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Meyer, Beryl Patricia

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THE WESTERN CANON IN A MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR SOUTH AFRICA

Beryl Patricia Meyer

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ABSTRACT

This report confronts the issue of the globalisation of European culture and its significance for the Western canon in South African education. It considers the difficulty of defending the canon as cultural resource for a local minority while avoiding the imposition of the globally dominant Anglophone culture on all South Africans.

It is argued that whatever in the canon can be freely accepted as advancing the interests of all South Africans should qualify for inclusion in a common curriculum, but that other canonical works should be regarded as minority culture in the same way as aspects of traditional African culture. An attempt is made to establish a perspective from which Africanism and the defence of the canon can be seen as congruent and compatible aims, equally deserving of accommodation within a multicultural curriculum.

KEY WORDS

Western canon
Culture
Minority rights
Multiculturalism
Curriculum
Africanism
Eurocentrism

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.



May, 1998

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Some of the material in Chapter II, pp.17-18, and in Chapter III, pp.23-24, was read as an 'argument note' at the Fifth Biennial Meeting 20-23 August 1996, of the International Network of Philosophers of Education, and subsequently appeared in Volume 2, pp. 46-48, of the collected papers and notes from that Conference.

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I SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

There is now an urgent need for debate on the place of the Western canon in South Africa's schools and universities. The danger is that apathy will allow the abandonment of the canon on the basis of shallow arguments and unexamined assumptions lifted uncritically from First World contexts. Important options may be destroyed for future generations in South Africa before ever we have undertaken a careful analysis of the place of the Western canon in the South African cultural mosaic. This Report arose from my wish to preserve a space in the curriculum for the classics of European literature, philosophy, art and music. It is an attempt to construct a conceptual framework within which the canon would be entitled to a reasonable defence untainted by universalist claims or cultural supremacism.

There are only two serious and defensible objections to the Western canon in education anywhere. One holds that the canon lacks 'relevance' or instrumental value. It has to be conceded that South Africa's first priority is to educate for economic growth so that living standards can be raised for the poorest sectors of the community. But once this overriding curricular need has been provided for, some part of the remaining time will surely be given to education for spiritual and aesthetic needs. It is only when one argues for the inclusion of the canon in this remaining time that one is confronted by the second objection, which holds that the retention of the canon in the South African curriculum would be culturally hegemonic, in that imposing it on people who cherish a moral and aesthetic heritage that is not Western, would militate against their self-realisation and reinforce the dominant culture[1] with all that this implies for what Charles Taylor (1992) has described as a demeaning self-image. Since space will not permit an exploration of both of these objections to the canon, and since, unlike the first, the second, or cultural, objection raises questions peculiar to the South African context, it is to the second of these issues that this Report will be devoted.

[1]Feminist objections run along similar lines.

Multiculturalism in opposition to the canon

The idea that the Western canon can be rejected on the grounds that its inclusion reinforces a dominant culture leads us to the issue of cultural difference. In developed countries made up of culturally diverse communities, demands for recognition by minorities have resulted in concessions to multiculturalism from majorities. Multiculturalism in education is regarded by First World minorities as a lifeline. And in the United States, Britain and Australia, supporters of a multiculturalism aimed at benefiting minorities have directed their attacks at the Western canon as the high culture of an unquestionably dominant majority. According to Harold Bloom (1995) this attack has been so successful that even elite universities in the United States have modified their courses of study to placate the multiculturalists. He writes of '... allied resenters ... attempting to reduce and scatter Shakespeare, aiming to undo the Canon .... Doubtless the assault [on Dante] will come, since the assorted multiculturalists would have difficulty finding a more objectionable great poet than Dante ... politically incorrect to the highest degree' (Bloom, 1995, p.76). Bloom's combative tone is most obvious in: 'Finding myself now surrounded by ... multiculturalists unlimited ....' and various other '[r]esenters of the aesthetic value of literature ...' (Bloom, 1995, pp.517-518). And Harold Bloom at bay is only one prominent First World defender of the canon who sees multiculturalism as challenging its claims. Charles Taylor (1992) assumes that there will be conflict between multiculturalists and supporters of the canon. A sense of the inevitability of this conflict is his point of departure for what he considers to be a necessary compromise. To women and students from excluded groups it is 'as though all creativity and worth inhered in males of European provenance. Enlarging and changing the curriculum is, therefore, essential ...' (Taylor, 1992, p.65). Multiculturalism and canonicity are beginning to look like irreconcilable ideals in the Northern Hemisphere.

My aim is to turn this First World objection on its head and argue that not only is multiculturalism compatible with retention of the canon, but that it is only within a well-structured, multicultural framework that the canon in South Africa can be defended at all. One of the many ways it can be viewed here is as the high culture of a numerical

minority. One of the problems to be confronted is establishment of the minority status, and argument for the minority rights, of the South African ethno-cultural group most closely associated with the dominant culture of the twentieth century, while at the same time ensuring that the needs and rights of the disadvantaged majority are not compromised in any way. I believe that it is possible to defend the place of the Western canon here, but that this can be done only once the outlines of a viable model for South African multicultural education have been set out. Constructing such a model, grounded as it must be, on a careful analysis of existing and potential relationships among cultures in South Africa, will be the chief means to my aim which is to defend the place of the canon in education here. In brief, though like Harold Bloom, I place high value on the Western canon in education, I differ from him in that so far from being antithetical to a defence of the canon I see multicultural education as offering the best chance for its continued incorporation into South African curricula.

The legacy of Apartheid

In a recent paper Wally Morrow (1996) has asserted that a multicultural approach is neither necessary nor wise at this stage of South Africa's social and political development, and that it is only among intellectuals in Europe and North America that multicultural education is discussed at all. Because these countries have long pursued the initial goals of eighteenth century European political thought which focused on universal human rights and the equal dignity of all citizens, they have attained fundamental conditions of political stability and social cohesion. With this indispensable foundation laid down, Western societies can now, according to Morrow, afford the luxury of tinkering with what Taylor has dubbed a 'politics of difference' (Taylor, 1992, p.38), that is, the new phase of liberalism which recognises that differences among groups of people may be acknowledged and even fostered, without compromising their solidly established rights to equal dignity as individuals. Multicultural movements are closely connected with this second phase of liberalism. Morrow's contention is that in South Africa the first phase of liberalism - that which entrenches universal and equal individual rights - is not yet sufficiently well established and he complains of the 'high moral tone

of much of the discourse of multicultural education' which he says 'has a hollow ring to it if it is the harbinger of social disintegration' (Morrow, 1996, p.255). The 'high moral tone' which so irritates Morrow arises from the complacently majoritarian perspective of the chief spokesmen for multiculturalism in the developed world. It is no wonder that Morrow is disenchanted with the South African advocates of multiculturalism. Most of them are white, English-speaking, liberals who have uncritically adopted the rhetoric of global Anglo-American culture in this as in so many other spheres. In the field of multicultural education, this complacently majoritarian perspective is entirely inappropriate for a group who constitute a numerical minority. Naively, they assume that it is they who will be making the concessions, that it is they who will graciously allow a niche for the mere African tradition in a backdrop which they generally do not even bother to define, but which is of course, their version of the globally dominant Anglo-American culture. Their own minority culture is 'a particularism masquerading as the universal' (Taylor, 1992, p.44). This faulty perspective, left uncorrected, is likely to produce a backlash which will sweep the canon away together with the woefully inappropriate assumptions that underpin current attempts to defend it here. One of the aims of this Report is to encourage white, English-speaking apologists for the canon to reorient themselves and their mission in relation to ineluctable South African realities. And this done, perhaps Morrow's objections to multiculturalism in South Africa will have been adequately countered.

One of Morrow's (1996) criticisms of South African multiculturalism arises from his not unexpected argument that Apartheid was one form of the politics of difference, so that South Africans, having recently experienced a politics of difference, already know that they do not like it. Opposition to the Apartheid regime was inspired by the politics of equal dignity and universal rights which has yet to consolidate its victory. It must be conceded that these are indeed unpropitious times for an assertion of minority rights in South Africa. It may be that Morrow is right in thinking that fostering a politics of difference in the aftermath of the Apartheid regime may carry with it the risk of social disintegration: these are valid fears. But the ugly truth is that Apartheid's so-called politics of difference was a cruel and stupid local response to a fear experienced by minorities everywhere, fear that in a state run on the lines of a liberal politics of equal

dignity they would not be able to retain a distinctive cultural identity. Whether or not such a fear is morally admissible in a privileged, or indeed any, minority is not the issue. That fear is real and, if ignored or brushed aside, may provoke the social disintegration against which Morrow so rightly cautions us. Rothermund (1986) states that 'when there is ... a privileged minority and an underprivileged majority, education must establish an equilibrium and ward off the forces of disintegration' (Rothermund, 1986, p.2). The previous regime's exploitation of cultural difference as a pretext for harsh discrimination does not mean that cultural difference should no longer be accorded any significance. We should not swing blindly with the pendulum of history, from one state of imbalance to its opposite. Certainly the politics of equal dignity and the need for social cohesion may claim priority. But Kenneth Strike (1996) rejects the idea that all other interests must give way to the requirements of citizenship. He holds instead that 'the requirements of citizenship must be *balanced against* other kinds of interests' (Strike, 1996, p.51). If it is claimed, and this seems to be what Morrow implies, that this balance is a luxury which a fragile democracy and undeveloped society cannot afford, it can be argued that failure to achieve an equilibrium may also lead to disaster if not in the shape of immediate civil unrest, then as large-scale emigration of minorities with their skills, skills paid for by all the peoples of this country. This alarming trend can already be discerned.

