

# THE VILLAGE BOY'S RUDE AWAKENING: MY ACADEMIC CURRERE

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The daily walk to school and back to my village was the beginning of my “long walk” to education. Every morning, with other children from our village, barefooted, I walked and ran to attend classes at the nearest mission school. The mission school, the beacon of Western education ten miles away from our village, was to us a light set upon a hill dispelling darkness, ignorance, and backwardness. Indeed, it symbolized the white man’s burden to “civilize” us. I was to spend the first five years of my academic journey at this mission school. I did not have the luxury of pre-schooling. My parents were convinced, and so was I, that education was the great escape from perpetual poverty. They impressed upon me that a bright and fulfilling life was dependent upon my success in school. My parents and I were oblivious to the perilous pathway of my academic road. The challenges and problems that were littered along my academic journey were not at first apparent and manifest.

## MY ENCOUNTER WITH COLONIAL EDUCATION AND WESTERN EPISTEMOLOGY

Unbeknownst to me and my parents, the school and my home environment were like oil and water. In colonial Zimbabwe, the school and the home were two unrelated entities. There was no congruency. The chasms between school and society and between child and curriculum were very wide, breaking the “essential continuity of educational concepts and practices across the spectrum of human development” (Dewey, 2013, p. xx). The school was isolated from my being and my experience. In the village, I was an African, but at school, I was taught to despise who I was and to be a white man in “taste, habits, dress, opinions, morals and intellect” (Macaulay, 1835/1995, p. 249). For me to assimilate to the European lifestyle and values was an admission that my culture was inferior to white culture. My identity and self-awareness as an African were continuously assaulted and pounded upon. School alienated me from my culture. This psycho-cultural alienation intensified at each further stage of my education. No doubt, as an African, I was being miseducated.

I had the misfortune of beginning my education in 1965, the year the Rhodesian government led by Ian Douglas Smith declared unilateral independence from Britain, to thwart British intentions of granting independence to the African majority in Rhodesia. This event and the 1966 Education Act, along with the 1969 constitution that introduced the concept of separate development for blacks and whites, would shape my academic trajectory. For years, various colonial settler governments in Rhodesia sought to limit African access to education and frustrated Christian missionary efforts to educate Africans. The concept of separate development forced all African chiefs to set up Councils to govern areas under their control. Subsequently, the Rhodesian government transferred primary schools from missionary control to the control of local Councils, which were under-resourced and under-funded. The under-funding and under-resourcing of schools greatly impacted our academic achievements and widened the achievement gaps between Africans and Europeans. In a segregated school system, the government spent more on a white child than on a black child. The curriculum was foreign, and rote learning was the dominant pedagogical practice. The foreignness of the curriculum and

the hidden curriculum thoroughly socialized us to English middle-class values and behaviors (Kanu, 2006). In most instances, I regurgitated words without understanding what I was saying or writing. My indigenous ways of knowing (IWK) and the notions of learning relevant to my social and cultural context were swept aside. IWK is the recognition of the traditional knowledge systems that were historically suppressed by Western aggression and colonialism.

I was denied the advantage of early vernacular instruction. Prior to 1966, learners were taught in their mother tongue in grades one and two. Beginning from 1966, English was made the medium of instruction from first grade to foster a rapid acquisition of the Queen's language by children at an impressionable age. An incident that demonstrates the importance of teaching learners in their home language occurred when I was a first grader. My first grade teacher, who was male and was well-known for his dedication and commitment to educating African children, flashed a picture of a rabbit on a chart. The teacher then asked the question "What is this"? For a long time, the teacher waited for an answer. I raised my hand and said, "That is a *shuro*." *Shuro* is "rabbit" in Shona—one of the native languages in Zimbabwe. The whole class erupted into laughter. The village boy had just received a rude awakening and had seen a harbinger of things to come. It was apparent that my educational destiny hinged on my mastery of English. English was to be not only a vehicle of communication, but a tool for cultural dominance. Speaking in my mother tongue at school was unacceptable and was rewarded with punishment in the form of manual labor after school. The message was loud and clear—English was superior to my native language.

