

The Charter for the Humanities and Social Science

The child of January 2012 will enter the University gate of 2030 to study Aeronautic Engineering confident that she is not driftwood and that her clans come from a long way back.

She would be bi-lingual and her mother tongue and her English will be interchangeably strong-she can write and she can talk and if need be compose poems on periodic tables.

There at the University of 2030 she will be exposed to a deeper understanding of diversity and that Others both from far and near are wonder-full in their own way.

She will come to meet quite a number of them; if she needed a semester to study the poetry of Aime Cesaire in the original because her Caribbean high-school teacher inspired her to, she might take a semester off to study in Dakar or Cairo or Paris.

If she wanted to strengthen her quantum physics, there would be Hyderabad, Beijing or Stanford.

If she wanted to take a breather from complicated equations about the stress modulus in variegated metals, she could do an elective on VhaVenda art or the Nando Song Cycles of the ironsmiths of the past.

She will be an engineer but the humanities and the social sciences would have played their bit part in the making of a good engineer.

And she would look back and wonder about the dark times and the times of confusion that her parents speak about and hopefully she will stop with a smile at that interregnum year of her birth and perchance this Charter is on some shelf gathering dust and it so happens that she pages through it, we hope that she does so in amazement: such a plain, obvious and trivial piece of text.

Our work would have been done.

Yet for her to be “there” it would have meant that the Humanities and the social Sciences were stronger than ever in this country. Most certainly, they would have to have been more than an “adjunct” to Engineering, Science, Technology, Medicine and or Actuarial Qualification. They would have been what this Charter intended.

Firstly, for her to have known that she was not driftwood and that her clans came from a long way back, presupposes a close link between the Teachers of tomorrow and deep Humanities Research. The metaphor comes out of Mazisi Kunene’s poetry and to get the metaphor right, we need to understand his discord, the Zulu intellectuals of the 1940s and 1950s usage of isiZulu, the way their metaphors linked to other sentiments of alienation and to link all that to a historiography that traces how polities and clans emerged after the decline of Great

Zimbabwe and how people lived, who moved where and how her clans, their own oral poetry and memory fits into the bigger picture.

She would enter the University system already an African.

Secondly, it would have meant that what the current Minister of Higher Education is trying to achieve at University level would have been deepened and have become the mainstay of the Basic Education system.

The fact that she could compose and play with at least two languages is not to be taken for granted. The fact that there could have been such dexterity in her schooling system presupposes a generation of teachers that know not only their periodic tables but would have also been schooled in creative writing- the fact that one is born Greek does not make her a Homer or a Platjie.

Thirdly, for her to have been exposed to Others and have understood that which is wonderful in Others at University presupposes seriously Afropolitan and Cosmopolitan spaces where the Gandhian metaphors of appreciating the Other's "wonders" occurs without losing one's integrity. It would have meant a scholarship in Humanities and Social Science which would have overcome the classifications of Race and Ethnicity and their deep historical and oppressive roots.

Fourthly, it would have meant that despite her aptitude for maths and science she would have had a thirst for culture and a capacity to seek the roots of what has been a wonderful contribution to a Trans-Atlantic African sense of the aesthetic and the sublime: to understand Aime Cesaire fully would have meant reading him in French and to do so it would have presupposed an African-wide system for student mobility where the colonial divides of Francophone , Lusophone and Anglophone Africa had melted.

It presupposes an African Renaissance.

Fifthly, in terms of her own aeronautical flight she could think of a world that was about the South (Hyderabad) or the North (Stanford) or the Far East (Beijing). It would presuppose a new global geography and an ability to be unafraid of boundaries and a system that allows for trans-cultural competence.

Sixthly, the Nando Cycles are not some cheap tourist-linked gimmick. They are the songs of the clans of iron-mongers and smiths of the areas from the Soutpansberg to the Limpopo- and the Cycles are the secret songs of their craft and their apprenticeship. They were not just songs, they were ways through which "know-hows" about the craft and iron-working were passed on from generation to generation. She would be expected to be a sophisticated engineer of metals in days to come it would not be strange for her to appreciate their importance in the seminars of tomorrow.

Seventhly, as a woman engineer she would be the exemplar of our constitutional integrity.

It would have taken a revolution in the Humanities and the Social Sciences of South Africa to get her to that point. Excellence is a pre-condition.

This Charter is about that pre-condition.

It means that the Apartheid past, the racial segregation of institutions, their inequality and their blots on the integrity of our scholarship have receded into a regrettable past.

Part of the process in developing the Charter and its recommendations meant a serious look at ourselves. The Task Team, its Reference Group and at our constituency had to dig deep. What was it about our contribution to a broader humanistic scholarship that resonates that makes us feel proud?