Context is all: in a fascist context the politics of difference is oppressive and humiliating. In a liberal context it has very different implications. Of course Morrow's point is that the liberal context for a benign politics of difference is not yet established in this country. But are we to assume that he thinks it would be possible or even desirable for us to trace the course of social and political evolution taken by Western countries in some sort of step-by-step imitative pattern? First, a politics of equal dignity and then when social cohesion has been achieved - and presumably this would take decades if not centuries - a few concessions to the politics of difference? Or does he assume that by that time the minorities will have been assimilated? Social and political evolution here can hardly be expected to follow any predictable historical pattern. This is not the eighteenth or nineteenth century, and as the demand for acknowledgement of difference goes up from Belgium to New Zealand, and from Turkey to Kashmir, it is going to be difficult to silence such calls here. What are the alternatives to

multiculturalism in South Africa? Morrow does not say. Can he be in favour of uncompromising assimilationism?[2] Judging by his earlier writings he does not seem to be an Africanist so it is not clear just who would be assimilated and to what. In *Chains of thought* Morrow (1989) speculates on whether it would be possible to provide an education not bound to any one culture or tradition. Conceding the cultural specificity of schooling he argues the need for a more cautious and sceptical approach to the idea of education as culturally specific. And musing about Jomo Kenyatta's views, he expresses the hope that Kenyatta thought of education as 'not concerned with any particular heritage or culture but rather with achieving a measure of autonomy from any culture or heritage' (Morrow, 1989, p.12). One doubts whether cultural neutrality, culture-free education, could ever be possible. This very 'autonomy' from group aspirations of which Morrow speaks, is itself one of the most cherished ideals of Western individualism in its most extreme form. Rating the spiritual emancipation of individuals higher than the comforts of familial and social interlinkage is uniquely characteristic of Western intellectuals and is generally abhorrent to people of African or Asian background.

In this Report Morrow's challenge will be answered, his dismissal of the importance of culture will be countered and the ground for a multicultural approach in South Africa will be laid down, first by a brief discussion of the significance of culture as a factor in all human societies, then by some suggestions for a new perspective on the local canon-bearing culture in relation to other South African cultures. We in South Africa cannot avoid confronting the implications of cultural pluralism. Because of the historical background, the subject may be more delicate and distasteful here than it is elsewhere. Nevertheless, difference will not go away from here any more than it will vanish miraculously elsewhere. The goal is a model which would take account of difference without favouring any one group or disadvantaging any other.

[2]If so, the 'high moral tone' he complains of in the multiculturalists would be as nothing to his own high moral tone if all he can offer the South African cultural minorities is a penitential self-immolation.

Outline of the following three chapters

In the second chapter of this Report a brief reference to the significance of culture in human affairs and the rights of cultural minorities, will be followed by a discussion of the complex problems connected with the culture of local English-speaking whites, because theirs is the constituency most closely associated with calls for the retention of the Western canon in South African education. Essential to multicultural education is clarity on concepts such as 'majority' and 'minority' culture, and in this country the issues are complex and convoluted. All current attempts to defend the canon here are bedevilled by the confusion arising from a unique entanglement of the dominant contemporary assimilating global culture and the local minority culture most closely linked to the Western canon. Past privilege, and the extensive overlap between their own tradition and the dominant global culture, together have given rise to a situation in which efforts to defend any aspect of the local English tradition inevitably appear as hegemonic and supremacist. An attempt will therefore be made to assess the implications for the canon of the globalisation of Western culture, especially in its Anglo-American guise.

In the third chapter, a viable framework for multicultural education in South Africa will be outlined together with suggestions for ways in which the Western canon could be incorporated into such a framework. In formulating the basic structure I shall have recourse to the work done by John Rawls and Kenneth Strike who defined and refined the concept of the overlapping consensus in a pluralist society. It will be argued that a core curriculum for South Africa's schools should comprise components both from the global culture and from whatever in the local cultures could be freely and rationally accepted by all communities as beneficial to themselves. This common core curriculum would foster unifying, national, and developmental interests. Parts of the Western canon could well find a negotiated place in such a core curriculum. But it will also be argued that provision should be made both for Africanism and for minority rights, giving all communities the option of continued access to whatever in their tradition remains important to themselves though it may offer no obvious demonstrable benefits to other communities. This access could take the form of elective curricular components freely available on an optional basis to individual students from all communities.

The fourth chapter will develop themes from the second and third chapters, arguing that much of the Western canon should be defended only as a particular and minority interest and incorporated into electives providing for minority interests. It will be argued that English-speaking whites should accept the implications of the minority status appropriate to their numbers, ceasing to claim universal value for the canon in its entirety. Every effort will be made to stress the congruence of Africanist ideals with the aims of apologists for the Western canon. If we draw on the vocabulary of David Apter, both of these ideals can be seen as expressions of primordialism, or a legitimate desire to preserve a cherished tradition in the face of the onslaught from global mass culture. Within a fair and equitable arrangement, the Western canon can be incorporated without prejudice to South Africans of Asian and African background. It cannot, however, be defended within existing Eurocentred structures nor should it be accommodated within any new multicultural framework constructed on a basis of First World attitudes and assumptions.

II THE ISSUE OF CULTURE: MAJORITY AND MINORITY CULTURES IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE PROBLEM OF CULTURAL DOMINANCE

Any group could see itself as bound by a common culture: a social class, a religious grouping, employees of a business enterprise, or people of a particular age group, gender or sexual persuasion. But in South Africa the educationally important issues revolve around the cultures associated with groupings based on race, ethnicity and language. These ethnically based cultures are associated with values, attitudes and beliefs, as well as with the more superficial manifestations of culture such as food, dress, music and festivals. Roger Scruton (1991) lists the seven elements of culture which he says feature in educational debates. The first five are: language, including dialect, and speech melody; religion; social ceremonies and manners; morality; popular entertainment, sport and leisure. But it is the sixth and seventh elements to which I shall be returning in the pages that follow. They are: political culture including a sense of law and justice, and expectations as to the correct way to resolve conflicts; and high culture in which aesthetic values are paramount and to which category the Western canon obviously belongs.

Culture and Apartheid

We begin with a cautionary note from Wally Morrow (1996) who reminds us of the conception of culture prevalent in the apartheid era and still strongly associated with contemporary South African approaches to multiculturalism. This attitude arose from Afrikaner determination to preserve their unique culture - seen by them as sacred - and from their use of Apartheid as a strategy for the attainment of this end. Morrow is concerned that in the aftermath of Apartheid many South Africans still believe that the differences between cultures being sacrosanct, each culture, in its supposed uniqueness, should be viewed with reverent awe and never modified or challenged. But there is no pure culture, and Morrow stresses the importance for teacher education of a conception of culture which would allow for the continual modifications actually taking place. Cultural difference should never be an excuse for avoiding cultural dialogue and

interaction. It is, he says, 'the interfaces and mutual enrichment between existing cultures [that] provide the most promising node for the generation of the social cohesion that we need for our survival' (Morrow, 1996, p.262).

At least Morrow concedes the existence of different cultures, reluctant as he is to allow any educational significance to them. It may even be that the best provision for 'interfaces and mutual enrichment between existing cultures' would be a well conceived multicultural curriculum! A multiculturalism simply lifted from First World practice could not answer our needs and so we need to insist on a rigorous and searching analysis of the South African situation before embarking on a multicultural project. Morrow's emphasis on the importance of social cohesion can be endorsed, but social peace would not be enhanced by ignoring the cultural issue. Admittedly there seems not to be too much controversy at present; one anticipates that the issue will gradually come to the fore. And already there are signs that African academics are restive about the current dominance of Western classics and Western values in school and university curricula. Africanists have a right to be concerned. This Western dominance may indeed be alienating to African children and students and should not go unchallenged. But a reaction which swept away all vestiges of the European classics substituting a universalizing Africanisation of the humanities for the present Eurocentric curriculum would be equally unacceptable and alienating to minorities. This Report rests on the assumption that the present imbalance should be corrected and future distortions prevented.

The significance of culture

The hope of a culture-free education probably derives from that eighteenth century European Enlightenment vision which has been so momentous in its beneficent political consequences. The idea of a universal human nature underpins the eighteenth century notions of universal human rights on which the politics of equal dignity is based and whose consolidation Morrow believes must take precedence in South Africa. Obviously,

this vision, being a product of European culture, is not in itself culture-free. Geertz (1973) outlines the Enlightenment view of human nature as follows:

> The great, vast variety of differences among men, in beliefs and values, in customs and institutions, both over time and from place to place, is essentially without significance in defining his nature. It consists of mere accretions, distortions even, overlaying and obscuring what is truly human - the constant, the general, the universal - in man.
>
> (Geertz, 1973, p.35)

This is the underlying assumption behind the liberal conception of human rights and presumably it also lies behind our assumption of the universal value of the Western canon, ironically fuelling cultural supremacism. The Enlightenment view of culture has held sway in recent decades, but it may be an oversimplification and it implies that culture is relatively insignificant in human affairs, or at least in politics. Kenneth Strike says that in order to diminish conflict, the universalizing kind of liberalism will emphasize non-cognitive cultural activities such as cooking and music (Strike, 1994), and David Apter warns that there is more to primordialism than the sort of nostalgia which encourages the making of woven blankets or modern copies of traditional artifacts (Apter, 1977).