This seemingly innocuous incident (the *shuro* event) was my introduction to the colonization agenda of colonial education. The "*shuro* incident" denied me the opportunity to think, reflect, and to shape and mold my thoughts in my own language. Going forward, my mother tongue was rendered irrelevant and worthless. I began to value speaking in English. Competence in English was at the expense of my competence in my mother tongue. The devaluation of my language lives with me to date and is demonstrated in my speaking to my friends, children, and spouse in English. Code-switching dominates my communication pattern whenever I attempt to speak in my mother tongue. Furthermore, learning and being taught in English as early as grade one stifled my thinking and imagination. The articulation and expression of my thoughts were severely curtailed. I thought in my mother tongue and then translated my thoughts to English. The effectiveness of colonial education as an ideological tool and its capacity to colonize the mind is demonstrated by my grade one teacher's unawareness of the role of culture and language in learning. My teacher was oblivious to the broader implications of using English as a medium of instruction—the annihilation of a "people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment [and] in their capacities and ultimately themselves" (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). I began to appreciate my English name, Lovemore, and ridiculed and despised my friends who had African names. My failure to correctly answer my teacher's question and the subsequent humiliation I suffered "annihilated" the belief in myself and my capacity to know and to be in my language—the fundamental objective of the colonial education project.

Gripped with the fear that I might not proceed beyond primary education, my parents transferred me to a boarding school. Unbeknownst to my parents, they were doing what the missionaries wanted: isolating and insulating African children from their culture. My parents' fears were not misplaced because the bottleneck or pyramid system introduced by the Education Act of 1966 drastically reduced transition rates and increased dropout rates (Shizha, 2006). Only 12.5% of students who sat for the seventh-grade examination proceeded to secondary education (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011).

The remaining students were channeled to four-year secondary vocational schools or to the informal sector (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). After two more years, I passed the examination that further reduced the number of students making the transition to the next level. However, by sending me to a boarding school, my parents isolated and insulated me from the influence of my culture and intellectual traditions (Ogunnaike, 2018). Away from my village and my cultural environment and exposed to the Christian religion that consistently and persistently battered and butchered my traditional African religion and cultural norms and traditions, I internalized western values and ideas and appropriated them as my own.

At the secondary level, the curriculum continued to ruthlessly and relentlessly attack my African culture, persona, and history. For example, I could not see myself in history taught in schools. The history curriculum was foreign. I was taught European history and the history of Europeans in Africa and not African history. The denigration and vilification of African historical figures and the glorification of European history characters was palpable. Everything about Africans was negative. As an African, I was portrayed as having no past. My African past was considered “darkness” and, therefore, not history worth studying. The effect was that I despised African history, identified and mimicked European historical figures like Bismarck, Winston Churchill, Lenin, etc. I knew more about Europe and the USA than I did about African anthropology, religion, ethics, music, art, etc. My colonized mind was evidenced by my glorification of European historical figures' achievements and my expression of self-denigration, self-hate, and love for everything that was not me. My imagination was colonized as, indeed, was the way I thought about reality and the world. Colonial education bonded, imprisoned, and shackled me.

Furthermore, I studied English literature, not African literature. The Shona language as a subject was taught in English, and I was required to translate English into Shona as one of the final examination questions. This further buttressed the inferiority of my mother tongue and created a feeling of psychological insubordination and a subservient mentality. Because of the internalization of my mother tongue as an inferior and worthless language, as students at the University of Zimbabwe, we despised and belittled our compatriots who majored in indigenous languages.

Moreover, subject delivery practices (pedagogy) promoted rote learning and stifled creativity and thinking. As a student, I had no voice in the classroom—was supposed to be seen but not heard. Teachers wielded unquestioned authority, and the classroom environment was undemocratic. Colonial pedagogy violated my indigenous ways of being and knowing. It failed to appreciate that my indigenous worldview was holistic and connected to the sacred, to piety and virtue (Kincheloe, 2006; Ogunnaike, 2018). Stories, idioms, and proverbs as an indigenous way of knowing had no place in colonial pedagogy. Colonial pedagogy taught me about myself from the Other—the British perspective. Ultimately, I developed what Du Bois correctly calls a “double consciousness”—a knowledge of self as other. Du Bois (1903/1994) poignantly observed that double consciousness is the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p. 5). The knowledge of the self as the other was that I and my ancestors were barbarians, lacking culture, civilization, and knowledge. In a nutshell, I became a “Black skin with a white mask.” I was an African in skin color only and internalized the belief that nothing good could come out of the dark continent—the heart of darkness. My experiences and background knowledge did not matter in my instruction. The school curriculum and pedagogical practices accomplished their goal of creating a darker Briton, “English in taste, opinions, in morals, and in intellect”

(Macaulay, 1835/1995, p. 249). I lost my self-pride and self-assertion, as I doubted my African humanity and knowledge. Every school holiday, I preferred living in the city with my brother instead of going to the village.

