules held up to her. The moral framework of *Ubuntu/hunhu* generates a pattern for the transmission of all knowledge: a body of socially accepted beliefs transmitted intact by adults to unquestioning children (Pearce, 1990, p.157).

Reflecting on the current situation on the modernity factor, Pearce (1990) comments further that:

If *Ubuntu/hunhu* entails the transmission of traditional culture, teachers will increasingly find themselves fighting a losing battle, for there is little meaningful which remains of that culture in this period of increasingly rapid social change and, perhaps, social disintegration (p.147; and *globalisation: my addition*).

Post-colonial era Zimbabwe: A call for *Ubuntu/hunhu* in Citizenship Education: Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training

In 1998, the government of Zimbabwe, through the country's president, established a commission whose task was "to inquire into and report on education and training in Zimbabwe" (Presidential Commission, 1999, p.i). As part of its Terms of Reference, the commission was instructed to "inquire into and report upon the fundamental changes to the current curriculum at all levels so that education becomes a useful tool for character and citizenship formation" (Presidential Commission, 1999, p.349). Character formation implicitly meant individuals who had qualities associated with *Ubuntu/hunhu*. This is confirmed by the Commission itself in its recommendations when it says teaching rights, duties and responsibilities is important because

These should be part of a person with genuine and acceptable *hunhu/Ubuntu*...a good human being, a well behaved and morally upright person characterised by qualities such as responsibility, honesty, justice, trustworthiness, hard work, integrity, a cooperative spirit, solidarity, hospitality, devotion to family and welfare of community (Presidential Commission, 1999, p.62).

Teaching *Ubuntu/hunhu* in education is a means of addressing what the Commission describes as

Moral decadence in society, loss of discipline and sound human, cultural and religious values; a crying need to overhaul the entire education and training system in Zimbabwe; to develop a Zimbabwean philosophy of education system that promotes a citizen with *Ubuntu/hunhu* (Presidential Commission, 1999: p.349).

The Commission goes further to describe problems in schools

and society as:

Vandalism, violence and indiscipline in our schools and society are a result of lack of values, relevant ethics, morals, individual and collective responsibilities for protecting property and valuing human life. This is reflective of that *hunhu/Ubuntu* which is currently lacking in society and the formal education process (Presidential Commission, 1999, p.349).

The Commission adds: “The philosophy should, among other things, spell out the type of person that the education system should produce in order to promote a successful nation. The product of the proposed education system should be a product who has morality and ability to learn from the philosophy of *Ubuntu/hunhu*” (p.33). This was the first time an official call was made for *Ubuntu/hunhu* to be one of the central guiding principles for education in Zimbabwe. The Commission further observed that the absence of a coherent philosophy of education such as *Ubuntu/hunhu* manifests itself in the products (graduates) of the education system itself who demonstrate a lack of moral focus, respect for other people, and are intolerant and corrupt. This is also observed in the ways people conduct business and the practice of politics. There is a general lack of moral integrity and focus among the populace. There are very high levels of intolerance of other people’s views that differ from our own resulting in attempts to deny these citizens the human right to make independent decisions on social, economic, political and cultural issues that affect their lives, the Commission notes.

These recommendations were put forward as guidelines for a proposed citizenship education programme in the curriculum, (which never took place). The recommendations, it was believed, would tackle problems that the Commission said were prevalent in society, especially among young people. *Ubuntu/hunhu* would be the solution to these problems, the Commission suggests. Sigauke (2011) however, raises possibilities for underlying or hidden ideological motives on the call for *Ubuntu/hunhu* in citizenship education, given the country’s politico-socio-economic context that seemed to have shifted policy formulation towards capitalist tendencies.

***Ubuntu/hunhu* dilemma in a globalised knowledge society**

The position of indigenous knowledges in this age of globalisation is a central theme in Connell’s (2007) book, ‘*Southern Theory*’. Other writers, Ramose (1999) and van

Binsbergen (2002) have also expressed similar concern about the future of *Ubuntu/hunhu* in an age of globalisation. Ramose (1999) notes, and I agree with him, that the globalisation process, towards which the modern world is increasingly drawn, is about the ascendance of a market-orientated economic logic of maximalisation, in which the value, dignity, personal safety, even survival of the human person no longer seem to constitute central concerns. This process is reinforced by the Global/Atlantic North's post-colonial drive for political and cultural hegemony. While African societies have suffered greatly in this process their lasting value orientation in terms of *Ubuntu/hunhu* holds up as an alternative in that it advocates a renewed concern for the human person. This alternative, Ramose argues, is already applied in the peripheral contexts of village kin groups in Southern Africa today. It is also capable of inspiring the wider (*global: my addition*) world where it may give a new and profound meaning to the global debate on human rights and other global issues. However, the value orientation of the village has tended not to be within easy reach of the globalised urban population that has become numerically dominant in Southern Africa. Outside contemporary village contexts, in urban areas for example, *Ubuntu/hunhu* is only selectively and superficially communicated to the population at large. The globalisation process is largely to blame on this (Ramose, 1999).