The idea that there may be more to culture than a set of visible rituals and practices masking the universal man beneath, is developed by Geertz (1973) whose conclusions are based largely on evidence from the fossil record suggesting that the development of cultural artifacts and symbols did not await the attainment of the modern human brain, but preceded it. It was once assumed that complex cultural patterns began taking shape only after human brain development had reached present levels. If this were so, then the conviction that human nature is universal and independent of culture would be justified. But anatomical evidence for the timing of brain development strongly suggests that there may not be a universal human nature underlying all cultures. Throughout the earliest periods during which the human brain itself was evolving, it seems that language, myth, art and technology were also developing, so that in these formative stages brain, body and culture were in interactive development, each shaping the progress of the other. A

selective advantage would have been given to individuals most able to take advantage of available cultural resources, and Geertz's conclusion is that since the human central nervous system evolved in interaction with culture, it cannot now organize our experience or guide our behaviour without direction from systems of significant symbols. Our genes provide only very general response capacities; we are born with a formless human potential, offering great flexibility. But this does mean that people are dependent on extragenetic control mechanisms, or significant symbols, for the realisation of their inchoate potential. The attainment of specific patterns of symbolic meaning provides the conceptual structures which mould what would otherwise be formless talent. Geertz's conclusion is that culture should not be regarded as mere outward custom but rather as a kind of internal software - a set of programmes - for the governing of behaviour. It cannot be dismissed as superficial ornament. Geertz sees culture as the principal basis for the specificity of meaningful human lives, and as an essential condition for our humanity itself.

Like our nervous system, our ideas, our beliefs, our behaviours, even our emotions, are to a considerable extent cultural products, however much they may emanate from innate genetic capacities. In Geertz's opinion it is neither a universal subcultural human nature, nor a cross-cultural consensus that can unite us. What all human beings do have in common is the need for a specific culture to complete their humanity. Indeed if the idea of a culture-free human nature is an illusion, then attachment to particular forms of culture cannot be regarded as mere caprice or prejudice. Geertz argues that human beings are incomplete animals who finish themselves through highly particular forms of culture, not through some vague abstraction like culture-in-general.

The capacity to speak or to smile is of course genetic. But the ways in which these innate capacities translate into action are surely cultural 'as is perhaps demonstrated by the Balinese definition of a madman as someone who, like an American, smiles when there is nothing to laugh at' (Geertz, 1973, p.50). Geertz continues:

> Between the basic ground plans for our life that our genes lay down - the capacity to speak or to smile -and the precise behaviour we in fact execute - speaking English in a certain tone of voice,

> smiling enigmatically in a delicate social situation - lies a complex set of significant symbols under whose direction we transform the first into the second, the ground plans into the activity .... In Java ... the people quite flatly say, "To be human is to be Javanese". Small children, boors, simpletons, the insane, the flagrantly immoral are said to be *ndurung djawa*, "not yet Javanese".
>
> A "normal" adult capable of acting in terms of the highly elaborate system of etiquette, possessed of the delicate aesthetic perceptions associated with music, dance, drama, and textile design, responsive to the subtle promptings of the divine residing in the stillnesses of each individual's inward-turning consciousness, is *sampun djawa*, "already Javanese", that is, already human. To be human ... is not just to talk, it is to utter the appropriate words and phrases in the appropriate social situations in the appropriate tone of voice and with the appropriate evasive indirection.
>
> (Geertz, 1973, pp.50-53)

The implication, for those of us who are not Javanese, is of course not that the Javanese alone are truly human, but rather that the Javanese are aware that attaining their full potential means drawing on all the cultural resources available to them, resources whose interconnected subtleties indicate a lengthy historical evolution. If certain behaviour patterns are felt by communities to be definitive of their own conception of humanity, then the importance for education of the symbols used as cultural mechanisms for the inculcation of those behaviours cannot be overestimated. On this issue, any Africanist lobby and all defenders of the Western canon should be of one mind. Both Africanism and Eurocentrism should be viewed with a more sympathetic understanding than has been vouchsafed to them in the past.

If we accept Geertz's outline of human development, then culture as coeval with that development, and definitive of the truly human, cannot be summarily dismissed as a superficiality. The passions roused by the issue are easier to understand and the importance of the cultural issue in educational debate more difficult to elude. A new and common culture cannot be consciously constructed by administrators and bureaucrats intent on nation-building, any more than a living language can be constructed by linguists and lexicographers. Cultures and languages do change and interact, but only through innumerable infinitesimally small choices made by large numbers of people over several

generations. And if, in any epoch, particular communities feel happy in the possession of an historic accumulation of symbolic resources, such attachments cannot be casually brushed aside by resorting to the Enlightenment view, which is that beneath the veneer of a particular culture, is the underlying natural man. Obviously this view of cultures is in itself culturally specific.

Geertz's conclusions lend weight to Kenneth Strike's caution when he warned in 1996 that liberalism could not be hastily dismissive about cultural diversity or fail to take account of culture-based differences when discussing pluralism or exploring the implications of an overlapping consensus. In 1991 Roger Scruton stated quite flatly that no educational process could avoid imparting some culture to those who participated in it, because anyone who taught children anything, inevitably also taught them language, good manners, and morality. As for cultural neutrality, Goodwin (1994) maintained that student teachers could not be fair to other cultures unless they had become consciously aware of the cultural vantage point from which they themselves viewed cultures other than their own. In order to make the transition from self to other they had first to know themselves. Ignoring the cultural issue, or striving for a culture-free approach would not help to foster the necessary awareness.

It is white English-speaking South Africans who tend to operate from within an unexamined assumption of the universality of their own very particular culture. This is not attributable to innate ill-will but has come about for historical reasons. Their culture is closely connected with globalised enlightenment forms. One of the chief aims of this Report is to articulate and clarify the ill-defined and unspoken for this group, whose ignorance of the basis for their own vantage point is beginning to rouse the justifiable ire of Africanists and may end in the removal of the Western canon from the humanities curriculum. Since some cultural transmission is unavoidable, how much better that it be conscious, acknowledged and structured than that it be unconscious and insidious, as at present where the unexamined universalist claims of white English speakers may be unacceptable to people nourished up to now by African or Asian symbols. Jim Garrison (1996) reminds us of Heidegger's view of human beings as contingent socio-historical constructions. It follows that the notion of a self entirely independent of culture must be

abandoned. The academic disciplines that disclose cultural conditioning 'themselves are cultural practices .... A liberating education teaches that culture has us before we have it ....' (Garrison, 1996, p.124). The canon contains within it many of the symbolic devices, inextricably linked with what may be fruitful in English minority culture, but whose universality should not be assumed.

Minority cultures in the South African context

There seems no way to avoid grasping the multicultural nettle, yet Morrow (1996) would rather we eschewed it, for, says he, the debate about multicultural education does not take place in Somalia, Burundi, or Chechnya, but rather among European and North American intellectuals. But South Africa's population cannot simplistically be grouped with the inhabitants of Somalia or Burundi.[3] The notion of multicultural education being reserved for disadvantaged minorities must be rejected for this would entitle all minorities in the United States or Europe to its benefits, and consign South Africa's minorities to the melting pot. To insist that the only culture acceptable in South Africa must be African merely because South Africans of European and Asian descent happen to be living on an area of the globe marked 'Africa' is both simplistic and outdated. And since people everywhere tend to persist in an irrational desire to pass something of their own ways to their children, such a wish would not be extraordinarily culpable in the white minorities of South Africa. The view held in some circles that their European-derived culture is irredeemably tainted with the guilt of colonialism and racism and, therefore, not worthy of consideration is partly dependent on acceptance of the principle of collective guilt, which is of doubtful validity to say the least, and partly on the assumption that throughout history it is only people of European descent who have conquered or enslaved other peoples or have harboured racist feelings. What is certain is that European colonial conquest and racism are the best documented examples of such phenomena because, true to the European intellectual tradition, Europeans themselves have subjected their own history to a rigorous scholarly analysis and an unsparing moral

[3]What Morrow omits to tell us is that multiculturalism in the developed world is espoused by, and presumed to benefit, among others, the descendants of immigrants from places like Somalia, Burundi and Chechnya.

judgement. We need not accept that a penitential self-immolation on the altar of nation-building is the only option for European-descended cultural minorities whether white or brown.