After two years of secondary education, I took what was then called Junior Certificate Examinations in order to proceed to high school. Taking examinations in Rhodesia was mental torture. It meant sleepless nights of studying and cramming information from textbooks and notes from the teachers, undoubtedly enhancing docility and stifling critical thinking. The village boy passed all of the subjects and proceeded to high school. By the time I was in high school, the liberation war in Zimbabwe had intensified. Some schools were closed. Economic sanctions imposed upon Rhodesia by the United Nations were forcing industries and factories to close or relocate to other countries. Disaster struck at the end of my time in high school. I passed all of the subjects except English Language and Shona (my mother tongue). Interestingly, I passed English Literature with an A but failed English Language. I was a victim of what Ogunnaike (2018) calls necrolinguistics. Due to the demonization of my mother tongue, I was not fluent in any language, European or African. Colonial education failed to use my language as a springboard to learn English as a second language as evidenced by the *shuro* incident. Because my transition to the English language was not properly managed, it interfered with my learning of the English language.

I could not proceed with my education. The only option was to look for a job. Unknowingly, I was fulfilling the agenda of colonial education: to work for the white man or colonial government and not create a job for myself or others. Job searching without work experience and trade or profession was like searching for a needle in a haystack. Job opportunities for Africans in racist and colonial Rhodesia were few and far between. The combined effect of the liberation war and economic sanctions meant that jobs had become scarce as industry and commerce had suffered. In any case, colonial education was meant to channel Africans as hewers of wood and drawers of waters. However, the gods smiled on me, and I was employed by the Rhodesia Prison Service as a prison guard. Only whites could be employed as prison officers. While working as a prison guard, I studied and wrote the English language examination set by the University of London. Fortunately, this time around, I passed.

### THE VILLAGE BOY AS A RURAL TEACHER

After almost five years of service as a guard, I resigned to train as a primary school teacher at one of the teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. At that point, the liberation war had ended, and Zimbabwe had attained its independence and sovereignty. At the teacher training college, I was subjected to psychology, sociology, and philosophy of education. Most, if not all, of the psychology, sociology, and philosophy in the education books I read had been written by authors outside of Africa and referred to experiences not relevant to the students I was going to teach. The teaching and learning methods I was taught still mirrored the ones I had been exposed to as a student. Although we read Paulo Freire's (1968/1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, instructors were neither enthusiastic nor competent enough to teach Freire's pedagogical practices. At independence in 1980, the Zimbabwean government had vowed to radically transform the colonial educational system, especially the curriculum and pedagogy. The reality on the ground proved otherwise. It was "new wine in old wineskins."

As a teacher in rural schools, I found myself on many occasions teaching as my former teachers had taught me. The village boy, now a village teacher, was miseducating students in the same way I had been miseducated. Colonialism had ended, but its effects, legacies, and vestiges lingered on. I continued to use colonial pedagogy: rote learning

and drill. I realized that I was a bad and poor educator. I desired to be better. On my own, I studied two Advanced Level subjects so that I could pursue my education at the University of Zimbabwe. After teaching for seven years, I enrolled for a Bachelor of Education Degree at the University of Zimbabwe. My major was history, with a curriculum studies minor.

It was at the University of Zimbabwe that I was exposed to the richness of the African past. African history came alive for me. I discovered that I had learned a distorted and largely false history at the primary and secondary levels of my studies. Educational and curriculum theory demonstrated to me the evils and limitations of colonial educational practices. It became clear to me that education can be an instrument for liberation or for indoctrination and mental enslavement (Freire, 1968/1972). The dire and urgent need for a decolonized curriculum to decolonize the African mind was thrust upon me. I graduated and was assigned to teach in an urban school. The school was considered one of the best schools in the country. Most of the teachers at the school were highly qualified and experienced, and yet they failed to disengage from colonial pedagogy.