I have a different view regarding the village contexts which Ramose (1999) says still hold *Ubuntu/hunhu* values. Contemporary Southern Africa, including its rural villages, is in fact among the various products of globalisation. Today the majority of village inhabitants of Southern African countries, Zimbabwe and South Africa for instance, are so effectively exposed to products of globalisation (global technologies of information and communication, for example) such that they are no longer in any direct contact with the values, beliefs and images of the traditional/indigenous village knowledge, *Ubuntu/hunhu*. They all have to (re)-learn the values, beliefs and images of the village (*Ubuntu/hunhu*) more or less from scratch because the globalisation process has affected them all.

However, in spite of the above observations, even among the more globally oriented urbanised populations, the same

urban people “hide niches of village life that are characteristic of *Ubuntu/hunhu*” (van Binsbergen, 2002, p.15). Village cultural and religious practices seem to be going into hiding especially among urban populations — these practices and values exist only underground and are not publicly articulated within the globalised urban space. *Ubuntu/hunhu*, as a model of thought, has to take on a globalised format in order to be openly acceptable to, and displayed by, the majority of modern Southern Africans and beyond. It is unfortunate and ironic that many identity constructions outside the Atlantic/Global North today, including *Ubuntu/hunhu* in Southern Africa, seem to be seen in that light, that is, the need to take a globalised format. Further, in order to succeed and to be taken seriously, they need to be put in the format stipulated (even imposed) under Atlantic/Global North hegemony.

Ubuntu/hunhu can be a tool for transformation in a context of globalisation. For instance, van Binsbergen (2002) makes the following observations which I believe are relevant to *Ubuntu/hunhu* in a globalised knowledge society. Firstly, *Ubuntu/hunhu* constitutes a form of symbolic empowerment for the people of Southern Africa who fought to attain majority rule and cast off the yoke of the Global/Atlantic North’s cultural and symbolic, as well as political, military and economic dominance. *Ubuntu/hunhu* offers the appearance of an ancestral model to them, a model that is credible and with which they can identify, regardless of whether urban globalised people still observe ancestral codes of conduct or not; and regardless of whether ancestral codes are rendered correctly or not. Secondly, *Ubuntu/hunhu* can be effective because it is appreciated as an African thing from the heart of Southern Africans. In times and places of conflict as in my country Zimbabwe *Ubuntu/hunhu* was used by the new political leaders to introduce an unexpected perspective (reconciliation) just like Nelson Mandela did through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The value of *Ubuntu/hunhu* as a governing guiding principle has also been reflected in a South African Foreign Policy White Paper: ‘*Building a Better World: The Diplomacy of Ubuntu: Final Draft*’ (13 May, 2011) and other policy documents.

But the implications of *Ubuntu/hunhu* can go well beyond the Southern African region. In fact international scholarly communities have started paying attention to this

concept and use it as a guiding principle by which to question the instrumentalist view of education that dominates the Global/Atlantic North. For instance, the 2015 Annual Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Conference held in Washington D.C. has had, as its theme, the following title: “*Imagining a Humanist Education Globally: Ubuntu!*” (www.cies2015.org). Details of issues covered during the conference resonate with the need for the globalisation of *Ubuntu/hunhu* and an *Ubuntu/hunhu-inspired* education that is transformative and empowering for all humanity. The conference theme recognised that, generally, while education has been viewed as an instrument for reproducing certain inequalities, even a carefully designed colonial education that was intended to subordinate colonized peoples in different parts of the world, ended up producing critical thinkers and activists who questioned and helped to topple formal colonial domination. This is what my village people wished would happen when they sent us to school.

Concluding remarks

The question raised at the beginning of this paper concerns the position of *Ubuntu/hunhu*, as an indigenous knowledge system or way of being, in what Connell identifies as *Southern Theory*. Throughout this paper I have tried to demonstrate that *Ubuntu/hunhu* philosophy can be a viable alternative guiding philosophy in many areas of social life including education not just in Southern Africa where it originates but beyond. In addition to various examples drawn from my own experiences this view was further supported by various writers cited in this paper and recommendations from policy documents such as the (1999) Zimbabwe Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training and the South African Foreign Policy White Paper (2011).

I have suggested that education that embraces *Ubuntu/hunhu* as its central philosophy could facilitate the process of deconstruction of the prevailing modernist epistemologies in formal schooling. An education that is directed by the philosophy of *Ubuntu/hunhu* has the potential of regenerating space for positive social change in the current dominance of neo-liberal logics in education and social reform. The growing scholarly attention to this Southern

African philosophy in education, of which I see this article to be part of, attests to the possibilities of an *Ubuntu/hunhu-inspired* education that embodies a philosophical, pedagogical and curricula framework that is emancipatory, cultured, transformative, localised and empowering for all humanity globally.

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