The people of South Africa find themselves in a situation not foreseen by any of their ancestors. Neither the African majority under pressure from the advocates of modernisation, nor the minorities under pressure from nation-builders need feel under a moral obligation to renounce their culture and adopt another in its stead. In long-established states to which families and individuals have recently migrated in the full knowledge of what kind of majority ethos and what manner of state and constitution they were inflicting on themselves and their descendants, minorities should accept mainstream culture in the state schools while maintaining their own language and customs in the private sphere. This was accepted by millions of Russian, Italian, Greek, Portuguese and German migrants to the United States, Australia and South Africa. In this category in my view are recent Spanish-speaking migrants to the United States and Asian minorities in Britain. Glazer (1977) recounts arguments put forward some time ago in the United States to the effect that conquered Hispanics and enslaved Blacks had a right to special cultural protection, unlike white ethnic groups who had chosen to immigrate and, therefore, to assimilate. Such a view is entirely consistent with my own. Native Americans, African-Americans, Australian Aboriginals and Welsh speakers in Britain find themselves included in a modern state as a *direct* result of force exerted against their ancestors. Cultures in this second category do have a right to protection against encroachment by the majority. And then there are minorities in a third category. In countries inhabited by a variety of peoples washed up by the tides of history, long before it was possible to foresee the eventual constitutional future, all cultures should enjoy equal protection. Such societies are not melting pots since constitutions and state boundaries were later superimposed on existing cultural communities. In this category, to name only a few, are: Turkey, Iraq, Canada, India and South Africa. The South African minorities need not feel under a guilty obligation to renounce their cultures and all the myth, symbol, and literature associated with them. They have a right to cultivate them within state schools and universities. The educational issue is how to structure access to them in such a way that the reasonable wishes of minorities can be

accommodated without the white English minority imposing their own supposedly universal culture on others. Africanist aspirations must be catered for and the deprivation and humiliation to which previous regimes have subjected the African majority must not be perpetuated.

In the aftermath of a minority regime which used cultural difference as a pretext for discrimination, the times could not be less propitious for an assertion of minority claims in South Africa where any attempt to assert cultural identity in education is certain to be seen as - and quite likely to be - a pretext for a continued monopoly of knowledge and wealth. Nevertheless South Africa is the kind of society in which all cultures have a right to co-exist in the state schools and an attempt must be made to negotiate a multicultural curriculum policy. But any viable policy will be grounded in a clear understanding of actual and potential relationships of cultural dominance.

Cultural dominance and the problem of English-based culture in South Africa

Much may be learned from the experience of other heterogeneous societies. However, neither the American, nor the Australian, still less the British, model can be adopted uncritically. These three first world models take as their starting point an acknowledged mainstream or majority culture which is so dominant and all-pervasive by virtue of overwhelming numbers or centuries-old tradition that its own survival is taken for granted. From the vantage point of the minority cultures this dominant culture is the oppressor in adversarial relation to whose values they define their own. From within the majority culture the view is the same in reverse: for each of the minority cultures a niche can be carved from the extensive space occupied by the all-pervasive mainstream culture.

But what can such terms as 'majority' or 'minority' culture mean in South Africa? In the urban areas the dominant values arise from Global-Anglophone culture whose status derives from its association with economic and social empowerment, which in turn arises from the known global dominance of the culture. European immigrants - Portuguese,

Jews, Greeks and others - have accepted a considerable degree of cultural assimilation into an English educational tradition. But in the schools and universities of the future, Africanists, Afrikaners, and perhaps Moslems, while accepting the global language as medium of instruction are likely to view the local English educational tradition as an oppressive one in need of transformation if not outright abolition. The trouble with viewing the globally dominant culture as majority culture and by implication as oppressor culture (as it is seen by minorities in First World countries) is that a parochial version of it happens to be the community culture associated with a very small group of whites who could conceivably claim for themselves some of the consideration due to a minority. The status of the Western canon is inextricably entangled with this paradox which must be confronted if we are to make any reasonable and defensible claims for the canon in South African education. *English culture in South Africa is a vulnerable particularism burdened with the universalist claims of a global culture, and the canon has its place in both the particularist and the universalist strata.* Because we confuse the local with the global, attempts by the local minority to defend aspects of their tradition, are inevitably condemned as hegemonic. Their language is the universal matrix of South African education, which brings with it the risk that eventually the only aspects of their culture included in a common curriculum will be those which, like the language itself, have instrumental value for other groups. The problem is compounded because, seduced by the international rhetoric of multiculturalism, they themselves assume that the onus is on them, in their benevolence, to tolerate, even encourage, some superficial concessions to multiculturalism - concessions that will not affect the mainstream status of their own culture. This is an entirely inadequate response to the realities of the South African situation, but is an inevitable consequence of their complacent and erroneous view of themselves as custodians of a global language. Only once the local community culture has been disentangled from it can the global Anglo-American culture be viewed - and resisted - in South Africa, as a dominant majority culture. For South Africa is not Britain or the United States where the purveyors of an English-language based culture can feel assured of indefinite majority status.

Particularism and the burden of the Universal

Underlying this Report is a sense of urgency arising from a growing sense of crisis within the cultural community most closely associated with pleas for the retention of the canon in the curriculum. An alarmingly high proportion of white English-speaking South Africans either plan to emigrate or regret the fact that they are unable to do so. Those who leave do so with reluctance 'for the sake of the children'. The easy explanation is that their fears, whether or not well-founded, are for their economic and financial future. And no doubt this is true. But unvoiced, because undefined, uneasiness about cultural continuity also plays a part in motivating the emigrants. Their fears are unvoiced because of the confusion about cultural identity so pervasive in this community. And the imputation of collective guilt, always hovering beyond the stated terms of any inter-cultural discussion is part of the problem of unease and insecurity. A sense of belonging and the option of retaining what has been historically valued are far more likely to promote generosity of spirit and a willingness to share, and help protect, the cultures of others, than is the uneasy conviction that those others regard one's own culture as a foreign imposition ultimately to be rooted out.

South African whites, unlike minorities elsewhere, cannot claim special consideration on the grounds that they have suffered disadvantage. On the contrary, they have inflicted it on others. And they have not had a demeaning image of themselves projected on to them by others. As purveyors of the global culture they have projected such images on to people of colour, people who will be struggling to combat the damage for a long time to come, and who will probably want to draw on African tradition in the course of their struggle. For the minorities all that can reasonably be asked of the education system is some part of what Strike (1996) has called 'A modest list of ... culture based educational interests' including 'the need for initiation into a culture ... the need for a coherent and respected identity ... and the opportunity for cultural reproduction' (Strike, 1996, p.59). This would go some way toward stemming the tide of emigration and anchoring this community more surely in the country of their birth.

The protection offered by the South African constitution to cultural groups is readily accessible where the basis for defining the culture is clearer. Afrikaners, like other ethnic groups can define themselves by a language shared as mother-tongue by white and brown Afrikaners; Hindus, Moslems and Jews can enjoy protection for a culture definable in terms of religious affiliation; but for mother-tongue speakers of English, both white and brown, *there is no definable cultural sphere for which a claim can be made*. The furore over the former 'English Service' radio station when it became SAFM is quite instructive in the li[illegible] throws on their dilemma. The idea behind this transformation - that there should be a multicultural radio channel for all South Africans, using the universal language - was actually quite a good one. Presumably the idea was that each language group would continue to enjoy cultural specificity from one of those radio stations that use the languages of the various ethnic groups, and that in addition all should have access to the shared multicultural channel. What the planners forgot - and later refused to concede - was that the universal language also happened to be the cultural vehicle for a particular minority whose continued access to a culturally exclusive station was thus the only one to be brushed aside when the new multicultural channel was instituted. Interestingly enough, the survival of Radio Lotus implied a recognition that the universal language *can* be culturally specific and minority oriented - in the one case.

Another source of the difficulty of limiting the dominance of this group by defining a sphere for them, arises from the way that white English-speakers themselves have always viewed their inherited tradition. If they have an identity at all, then a very important part of it is in their cultural and linguistic links with the global 'English-speaking world' meaning of course, first language speakers elsewhere rather than second language speakers in their own country. To anyone who places supreme value on politico-geographical loyalties this must seem profoundly shocking. But the idea that one's supreme loyalty must be devolved to the geographical entity where one resides is a relatively new one in human history and particularly prevalent in South Africa. The international affiliations of White English-speaking South Africans[4] are probably no more a heinous sin than the extra-territorial affiliations of Catholics, Jews or Moslems.

[4]'White English-speaking South Africans' is an extraordinarily cumbersome appellation.

But defining a local cultural sphere and a South African identity, without necessarily depriving themselves of what they have until now, most valued in that incipient identity, raises problems that White English-speaking South Africans must face as they grapple with the paradox inherent in their situation. Where the global universal language of empowerment is concerned, they are going to have to relinquish rights of ownership, or the right to set standards for second-language speakers. However, it may be reasonable for them to request that they, like other South Africans, be permitted to transmit to their own children, in some of the state schools, that version of English with which they feel most comfortable. And they have a right to draw on whatever elements of their historic culture they may choose, so long as they do not force them on others. They need - and the curriculum planners need - to be quite clear on the distinction between those elements of the global Anglo-American culture which have instrumental value for all South Africans, and those aspects of their historic English culture which have value only for themselves and which need neither be surrendered nor forced on others. Until these distinctions have been clarified, any defence of the Western canon will continue to rest on very shaky ground. Making the crucial distinction between universal and particularist elements in South African English culture is an essential prelude to the construction of any multicultural curriculum which would allow a place for the Western canon.

