Chapter 15
Education and Epistemicide in Africa:
Towards an Ubuntu-Based Comprehensive Model of Education

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ABSTRACT

Epistemicide is the exclusion or elimination of indigenous knowledge systems at the expense of the imperious, domineering, and colonial knowledge systems. To combat epistemicide in Africa and liberate the minds of the current generation, the authors propose a comprehensive ubuntu based model of education. This model suggests four interrelated strategies of liberation: 1) decolonization, 2) revalorization, 3) revitalization, and 4) construction and creation (DRRC) of knowledge. This chapter examines the contextual and conceptual background of education in Africa through a historical lens, provides a detailed description of the proposed model, and outlines some potential implementation challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Epistemicide [1], a term invented by Santos (2007), is the exclusion or elimination of indigenous knowledge systems (de Sousa Santos, 2007; Hall & Tandon, 2017) at the expense of the imperious, domineering, and colonial knowledge systems. As stated by Cheik Anta Dioup (1967) and Martin Bernal (1987) (cited in Santos, 2014, p. 139), epistemicide can be overt, direct and intentional such as the elimination of "the African roots of Greek antiquity so as to intensify its purity as the root of European culture." However, oftentimes, epistemicide is so ingrained in other systems of exploitation that it does not surface as an ill necessitating elimination. "Epistemicide, as the systematic destruction of rival forms of knowledge, is at its worst nothing less than symbolic genocide" (Bennett, 2007, p. 154). On the other hand, the Oxford

English Dictionary defines education as "the systematic instruction, teaching, or training in various academic and non-academic subjects given to or received by a child, typically at a school; the course of scholastic instruction a person receives in his or her lifetime". One wonders how a system that is supposed to cognitively enrich and sustain knowledge ended up destroying it in Africa.

Steve Biko's quote "*The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed*" exhorts us, who have been affected by an oppressive education system, to heal and liberate our minds. Africans must decolonize the new generation's minds and equip them with culturally relevant and sustaining epistemologies and approaches. Several prominent figures (Hall & Tandon, 2017; Mudimbe, 1988; Nyerere,1978; Thiong'O, 1984; Bird, 2018; Fanon, 1952; Freire, 1972; Nkrumah,1964) have highlighted the importance of liberating the mind to achieve true freedom. With this call to action in mind, we propose a comprehensive *ubuntu* based model of education to combat epistemicide in Africa, with four interrelated strategies of liberation: 1) decolonization, 2) revalorization, 3) revitalization, and 4) construction and creation (DRRC) of culturally relevant knowledge. *Ubuntu* is integral to this model because, as its characterizations in Table 1 show, it is a philosophy that's centered around humanness.

Table 1. Ubuntu characterization

Ubuntu – **General Characterization**	*Ubuntu* – **Education related characterization**
● Code of trust ● Humanism, goodness, empathy compassion, forgiveness, wisdom, generosity, hospitality, and unselfish kindness ● Concentric and harmonic unity of the visible and invisible worlds. (Mulago 1969:145) ● Suffering of one is conceived as the suffering of all (Nolte-Schamm, 2006) ● Interconnection and relationship (Mulago 1969:138,143) ● Cohesive principle of the Bantu community (Mulago1969:137) ● Fecundity and sharing in life, friendship, healing and hospitality" (Magesa 1998:55) ● Social ethic with a reconciling vision for all of humanity (Teffo 1999:299)	● Crucial pillar of an African worldview (Battle 1997:39) ● Focus on community (Gyekye 1997:75) ● Favors communalism (community or collectivism) above individualism ● Common denominator (Koka 1998:34) ● Centre of cohesion and solidarity (Mulago1969:137) ● Collective work and responsibility ● Respect, discipline and good behavior (Koka 1998:31) ● Demonstrates a spirit of solidarity and togetherness. ● Provides a spirit of oneness and inclusivity ● Promotes the human as a social moral being (Prinsloo 1994) ● Provides the basis for African ethics and morality (Prinsloo 1998:54) ● Strives for harmony and security offered by the group (Seriloane1976:33, 37) ● Rests on the pillars of genuine caring and spontaneous sharing" (Broodryk 1997). ● May give rise to actions of self-sacrifice by individuals for the larger group.

This chapter is organized in five major sections. The first section contextualizes and frames the issue, highlighting historical connections to the present structural issues in African education that lead to epistemicide. The second section critically compares and contrasts such education to indigenous education and examines epistemicide caused by Eurocentric education. The third section proposes an *ubuntu-* based, multifaceted and comprehensive approach to African education that integrates indigenous and global knowledge and methodologies as well as informal, non-formal and formal modes of learning. The fourth section concludes the chapter with a statement about the challenges of the proposed model.

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