My passion for curriculum changes and reconstruction in postcolonial Zimbabwe compelled me to study for a master's degree in curriculum studies with an emphasis in history education. After graduating, I managed to land an instructor job in the Teacher Education department at Solusi University. I was part of a team of instructors who trained both pre-service and in-service teachers. The in-service teachers complained that the school curriculum was still not relevant to the needs and aspirations of the students. They bemoaned the fact that school curricula in Zimbabwe were dominated by "Eurocentric knowledge and epistemologies" and that "indigenous ontologies and epistemologies" were relegated to the periphery (Shizha & Kariwo, 2012, p. 74). The teachers claimed that school subject curricula developed since the end of colonialism merely tinkered with the colonial curricula, leaving colonial "fundamentals intact" and rendering them "irrelevant to the needs" of their users (Mavhunga, 2006, p. 446). In a nutshell, school curricula in Zimbabwe failed to cater to the "concrete existential needs" of the African students (Makuvaza, 2008, p. 375). Teachers who taught history specifically highlighted the problem that textbook narratives of the liberation war downplayed the role and contribution of ZAPU and its armed wing ZIPRA. Unknown to me, my research agenda was unfolding before my eyes. My mind began to grapple with the question of how we could put an end to the continuity of the colonizers' curricula and make school curricula meet the existential needs of the African learner. As fate would have it, my wife relocated to the USA. I resigned from my instructor position and followed her.

### THE VILLAGE BOY COMES TO AMERICA

My present is complicated. It cannot be adequately explained by the "that is a *shuro*" event. My present thoughts are a product of a collision and interplay of forces. The analysis of one's *currere* requires one to reflect on the past, gaze into the future, and "then slowly...analyze one's experience of the past and fantasies of the future in order to understand more fully, with more complexity and subtlety, one's submergence in the present" (Pinar, 2004, p. 4). As Pinar accurately predicts, the reactivation of my past and contemplation of the future complicates my presence. My past is troubled and my future problematized while I am submerged in the present.

My present existence as a doctoral candidate is a complicated and complex mixture of competing forces and events. The "that is a *shuro*" incident and the colonial education project, in general, is not an event of my own making. Like many other of my educational and teaching experiences, it is a variable outside of my control. My educational journey

has not been dependent solely on what I did, but on a host of other factors beyond my control.

My present circumstances, with the benefit of hindsight, help me to explain my educational and teaching trajectory. This analytical phase of *currere* is my critical self-examination of the past and present to understand the multiple facets of my educational experiences (Pinar, 2004). My present offers the opportunity to engage in a “complicated conversation” with my doctoral courses, my fellow students, myself, and the colonial education project. Ironically, this “complicated conversation” is happening in a Western academic institution, in a citadel of Eurocentric epistemology and ontology. I keep wondering whether at the end of my doctoral study the village boy will have found solutions to end the continuity of the colonizers’ curricula in Zimbabwe.

The method of *currere* has enabled me to become aware of the multitude of curricula at play in my own academic path: past, present, and future. Looking back at my past educational experiences, I now see how they were shaped by colonial society, politics, and culture. Education was more than an escape from poverty. It was much more. The colonial curriculum uprooted me from my culture and created in me an identity crisis and double consciousness. My African worldview was replaced by a European worldview that denigrated and rubbished my being and self-worth as an African. I was internally and externally colonized (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). Taking pride in speaking the language of the oppressor encapsulated my mental slavery and inferiority complex. As a teacher, I struggled to break free from colonial pedagogy. I was stuck in a colonial pedagogy that fit the way I had been taught and had learned. It dawned on me that my pedagogy did not match the socio-cultural realities the learners brought to school and was, therefore, incompatible with the life-worlds and lived experiences of students (Shizha, 2006).

Looking towards the future, I see that my research interests and agenda have been carved out for me—the necessity and desirability to decolonize the curriculum. My doctoral program has provided me with an opportunity to analyze assumptions, biases, values, and beliefs in education in general and in the curriculum. It has given me a new pair of eyes to look at my own past and current educational experiences. I interrogate, examine, and question the relevance of some of my doctoral courses to me as an international student. The feeling of being trapped forever in Western epistemology and ontology grips me occasionally. I have taken courses outside my department in order to “decolonize” my mind, free myself from Western epistemological hegemony, and find solutions to end the continuity of the colonizers’ curricula. I have convinced myself that postcolonial curricular perspectives and decoloniality as a political and epistemological movement may provide guidance to reconstruct and re-imagine school subject curricula in Zimbabwe. Postcolonial and decoloniality theories, along with a critique of the current situation, support a way of thinking about the curriculum to make it context-specific and relevant to learner experiences. I am not the only one who has been a victim of oppressive and prescribing curricula. Hopefully, my work and my life can inspire someone to press on in their own academic path/journey.