III THE BASIC STRUCTURE: A COMMON CORE CURRICULUM FOR MUTUAL NEEDS

In 1994 Kenneth Strike wrote: 'Any diverse nation that wishes to endure with peace and justice must find something that unites its citizens into a common polity. Whatever this something is, it will turn out to be central to the aspirations of that nation's schools ...' (Strike, 1994, p.2). This chapter will be given to the establishment of criteria for deciding what all South Africa's children should learn, and for reaching agreement on unifying common elements at the heart of a school curriculum. Once we have renounced the wish to impose common belief or a comprehensive common culture, as I believe we must, we can build up a core curriculum based on shared interests and then acknowledge, as Strike did, that if education is to address wider needs and offer a richer experience, a well conceived multiculturalism is not antagonistic to a successful civic education but actually essential to it (Strike, 1994).

The need for transformation

In a First-World arena the 'majority' culture - often the local variation on the globalised Anglo-American theme - does more than provide most of the subject content. Any majority or mainstream culture also inevitably provides the assumptions, the standards, and the criteria, by which other cultural manifestations are judged and assessed. And here in South Africa where the local English educational tradition continues to hold sway in the multiracial English-language schools and universities, the Western canon remains perilously entangled in an untransformed and hegemonic structure where it co-exists uneasily with the generally acceptable instrumental elements of global Western culture. The growing resentment which fuels increasingly strident calls for transformation cannot be ignored. Present structures are not well-conceived and it is quite natural for African academics and intellectuals to resent the exclusion of African values from the curriculum. By continuing to assume for their own culture in its entirety the majority-dominant status from which to offer small-scale concessions to others, English-speaking whites continue to expose the canon to all the odium associated with an unacceptable supremacism. Not

being demonstrably useful or economically justifiable most of the canon is extremely vulnerable to the resentment felt against Western dominance. It is, therefore, imperative that those elements of globalised Western culture with instrumental benefit for all, together with any canonical texts which underpin or undermine them, be separated from those aspects of the English and European tradition which - though they need not be abandoned by the English minority - cannot be forced on others. English-speaking whites must accept that the time has come to abandon all universalist claims for their inherited culture in its entirety. They can share with their compatriots only those elements of their tradition which are wanted by other South Africans and which could be seen as a legitimate contribution to the forging of a negotiated core curriculum. Many, even most, of the canonical works most cherished by defenders of the Western canon will not find a place in any negotiated cultural consensus for the education of all South African children. That of course is no reason why they should be renounced by any minority to whom they remain precious and meaningful. Minority interests should be acknowledged *as such* and accommodated in a fringe multicultural curriculum offering a variety of options. If the defenders of the canon remain inflexible, an Africanist movement will inevitably gather momentum, and because its supporters will be unable and unwilling to remove Westernising instrumental and vocational components of the curriculum, they will demand, and will achieve, the sacrifice of every vestige of the Western canon in the humanities curriculum. Resistence to this trend by Eurocentrists would fail, would set itself up for failure, because white English speakers still seem unable to defend any aspect of their own very particular minority culture without claiming for it a universal validity and significance. It is essential that we now move away from a situation in which Western values provide the unexamined vantage point from which African culture is viewed, and Western culture the all-encompassing backdrop from which grudging and inadequate provision is made for African culture.

The African option

The paradox of South African pluralism is that just as those most closely associated with the century's dominant culture are a numerical minority, so the indigenous 'minority'

languages and cultures are those belonging to the overwhelming majority of the population, for although their traditions are under pressure from global forces, the indigenous peoples themselves have not been reduced to numerical insignificance as happened elsewhere. Indeed in the rhetoric of international multiculturalism, the very term 'minority' connotes poverty and disadvantage, while the term 'majority' connotes economic and social dominance further underlining the difficulties attendant on transferring foreign practices in multiculturalism to this country. Since it is not impossible that a political party with a mandate for Africanisation could one day be returned to power here, it will be conceded that African culture, or some version of it has at least the potential for dominance. In most of South Africa's rural areas the traditional culture of the local African ethnic group could even now be regarded as the dominant one; if not in terms of material power, then in terms of prevailing belief.

The Western canon should be accommodated in a curriculum in which it is in part presented as an aspect of minority particularism rather than as an expression of dominant universalism. One way would be to posit indigenous African tradition, at least in the primary schools, as the true and legitimate majority culture of South Africa, so that an essentially African background of assumptions could occupy the extensive space to be taken up by the mainstream. African culture would then provide the backdrop from which niche provision would be made for European and Indian minority cultures. No doubt there is not a monolithic entity labelled 'African culture' but it may be that certain preoccupations and values common to the country's black ethnic groups could, perhaps should, provide the organising principle or starting point from which pupils would orient themselves in relation to other cultures. And this pivotal position, this orienting function, is the crucial one according to my understanding of the implications of majority culture status. Such an organising principle could save the most disadvantaged from alienation, humiliation and marginalization, while giving the more privileged an education in tune with their lived surroundings as well as the security of a clearly defined place in public education for their own cultures, defensible as minority, in a way that is not yet possible, at least for the culture most closely associated with the canon. Roger Scruton (1991), speaking of Britain's minorities, said that all children had an interest in acquiring the prevailing culture of their surroundings so as not to appear strange, or ineligible for the

advantages of social existence. The African option would have some real advantages for all concerned, yet whatever its attractions it has to be conceded that it would have very little chance of acceptance. Rejection would come not only from the minorities, but from the African majority themselves, such is the power and prevalence of the global Anglo-American culture and such the lure of the wealth and status that its possession is presumed to guarantee to those educated to share its assumptions. Just as we must surely relinquish any attempt to preserve the current dominance of European culture throughout the curriculum, it may be that we should not attempt to establish the dominance of African culture in its stead. Perhaps a genuinely new model for multiculturalism should avoid any such relationship between cultures in this country. To the construction of this new model, we now turn.

Confronting the Behemoth

It is probably inevitable that the construction of any multicultural framework with a chance of acceptance and viability would begin with a series of decisions taken about the place in it of globalised Western culture. Despite the resentment aroused by the global culture, it contains elements which are accepted, indeed demanded, by all South Africans, regardless of social background. The phase of Western culture now confronting the world's African, Asian and aboriginal peoples is largely derived from the achievement of the eighteenth century European Enlightenment in consolidating and popularising previous triumphs of European rationality. Contemporary globalised Western culture still bears the traces of an eighteenth century European mindset. Characterising this world view, Kolakowski described Enlightenment in the broadest sense as:

> ... the totality of spiritual effort which urged forward the forces of secular reason and imagination, scientific curiosity, the passion to dominate matter, the courage to explore and the skill to analyze, the skeptical distrust of simple solutions, and the habit of questioning every solution obtained.
>
> (Kolakowski, 1990, pp.26-27)

Despite all recent misgivings about the damage to the natural environment resulting from 'the passion to dominate matter', it is this rational armoury of the Enlightenment which holds out to the world's peoples the enticing prospect of scientific method and technology transfer, with all that this implies for industrial, agricultural, medical, military, and other technological development. And concepts of universal human rights formulated and defended in rational terms by enlightenment thinkers, now also attract people everywhere. In South Africa, as elsewhere, economic and political need will compel the utilisation of some part of the Enlightenment critical armoury. South African education must surely equip children with the analytical skills to effect development. Here then is the one aspect of Western culture with universal appeal. Regardless of the faltering of modernity in the face of postmodern challenges, Enlightenment rationality - for its fruits both developmental and democratic - remains the inescapable instrument of power and prosperity in the contemporary world. The challenge is to appropriate it without sacrificing all that is best in African culture and without assuming that African values can best be defended by abandoning the Western canon.

An overlapping consensus for South African education

A structural principle is needed, some concept which would help us plan a core curriculum comprising contributions from all the country's traditions so that no one of them would be elevated to the status of majority culture with the others relegated to inferior levels. The concept of an overlapping consensus, formulated by John Rawls and discussed by Kenneth Strike, could be just such a device. Rawls (1993) used this concept for adjudication among differing comprehensive doctrines, by which he meant conflicting philosophies and religions. Different parties could agree on a political structure which would shelter them all because each party should be able to find, within its own doctrine, reasons why support for the common political structure would be beneficial to its own members. Strike (1994) sought to promote the construction of a shared civic language for use by all parties when debating public issues. This deliberately constructed public speech was to be seen as an overlapping consensus among diverse moral perspectives. In a later paper Strike took the concept further, saying that Rawls's characterization of

pluralism as a pluralism of doctrines was too narrowly cognitive in that it ignored differences of language, custom and history, overemphasizing disagreements about truth. Liberals failed to recognise that the conflicts produced by cultural differences were analogous to those generated among differing comprehensive doctrines. He concluded by suggesting that 'cultural diversity poses problems for politics that requires [sic] something like an overlapping consensus to overcome' (Strike, 1996, p.58).