What stood out in our encounters with the international community is that we have exercised the world's moral imagination: whether it was the scholarship of the Apartheid period, the transition and the immediate post-Apartheid period, our work provided a calculus of self-understanding for issues around social justice, anti-racism and reconciliation everywhere. In which way can we sustain such a powerful presence in the world of knowledge and self-understanding?

Part of the moral challenge was also about the transgressive religion-linked contribution that has its roots in the colonial past of "heretics" like Colenso or Shembe or the inter-denominational thrust of an Anti-Apartheid stance that has revolutionised thinking and scholarship elsewhere.

We learnt how important our contribution has also been in terms of Musicality, Performance and Art everywhere- from the Guggenheim in New York to the Art and Drama Schools of Delhi. We discovered how seriously our writers, poets and dramatists are taken everywhere but increasingly on our continent and the global south- and how effective they have been in dealing with landscape, land, pain and discord.

We have been made aware how important Gandhian and Neo-Gandhian scholarship has been in the last twenty years despite the images we project as warriors, militarists and revolutionaries.

The fact finally, that the Black and African majority were deemed to be hewers of wood, drillers of rock and haulers of water in the Apartheid design and that even before that the existence in the reserves, compounds and hostels was part of the most ingenious systems of labour exploitation yet devised and the fact that this mass of humanity produced some of the most fascinating movements in recent history and a New Labour Studies that is being emulated elsewhere made us rather confident.

The potential was there for a sturdy Humanities and a sturdy Social Science scholarship. There was no doubt in our minds that they could enrich the quality of all of the fields of inquiry and education if and only if they themselves were robust, honest, challenging and committed to enabling graduates to possess a quality of mind to respond to any socio-economic pressure and demand.

That they were and are a vital component in the higher education system in South Africa and a crucial platform for the development of a value-system beyond racism, derogation and oppression needs no further comment.

After our encounters with more than a thousand colleagues in all the institutions of higher learning and interested parties in government and civil society we are convinced that HSS scholarship can be a repository of heritage, history, memory and meaning as this society strives for peace, prosperity, security and socio-economic well-being.

They are an archive of noble and ignoble ideas of equality and inequality, justice and injustice and stand as a constant monitor of our achievements and failures.

They are the custodian of indigenous and endogenous languages, of cultural formations lost and re-created in the striving for the disenfranchised majority to construct an African modernity, proud of its past and mindful of its historical entanglements.

They are the welcoming home of ideas, concepts, cultures and languages from the rest of this globalising planet and a key filter of the diverse interactions and dignity needed to create a pacific world.

After careful consideration and analysis we arrived at a series of recommendations based on what we feel are very sound principles.

We therefore argue that if the Task Team's Recommendations are implemented we can envision by 2030 that the Humanities and the Social Sciences in our Tertiary system will be a key epicentre of scholarship, pedagogy, community practice and social responsibility in Africa.

We also envision that our institutions and our academic community will be an equal partner in the world's knowledge production and dissemination alongside centres of excellence in the North and the Global South.

In cognisance too that the Tertiary education and research system are central to the social and economic evolution of societies we shall be recommending ways through which our system could be a vital co-agent of change.

All the above- being a dynamic epicentre on the continent, being partners in global initiatives and being key energy centres for ideas of progress and change are central to our vision. We are heartened that CODESRIA would like to see this process evolving into a Pan-African Charter for the Humanities and the Social Sciences.

Here the creative, imaginative, critical and analytical qualities the fields of the Humanities and the Social Sciences bring to science and social and individual well-being have a major role to play alongside natural scientific and technological capacities.

These qualities- (the creative, imaginative, critical and analytical capacities) have to be nurtured in all graduates of our post-secondary education system from the Further Education and Training system, the intermediary institutions we will be proposing and the variegated University system in the country. As much as it would be wonderful as Immanuel Wallerstein

has argued to have space for a curriculum of Physics for Poets, it would be equally pleasing to have a curriculum of Poetics for Physicists and Physicians.

The nurturing and generation of such capacities we are proposing is not in contrast and/or opposition to the worlds of Techno-Science but in dialogue with them. All students have to acquire an understanding of the social, the symbolic and the implications of the recent scientific revolutions- the digital, the genetic and the eco-centric ones. But so have they all to learn about the social revolutions of which we are a recent, uncompromising and proud heir.

In the words of Julius Nyerere (1978), “the ideas imparted by education, or released in the mind through education, should therefore be liberating ideas; the skills acquired by education should be liberating skills. Nothing else can properly be called education. Teaching which induces a slave mentality or a sense of impotence is not education at all.”