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The meaning of sharing under marketized education: an ubu-ntu perspective

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Extended summary. Reading his-story (history), her-story and our story from the perspective of Mother Africa reduced from her original position of Mater Preciosa, (the cradle of humanity: a precious Mother), to a Mater Dolorosa (a mother of sorrows) through conquest in the unjust wars of Western colonialism, our argument is that education – the bearer of the Western epistemological paradigm – continues to be primarily in the service of protecting and promoting the enslavement of politically independent Africa. Our thesis is that this service ought to be terminated because it is unethical. There is no reason to suppose that unlike other empires before it, the dominant unholy trinity of economicide, epistemicide and religicide perpetrated against Africa initially by the West and subsequently by other predator states, is an eternal order of things. We adopt the philosophy of ubu-ntu to elaborate on our argument. We will focus specifically on the marketisation of education taking examples mainly from conqueror South Africa and the Covid 19 pandemic.

The Bantu peoples together with some of the members of all the other population groups resisted this forcible imposition though some of them submitted to it. Today the former manifests itself in the intensifying struggle for curriculum change. In different degrees and, from varied perspectives these struggles belong to the “epistemologies of the South” pursuing justice against the unholy trinity of epistemicide, economicide and religicide. They are an active response to the ethical imperative to make a transition from education for servitude to education for liberation bringing an end to the “cognitive empire” established by the West in the South. This is the context in which ubu-ntu finds itself. What is ubu-ntu?

Ubu-ntu education was known and, practised from time immemorial by the Bantu peoples of Africa. It is still known and practised. Ubuntu is the root of African philosophy among the Bantu-speaking peoples. The African tree of ontology, knowledge and ethics stems from ubu-ntu with which it is connected indivisibly. Apart from a linguistic analysis of ubu-ntu, a persuasive philosophical argument can be made that there is a “family atmosphere”, that is, a kind of philosophical affinity and kinship among and between the indigenous peoples of Africa. No doubt there are and, will be variations within this broad philosophical “family atmosphere”. But the blood circulating through the “family” members is the same in its basics. In this sense ubu-ntu is the basis of African philosophy.

Education through ubu-ntu philosophy and culture is documented in multiple texts sometimes different in their perspectives and placing emphasis on selected aspects. It is not the intention here to narrate the same story. Rather, the intention in this essay is to identify specific ethical maxims of ubu-ntu and inquire into how they have and, may respond to the ethical problems facing Africa especially in the economic-social sphere. Many African philosophies of education concur on the view that “education begins at the time of birth and ends with death”. (Kenyatta, 1979: 99) On this understanding, education is a life-long process because it involves the formation of character. Without disregard for natural phenomena the ubu-ntu philosophy of education places special emphasis on the cultivation of inter-personal relations, beginning with the family, for the good of the individual and the promotion of goodness throughout the community, however large or small. Underlying this meaning of education is the ethical maxim, *obra ye nnoboa* meaning, life is mutual aid. This ethical maxim is not confined to Africans within Africa. It extends to all human beings across the globe because there cannot be ubuntu without umuntu. On this basis, it is open to dialogue with other philosophies of education.

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