In this chapter an attempt will be made to adapt Strike's latter observation for use in the South African context. When choosing content for a school curriculum why not think in terms of a cultural overlapping consensus? The common, or core, curriculum, comprising contributions from all South African cultures, would be a negotiated overlapping consensus which, according to Strike (1994), need not assert its own rational superiority against competitors. Instead it would have to show only that people with a variety of moral viewpoints could find it acceptable for reasons internal to their own different perspectives (Strike, 1994). What this means is that if the principle were adopted here, then Western-type rationality and Western-style political culture, if they were to be incorporated in a common South African curriculum, would be accepted by people of African or Oriental background, not at the behest of European-descended minorities, but because these values would promote the attainment of their *own* economic and civic goals. It should be obvious that any attempt to construct a negotiated overlapping consensus arises from an acceptance of diversity, and an acknowledgement of the relative permanence of the different contributing moral perspectives or - in the case of South Africa - different cultures.

A common curriculum for South Africa's schools could be constructed as a cultural overlapping consensus, comprising whatever components people from the various communities could accept as beneficial *to themselves*, regardless of the historical origins of those components. Beginning with contributions from Western or Eurocentric culture, it should be obvious that all can surely agree on giving to the children of all, the technical skills and commercial know-how which would enable them and the country as a whole to prosper in the global economy. And since economic prosperity is impossible without civil peace, it is essential that a new generation of South Africans be raised to

be as attached to their constitution as young Americans are taught to be to theirs. Since everyone in South Africa must surely have in common the wish for civil peace and economic prosperity, any initial area of common or overlapping aspirations would be in the economic and political spheres, because the exigencies of the global economy dictate the need to equip the young with the skills essential to material success, while the freely negotiated choice of a liberal-democratic constitution demands that we educate for democracy and a culture of human rights. Building up a cultural overlapping consensus to promote shared economic and political goals could begin with studies in: mathematics, sciences,[5] technology, business skills, civics, and scientific and commercial English. And if we add sports - already earmarked for nation-building - the initial overlapping consensus seems quite extensive. Despite the uncontestably European origins of modern scientific, technological, economic, political and legal concepts, and even sports, all communities could surely find *their own reasons* for justifying a choice of subject matter which would advance prosperity within each community and would ensure the civil peace and civil freedoms which alone could safeguard that prosperity.

To this point, only the European contribution has been discussed. The all-important matter of contributions from other cultures to a common curriculum will be touched on when some of the deleterious implications of Western influence are discussed. None of what has been proffered as contributing to a cultural overlapping consensus for the curriculum will seem new or original. It is already accepted that all these academic disciplines are indispensable and the notion that they are essential for economic development is anything but original. *What concerns us here is the perspective brought to bear on these disciplines viewed as cultural product or cultural threat, and also the relation of these core learning areas to studies within the humanities and in particular to the study of the Western canon.* Since the only aspects of European and English culture likely to be generally acceptable are the scientific, technological and political fruits of the European tradition, it seems clear that only canonical texts with direct bearing on those learning areas would be acceptable to all communities. Western canonical works which underpin, explain, and defend the universally empowering achievements of Western

[5] I am aware that studies in science and mathematics can also be undertaken for their educative and civilising benefits.

culture - the works of Newton, Galileo, Einstein, Descartes, Cicero, Locke, and Mill to name only a very few - as well as those which challenge the values inherent in Western achievements - by Rousseau, Nietszche, Marx, Dickens and many, many others - surely have much to offer the wider South African community. It would make no sense at all to sweep aside such invaluable insight into, and commentary on, developments whose full implications the South African population at large seem determined to embrace. Whatever in the Western canon can enhance and deepen understanding of Western science and critical rationality, together with their social, political, philosophical and personal consequences, can surely find a place in any South African university curriculum.

Cultural baggage: the price of the European inheritance

Western rationality has been embraced world wide for the technological expertise and material wealth in its gift, but it is also hotly resented world wide, because it challenges and undermines familial, social, political, religious and aesthetic traditions everywhere. The Western canon is especially vulnerable to the resentment felt against the West in some circles. Not surprisingly, Europhobes attempt to excise the technical benefits of Western culture for instrumental purposes - much as I have done above - while resisting the encroachment of less obviously profitable elements of this culture. But as long as they do not force them on others, minorities here have a right to seek accommodation, within a multicultural structure, for less obviously 'relevant' canonical works than those alluded to in the previous paragraph. They need not be inhibited by misplaced feelings of guilt, for the greatest threat to African values is not from Homer or Shakespeare, nor from Mozart or Rembrandt. Indeed the elements of Western culture which *do* menace indigenous tradition in every continent - including Europe herself - are the coveted rational-scientific triumphs at the heart of the modern globalised phase of Western culture. The threat is from *the very achievements universally acknowledged as indispensable to empowerment and material progress*. This truth must be confronted. It is usually evaded because Europhobes cannot bring themselves to reject those aspects of European culture that would promote economic growth or military power. So they

reject the European tradition in what seems the only way possible, by lashing out at the poetry, music and art whose demise would not retard their own material progress. Ironically much of the canonical literature and philosophy likely to be jettisoned provides the most profound and trenchant criticism now extant, of the very aspects of global Western culture - the empowering, critical rational elements - that *do* pose the greatest threat to indigenous values in Africa as elsewhere. To mention only two examples: William Blake's vision of reality and his interpretation of Christianity; Shelley's political and philosophical radicalism articulated at the birth of the industrial-democratic epoch, still confront the Western mind with profound challenges, though these are not apparent in school anthologies. The Romantic revolt was no less disturbing to a superficial modernity than is the contemporary postmodern challenge. Attacks on the canon cannot achieve their proclaimed objective which is to protect indigenous tradition and nurture the self-respect of the disempowered because, being grounded in a confused and ill-defined resentment, they are essentially incoherent. With or without the canon the ineluctable embrace of scientific method, human rights, and instrumental English carries with it the risks of Westernisation in a wider sense than the mere acquisition of skills. The need is to acquire these benefits while avoiding the uncritical abandonment of cherished values by the communities acquiring them.

Using the canon to confront the problem

The canon is assumed by its detractors to bring with it a single simple legacy of cultural imperialism. Attitudes of cultural supremacy are certainly contained in it, and Western arrogance must be rejected, especially wherever it still inflicts pain and humiliation on people of other races. Unfortunately, just as the universally desired instrumental goods of contemporary Western culture are grounded in the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment vision, it is that same vision which probably also accounts for any lingering arrogance from Westerners and the Westernised complacently convinced of the superiority of their vision of the world and of the inevitability of its triumph over whatever appears as backward, primitive or atavistic whether outside the European ambit or even - and of this more later - within it. Despite the postmodern challenge this myth

still holds sway over the popular mind in Western circles and it is likely to do so for a long time to come. Does the canon foster arrogance, racism, pride in dominance and past conquest? Undoubtedly it does in part. Much of it may be tainted by this legacy, for nothing mortal is morally flawless. Every culture in history has had its dark side, manifest in its best products as in its worst.

The matter is further complicated in that it is from within the canon that the most powerful rationale for universal human dignity, rights and freedoms, the rule of law and constitutional government, have been formulated. Few can bring themselves to oppose these values, overtly at least, though many are happy to disparage historically related concepts such as liberalism or individualism. The Western canon itself, through the contributions of thinkers such as Locke, Mill and Marx, has always provided the strongest arguments for the assertion of independence from Western dominion. It is a singular comment on the modern Western imperium that Western legal and democratic concepts have been indispensable to critics of the West, and used by them, as much to assert independence from Western dominance itself as to wrest human rights from indigenous despots, or to break with local tradition. No culture is static or monolithic and least of all the one evolved by that most restless of the world's peoples, the European. The Western canon reflects an exceptionally complex tradition. It should not be discarded on the hasty assumption that it lends unequivocal support to all that is most disliked in contemporary Western culture since it may provide the means to combat many of the worst recent developments in the tradition within which it came to be. Kolakowski (1990) has spoken of Europe's capacity 'to question the superiority of her [own] values' and of 'the process of endless self-criticism which was to become the source not only of her strength but of her ... vulnerability' (Kolakowski, 1990, p.18). It is this self-critical strain which prompts Kolakowski's daringly unfashionable suggestion that certain aspects of the European tradition should not only be defended but propagated. Roger Scruton (1991) takes up this same theme, saying that while all cultures allow for a principle of internal criticism, this tendency is most highly developed in the European tradition. The child brought up in the British way is encouraged to question and to criticize, to strive for fair play and impartial judgement, and to accept as doctrine only that which he has independent reason to believe to be true (Scruton, 1991). This self-critical faculty is an

inevitable fruit of any education centred on Enlightenment values. The South African child partially educated in the European tradition of scientific and political rationality will not have imposed on him an unquestioning belief in the superiority of European values. Quite the reverse. Of course he may not be able to sustain an unquestioning belief in the values of any *other* culture! It is this rather than its alleged and spurious Eurocentrism that makes Western culture something to be feared by so many.