### THE VILLAGE BOY'S HOPE

Unfortunately, I did not see all my past educational experiences as they unfolded right in front of my eyes. How do I hope to see what is coming? What does the future hold for me as a scholar and researcher? As a scholar and researcher, the village boy hopes to transform the colonial school curriculum. I am determined to end the cognitive injustice perpetrated by the legacies and vestiges of the colonial curriculum and its failure to incorporate indigenous knowledge, ways of knowing, and learning. It is my hope that

my doctoral training has equipped me to give hope professionally and personally as I work to make an impact on my students and society. No child should experience the embarrassment I suffered from the “that is a *shuro*” incident and the epistemic violence of the colonial education project.

The method of *currere* “slows me down” so that I “re-enter the past” to “meditatively imagine the future” (Pinar, 2004, p. 4). I envision a future not determined by my past, but my experience of the past improving the learning of my students and making my teaching student-centered and contextual. Reconceptualizing the curriculum will close the distance between me and my students and deeply engage us in complicated conversations about the curriculum and how it impacts all of us. I have learned that the nature and character of the curriculum determine the success or failure of students. Any curriculum I will craft will be rooted in this fact. For teaching and learning to be meaningful, it cannot be divorced from the world-view of the learner. This calls for a new discourse to change the course of education for our students. It is my sincere hope that I will take the risk of taking the lead in these “complicated conversations” and the reconceptualization of the curriculum. This is a must for the sake of social justice and equity in education.

The village boy’s hope is a decolonized curriculum, which in turn will decolonize and emancipate the African mind. How shall knowledge be produced, represented, and disseminated in the post-colonial dispensation? What should an authentic postcolonial curriculum and pedagogy look like? These difficult questions need to be answered in order to re-imagine a decolonized education system. A decolonized curriculum and a liberatory pedagogy should be “anti-sexist, anti-racist and anti-classist [and] against the ubiquitous and parasitic action of power itself” (De Lissovoy, 2014, p. 81). It must dispense with and discard disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical practices used to suppress creativity and critical thinking to serve the agenda of the colonial state of producing pliant and subservient students (Kanu, 2006; Kincheloe, 2006). A decolonized curriculum must intentionally promote the cultural self-determination and political agency that were repressed by the colonial education project.

In a nutshell, decolonized education must fundamentally address the “coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being” (Sentime, 2013, p. 344). The master-servant relationship in the classroom must be replaced by the solidarity and dialogue between the teacher and students on the pedestal of equality. Together, teachers and students are producers and disseminators of knowledge. In contradistinction to colonial education, which was enmeshed and rooted in the notion that some people are advanced and others primitive, decolonized education must decenter Western epistemology and consider it as one of the global family of knowledges (De Lissovoy, 2014). Oral traditions, stories, proverbs, folktales, etc. should be re-appropriated in postcolonial curricular imagining, as these indigenous ways of knowing provoke reflection and reflexivity (Kanu, 2006).

Moreover, decolonized curricula must expose students to other knowledge in order to understand the world and to extricate them from the hegemony and dominance of Western knowledge and ontology. The incorporation of indigenous intellectual traditions and knowledge systems in postcolonial curricula is imperative to counter Western hegemonic knowledge and ways of knowing and being (Kincheloe, 2006). To this end, decolonized curricula not only create space for the marginalized peoples but reconstruct knowledge and oppose the supremacy of Eurocentric thought and its universality (De Lissovoy, 2014). Because culture shapes our ways of seeing, the decolonized curriculum should place culture at the center of postcolonial curriculum reform and analysis. Ultimately, students would not develop a singular worldview, but would be exposed

to “epistemological pluriversality,” i.e., not only make postcolonial school curricula culturally relevant but responsive to different histories, sciences, and ways of learning and teaching. Colonial education was a dehumanizing force that took away the African humanity of the learners and produced a “mimic men.” Decolonized education should reclaim African humanity, epistemology, and ontology to discontinue mimicry. In a nutshell, decolonized education should be an instrument of liberation and emancipation from a colonized mind, self-denial and denigration, epistemological racism, and cultural devaluation and degradation. Fundamentally, the people it is supposed to serve must define it for themselves.

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