

J.D. Jansen, *Knowledge in the Blood: Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past*

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“Afrikaner, *quo vadis?*” The former prime minister of the Union of South Africa, D.F. Malan, asked this question during the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument on 16 December 1949. “Where are you going?” This question was seen by the prolific historian, F.A. van Jaarsveld, as central to the understanding of Afrikaner identity, for the answer is shaped by the *choices* made during times of crisis. The consequences of these choices shape how people react to a crisis and this *reaction* inevitably becomes part and parcel of identity. If we follow this line of thinking, and agree with Hermann Giliomee that apartheid was a radical survival plan, a choice born in a time of crisis, then Afrikaner identity is inescapably linked to apartheid. Consequently, in a world which has proclaimed apartheid to be a crime against humanity, the question raised by Malan remains crucial to many who still call themselves “Afrikaners”.

I deliberately refer to the *quo vadis* question in the inherited sacred history (“heilsgeskiedenis”) of the Afrikaner, because it highlights the essence of Jonathan Jansen’s book, *Knowledge in the Blood: Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past*. As a black South African educator, who lived under the realities of apartheid, Jansen emphatically places the experience of educational transformation in post-apartheid South Africa in sociopolitical and historical context. He particularly addresses the way in which white Afrikaner university students react to the challenge post-apartheid South Africa poses to their inherited racialised identity. The legacy of apartheid is a bitter pill to swallow, especially for those most associated with the term. Jansen sees how transformation

unwittingly contributes to the no-man's-land of identity in which so many Afrikaner students find themselves. The result is both a daring and bold account of “the struggle for change and what it does to people”, referring especially to “how white Afrikaner students experience this change and what it means for them in terms of remembering an inherited past and acting on an uncertain future” (p 19).

Jansen's book is essentially about identity and the nature of knowledge. On the whole the book can be seen as a must-read for teachers and lecturers who are confronted with the challenges of the post-apartheid classroom as well as the realities of institutional transformation. The book is also autobiographical in nature because Jansen locates himself in the midst of events described in the book. He is no stranger in the contemporary political and educational landscape of South Africa. Jansen's inspiration for *Knowledge in the Blood* came mostly from his time as Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria (2000–2007). It is, however, the actions he took in relation to the “Reitz four” as vice-chancellor of the University of the Free State which made him a household name in South Africa. Jansen is a provocative and charismatic opinion-setter and his book is not only accessible to colleagues in institutions of higher education, but written in such a way as to embrace the realities of a wider audience.

*Knowledge in the Blood* is a well-written piece of work and a very stimulating read. Jansen draws on a variety of resources, including the depth of his personal experience as an educator. With candor he relates the historical course of apartheid and the impact of it on young white Afrikaner students. The account of his experiences as the first black Dean of an all-white Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria provides thought-provoking insights into the dynamics of how people are affected by the legacy of apartheid. Moreover, he also assesses the impact of this on the shaping of “new” institutional cultures in universities. I was especially surprised by how I could relate my own experiences in Potchefstroom with the ultra-conservative setting he describes at the University of Pretoria.

Through addressing important questions in his narrative, Jansen makes the book essential reading for educators in the post-apartheid educational setting. One of the most dominant is the question of how to bring transformation to institutions of higher learning (changing students, staff, institutional cultures, racial and gender representativeness) without ostracising existing incumbents or playing one group off against the other. How do we mend the broken lines? He devotes considerable energy in providing possible solutions.

Jansen boldly explains that we cannot just assume that the introduction of logical and rational knowledge into the university curriculum will transform and change the minds of the staff and students in divided communities. This is because a curriculum is not just a text inscribed in the course syllabus for a particular qualification, “but an understanding of knowledge encoded in the dominant beliefs, values and behaviors deeply embedded in all aspects of institutional life” (p 172). He consequently acknowledges the need for engaging emotionally with students in order to address the complex problem of “knowledge in the blood”. This he quite eloquently describes as knowledge embedded in the complex spiritual, emotional, psychological, and political lives of a community; knowledge which comes from the heart as much as from the head; knowledge that is habitual and routinised; knowledge that is emphatic and does not tolerate ambiguity, built on the dead certainty given by its authority through a political and teleological order that authorised such knowledge as singular, sanctified, sure (p 171).

Therefore it is important to engage and interrupt white Afrikaner students' received knowledge, for they too are victims of apartheid. The post-conflict pedagogy Jansen proposes not only requires the setting of disruptive knowledge in a critical dialogue between black and white students, but it also emphasises the role of teachers in confronting students with "their own logics of race and identity; and to engage the new knowledge presented (the Apartheid Museum, for example) through reexamination of the old knowledge given (the Voortrekker Monument, as the counterpoint example)" (p 266). It would also mean juxtaposing common humanity with racialised identities *in and outside the classroom* through emotional engagement with students who sometimes experience an extreme sense of anxiety and uncertainty in a rapidly changing South Africa.

Addressing identity is a daring enterprise. Like most books dealing with a certain cultural group, *Knowledge in the Blood* does not sufficiently problematise Afrikaner identity and consequently lends itself towards oversimplification. Despite the major tendencies of social thought Jansen distinguishes in Afrikaner circles, and his own aversion towards essentialism, the book sometimes makes gross generalisations about Afrikaners which lead to essentialist statements where Jansen transgresses his own rule. One gets the idea that he sometimes sees Afrikaners as a wholly homogeneous community with clearly defined boundaries. What about Afrikaners who actively participated in the struggle against apartheid? Afrikaners who voted for the Progressive Party? The consequences of this simplification can lead to the perpetuation of a twisted "inherited identity" deriving from Jansen's description of the "inherited knowledge" passed onto the first generation of post-apartheid Afrikaner students. Thus, the acknowledgement of the importance of personal experiences and individual agency are both strength and weakness in the book.

Despite the above mentioned critical comments, *Knowledge in the Blood* attests to the beautiful possibilities standing before South African educators today, to not only change our students, but to also be changed by them. The possibility of change is inherent in the "blood" and, similar to the healing effects of a real blood transfusion, the transfusion of new knowledge can overcome the authority of received knowledge. Thus, the book is also a testament to the notion that identity is not as fixed as Van Jaarsveld would have had it. This notion changes the whole concept of the *quo vadis* question in that the transformation of racialised identities in South Africa may well produce hope instead of a crisis if it is built on the kind of leadership and understanding revealed by academics like Jonathan Jansen.

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