Enlightenment rationality confronts the world with an agonising dilemma. It is indispensable to material progress but also destructive to cherished belief and custom. If the Western canon were to be discarded in South Africa's schools and universities it would be partly out of fear of its relentlessly critical spirit, that strain which has already waged war on mythic elements in its culture of origin, so much so that Westerners now find it very hard to sustain and transmit belief and conviction in the face of the ever present challenge from the rational strain in their own culture and consciousness. It is the suspicion that this fearsome leaven may work its destructive way into other traditions which animates many of those most resistant to Eurocentrism. In the face of this resistance it must be repeated that the Western canon cannot now - because it never has - present Western culture past or present as normative. It may once have been offered in this spirit, but since its subversive challenge has always been as much if not more to its own as to other cultures it could make a significant contribution to the forging and synthesizing of a core curriculum for South African education, and to the ongoing debate and renegotiation surrounding any cultural overlapping consensus.

Refining the overlapping consensus: modification for South African needs

Kenneth Strike (1994) thought that public education in the United States should begin very cautiously with a sense of shared purpose both limited and instrumental, and in this earlier paper - he had in mind competing doctrines rather than cultures - he warned that any attempt to keep public schools impartial between religious and philosophical alternatives would probably focus attention on common instrumental goals and on fostering a civic ethic. Any civic language viewed as overlapping consensus had to be

sufficiently thin and shallow so that it did not set itself up to compete with the deeply held beliefs of a diverse citizenry. This cautious beginning *was* no more than a beginning, since Strike held that multicultural components should flesh out the overlapping consensus whose severe limitations were the price to be paid for avoiding dominance and conflict. 'A polity and an education rooted in a philosophically shallow overlapping consensus seems the best hope if we are to thread our way between the Scylla of domination and the Charybdis of civil chaos' (Strike, 1994, p.26).

It can be argued that South Africans too should avoid using state schools to force on pupils any aspects of culture other than those which would promote widely shared economic goals or support the constitution. But it may prove impossible to keep a cultural overlapping consensus sufficiently shallow and uncontroversial for the avoidance of overt challenge to belief, and this even if the European contribution to a common curriculum were to be restricted to technology and human rights. Even technological know-how and gadgetry cannot readily be detached from scientific method, and it will be acknowledged that Western science offers an interpretation of reality with profound philosophical and ethical implications. European-derived political and legal components also pose an ethical challenge. Concepts of universal human rights, derived as they are from Enlightenment theories about a universal human nature, and ultimately from Stoic, Roman, and Christian values, create problems for closely-knit traditional communities throughout the world.

The matter becomes even more complicated when contributions from cultures other than the European are considered for the proposed cultural overlapping consensus. These contributions, like the European scientific and constitutional concepts, would need to be accepted by people of different cultural persuasion as beneficial *to themselves.* This is not the place for an exhaustive selection of components for a common curriculum but some examples may be helpful. The Indic propensity for seeing human life as part of an ascending continuum of living creatures all pursuing the same earthly quest for the same ultimate goal could provide a most salutory and timeous corrective to the Judaeo-Christian conception of humankind as morally separable from the rest of 'creation' with a different worth and a different fate from that of other life forms on the planet. The

Indian view may prove more responsive to the ecological crisis, and could well be attractive to many other South Africans. And whatever in the African world view could advocate respect for the natural environment, or strengthen the sense of community, or foster the dignity of the elderly, or promote respect for the proprieties of family life may also be offered to the common store. Now the inclusion of all this could no more be justified on grounds of shallow instrumentalism than could the inclusion of Western scientific and constitutional concepts. On the contrary, attitudes toward family life, the natural world, and the place of humankind in nature, reflect some of the most profound beliefs of the respective communities. Useful and usable they may be, but philosophically shallow they are not.

It is my contention that it would be virtually impossible to isolate cultural components *of real value* which would not challenge preconceptions in other cultures. I do not believe such universally inoffensive components exist. It must be recalled that in 1994 Stake had in mind the construction of a civic language and a public ethic, rather than a school curriculum drawing on the resources of different cultures. He warned that deeply held belief could not always be shared with others, but a distinction between deeply held belief and shallow instrumental need is probably untenable in a cultural context. The very aspects of European culture which even Europhobes actually insist on sharing - scientific method and critical rationality brought to bear on the material world - are, though undeniably profitable and useful, yet also profoundly disturbing to the deepest beliefs, and challenging to the most cherished institutions of all traditions, including the European itself. If, therefore, we are to avert the charge of imposing belief, which charge would inevitably arise from the inclusion of any really valuable contribution to a cultural overlapping consensus, some criterion other than philosophical shallowness must be applied when the consensus is forged. Let us rather distinguish between, on the one hand, beliefs, institutions and artifacts which will be of no interest to other communities - and much of the Western canon will be in this category - and, on the other hand, those beliefs, institutions and skills which, whether superficial or profound in their philosophical and ethical implications, could conceivably be viewed by people in *other* communities as conducive to *their own* interests. These latter, which would certainly

include Western scientific and constitutional achievements, could be brought into the proposed cultural overlapping consensus.

Any cultural component offered to such a common curriculum would have to be defensible on grounds of its being valuable to all, and acceptable to all on the basis of rational self-interest. The claim to universal value inherent in its being offered to the overlapping consensus would surely justify a most relentless critical examination of any such component by those to whom it was offered. Here we can draw on Kolakowski's celebration of the self-critical spirit of European civilisation. The European tradition of self-doubt and self-critique is now irreversible within Western culture, so that any European-derived components offered to the overlapping consensus would certainly be subjected to ongoing critical examination. However, a genuine cultural overlapping consensus would also contain elements from African, Indian and Islamic sources. These extra-European contributions would also have to submit to critical examination before being accepted for the common curriculum. It could not be just or wise or safe to shield extra-European cultural beliefs and icons from the kind of critical examination to which Europeans - at least from the time of Socrates - have subjected their own. Whatever is to be included in a cultural overlapping consensus, and thence to form part of a core curriculum for schools, should - if it is not to constitute an imposition of belief on other communities - have been subjected to scholarly and public debate, and to all the rigours of a most relentless critical examination, regardless of its historical origins.

An overlapping consensus of mutually acceptable - because strenuously debated - values and skills could well be the South African equivalent of what is known, in other societies, as the dominant majority culture.

Beyond the overlapping consensus

The overlapping consensus, however conceived, was never seen by Kenneth Strike (1994) as anything more than a beginning for American education. He maintained that any public ethic which did not violate the liberty of diverse groups would be too thin to

support an adequate education for a rich and complex conception of human fulfilment (Strike, 1994). On his reasoning the civic language would be too thin because it would have been deliberately kept philosophically shallow, while on the line of argument followed in this Report the curriculum would be, if not always thin or shallow then certainly incomplete, because it would have had to be justifiable on grounds of rational self-interest to *all* communities. It is when we address those aesthetic and spiritual needs that cannot be formulated and justified in rational terms that disagreement and division may become irreconcilable. Much of what is most fervently defended would have to be withheld from a common curriculum because it would not survive the critical assault necessary to establish it as being useful to other communities for reasons internal to their own perspectives. Most of the Western canon will come into this category, together with much that is precious to people of African or Indian descent. The view that will be developed in Chapter IV of this Report is that these aspects of culture should be incorporated into the optional components of a multicultural curriculum. Strike was adamant that multiculturalism was, far from being antithetical to a unifying civic education, actually essential to it because the various justifications of any publically acceptable overlapping consensus would have to be constructed within the plural ethical perspectives of the society, and because it was 'those robust nonpublic cultures and perspectives that provide direction and depth to life' (Strike, 1994, p.25).

A well-structured multicultural curriculum would anchor each child firmly within the paradigm of her own upbringing, while challenging - implicitly challenging - that paradigm in such a way as to deepen understanding and promote intellectual risk-taking, without producing either confusion and ignorance, or blind adherence to tradition, which latter are the two poles between which we must strive to educate children. Most people still live within cultural paradigms, within which and with which they make sense of what happens in their lives. So young children cannot be flung into a spiritual free fall when they go to school, because as educators we have to take account of these paradigms; one could define a culture as an historically evolved strategy for investing experience with meaning and significance. Having evolved over generations, all cultures are richly complex. The delicate balance among opposing impulses, the fine state of equilibrium achieved within each tradition, is not amenable to hasty analysis or planned amendment,

even by those within the tradition, much less by those outside it. A multicultural education should not attempt to amend existing paradigms or to transcend them by striving for neutrality or the acultural. Nor should children be left to wander about confusedly, dipping into belief or artefact at random, substituting a flaccid incoherent mish-mash of good intention for structured and purposeful learning. In the primary schools academic subject content from various cultures should be juxtaposed as discrete modules so as to communicate a clear sense of the various cultural paradigms available. Such a curriculum would be subversive enough, hinting as it does at the socially constructed nature of knowledge. At secondary level satellite optional components subordinate to the common core of the curriculum would offer two benefits: for children outside the culture concerned they would provide new ways of conceiving the world; for those within it, a reassuring anchorage in the known and familiar re-explored, without which an intellectual foray into the unknown could be disorienting.

It is important that each community be free to give, to its children, recourse to whatever it deems most precious. Human frailty does weary of continual challenge or constant demands for adjustment to the new; people sometimes seek rest in deep uncritical conviction. Such a need may be part of what animates fundamentalist, revivalist or nationalist movements world wide, and perhaps it also provides motivation to those among the apologists for the Western canon who view it as enshrining a familiar set of cultural icons, rather than as a subversive critical instrument. Whatever aspects of a community culture are not imposed on others could well claim a partial respite from the relentless critical ferment at the heart of the overlapping consensus as it is continually forged and reforged. Once common environmental, civic, and vocational needs have been met in a common core curriculum, particular mythic and aesthetic needs could be provided for by granting to African, European and Indo-Islamic cultural traditions equal niche status around the common curriculum, and by giving optional recourse to such curricular components to children from all communities. As each cultural tradition evolved over time, responding to the stimulus from other cultures and to the critical debate at the heart of the overlapping consensus, course content would change, but only at the behest of those most closely concerned. If multiculturalism is to mean anything in South Africa we are going to have to take seriously the views of each community on

what are the finest achievements of its own culture. And if one or more minorities wished to incorporate parts of the Western canon in an optional component of the curriculum this should be accepted by others, for the historic assemblage of South Africa's communities suggests that all have a right to cultural transmission.

The era of the separate nation-state whose citizens are pressured into common culture is fast coming to an end. But because we now swing with the pendulum of history as it recoils from the recent exploitation of culture to create division and perpetuate deprivation, there is a strong reluctance in South Africa to acknowledge the cultural factor in education. The sole aim of the present administration seems to be nation-building and the creation of social cohesion. These are essential and laudable aims but more likely to be achieved if there is some concession to the idea that educational provision for diversity could actually reduce tensions and fears, making people more willing to embrace a national idea with no threat behind its promises of cohesion. But it seems that the official goal is a non-racial society where we shall all find the centre of our lives. Strike's view of pluralism places the centre of ethical life in the local and particular (Strike, 1994). I believe he is right, and I think that this is because the United States, as a nation state, is a relatively new and fragile construction. After only two hundred years it cannot yet provide individuals with the rich complexity and the depth available from the ancient cultures within its borders. What it could provide is protection within the American Constitution, in itself one of the finest products of the Enlightenment, for some of those local and particular cultures. The implications for South Africa should be obvious enough. In his concluding arguments, Strike goes on to say:

> We need educational policies that take more seriously the various forms of pluralism that characterize our society. We need such policies because in a free society people necessarily live a significant part of their lives in nonpublic communities and conceive their lives through perspectives and ideas that are not and cannot be shared. We need such policies because any public ethic that is consistent with the liberty of diverse groups in a free society will be too thin to sustain a full and robust conception of a worthwhile human life and thus too thin to sustain a fully adequate conception of education and fully adequate educative communities.

> Schooling in a liberal and democratic society must perform both universalizing and particularizing functions. People must be initiated into the shared civic culture, but they must also be initiated into some nonpublic culture. A balance must be struck.
>
> (Strike, 1994, p.25)

Assimilationists who would force a westernising culture on all in the name of modernisation should give up this endeavour, just as any attempt to impose a universalizing Africanisation of the humanities curriculum should also be rejected. Communities cannot simply be processed into a common homogeneous culture no matter how reassuring or expedient for modernisers or nation-builders. It may be argued that because the vocationally oriented studies will be unavoidably Western in tone, the balance should be redressed by ensuring that studies in the humanities are wholly African in flavour. Indeed as the Africanist pressure grows, it is very likely that the humanities in their entirety will be handed over to Africanisation simply because this would satisfy the Africanist lobby without compromising broad developmental and specific vocational goals. Such an arrangement would *not* constitute a just or reasonable compromise. Depriving European-descended minorities of all the significant symbols associated with a family culture and relegating them to a purely vocational education relieved only by the myth and symbol of a community other than their own, would be as unjust and alienating to them as the present 'untransformed' arrangements undoubtedly are to the African majority.

IV PRIMORDIALISM AND THE WESTERN CANON

This fourth chapter will return to the tension, briefly touched upon in Chapter I, between the politics of equal dignity and a politics of difference (Taylor, 1992) both of them phases of liberalism. Minority demands for recognition and multiculturalism are so closely related to an acceptance of the politics of difference that, to Wally Morrow as we have seen, multicultural education itself would be harmful in a country which has yet to recover from a politics of difference imposed by the Apartheid regime. The problem will be approached once more, this time reconceived with the use of terminology borrowed from David Apter because his vocabulary, being richer in its connotations, will take us further in our attempt to see both the Africanist movement and the alleged Eurocentrism of the canon's defenders as manifestations of the same historical trend. As natural allies in the struggle against the all-conquering rationality of the Enlightenment, it is to be hoped that these two groups will not dissipate valuable energy by opposing each other.

Contemporary global Western culture and the primordial challenge

Those elements of European culture likely to be acceptable in a cultural overlapping consensus - the technological application of science together with the concept of a universal human nature and its resultant political application in a politics of rights and equal dignity - are in large part the fruits of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment. The legacy of the Enlightenment has a powerful effect on the way in which educated people everywhere interpret contemporary social issues. It has left us with something very like belief in 'the force of an immanent rationality, the enlightenment itself, working its way into the world' (Apter, 1997, p.60). What Apter describes as an Enlightenment myth represents all history as moving in the direction of a greater common consciousness and away from provincial or local attachments. The Enlightenment myth impacts on politics and education through the assimilationist fallacy which rests upon it. According to Apter, we are all believers in this assimilationist fallacy in so far as we all assume that history is moving away from a limited condition characterised by primitive and irrational loyalties - tribal, ethnic, linguistic, religious -

and toward a new order which will be universal, open, pluralistic and, above all, democratic (Apter, 1977). This ideal of a developed, united, assimilating democracy is surely at the heart of current ANC policy, reluctant as it is to recognize difference. The connection with the politics of equal dignity is obvious.

But as early as 1977 David Apter could say that the Enlightenment myth confronted primordial challenges from peoples who were stubbornly resistant to homogenizing modernity and insisted on defending local and particular traditions which sometimes offer a very different view of the good life. Liberals and socialists alike saw this primordialism as intolerant, atavistic, anti-democratic, even pathological (Apter, 1977). Primordialism is, of course, the politics of difference under another name; a major theme of this Report is that it needs to be accommodated, *together with enlightenment and assimilationist values*, in a multicultural curriculum. Resistance to such a compromise is strong because assimilationists find it hard to understand primordial attachments especially when professed by educated people (Apter, 1977). For English-speaking white South Africans who see themselves as spear-heading the progress of Enlightenment culture, and thus as the most sophisticated - even the most civilised - sector of the population, viewing some of their own cultural attachments as mere primordialism would be unthinkable! Primordialists seem to substitute a narrow primitivism for the assimilationist ideals of rational tolerance, democracy and development. On the road that leads to the attainment of these latter ideals: 'Nationalism is the transition. Founder-leaders and charismatic presidents pull diverse nations together to make one [nation]' (Apter, 1977, p.85). This process of nation-building is now well under way in South Africa and as long as it leaves a little space for primordialism can only do good. The common curriculum outlined in the third chapter of this Report has as its chief aim the realisation of national, developmental, and democratic goals. These goals though arguably more important than all others are nevertheless not all-sufficient. That core curriculum incorporating instrumental components and unifying rational values should be fleshed out with content which, being non-vocational, and involving beliefs and spiritual values, whether African or European in origin, will not necessarily be regarded as acceptable by all communities. Dominated by the humanities, these areas of the

curriculum could offer what Apter called 'an adventure in the richer depth of primordial metaphor' (Apter, 1977, p.88).

Assimilationists explain primordialism as an unfortunate and temporary consequence of poverty and discrimination. Their remedy is to foster development and battle injustice with renewed vigour so that everyone can share in a common and popular culture. But Apter was convinced that no simple remedialism would suffice and held that the pendulum between assimilationism and primordialism would continue to swing back and forth (Apter, 1977). His own explanation for the primordialist phenomenon has direct bearing on attempts to uphold a defence of the Western canon in education here. He describes the culture of enlightenment and assimilationism as thin and inadequate. Primordial beliefs survive or are revived because the culture of modernity has proved to be too trivial and too shallow to have replaced them. The resurgence of primordialism 'has to do with the character of enlightenment. Not even the faintest echo of the Greek or aristocratic ideal can be heard in the land, so blended is it with utilitarian and populist considerations. The result is an assimilationist culture which is like weak tea' (Apter, 1977, p.88).

European primordialism

The oft-repeated charge of Europhobes is that Western culture is shallow. This charge is hurled at the culture in its entirety, but of course it is only valid applied to contemporary globalised Western culture in its materialist preoccupations. Spawned by modern technology, and buoyed by mass popular taste world wide, it now threatens to overwhelm local traditions everywhere. This globalised culture had its origin in Enlightenment values, which are but one small facet of historic European civilisation. The rest - ancient and irrelevant - should now be viewed as primordial, though even yet accessible, crystallised as it is in the Western canon. The charges of shallowness are thus unwittingly supportive of calls for the retention of the canon. Much of pre-Enlightenment European culture can now be seen as primordial, even aboriginal, since it has very little to contribute to any modernising or developmental or democratic goals.

European primordialists can reorient themselves in relation to globalised Western culture, divesting pre-Enlightenment elements of their tradition of any lingering universalist or hegemonic claims. European primordialism could then line up with African primordialism in a multicultural curriculum offering provision for these and other particular interests. Most of the Western canon could feature in a space allowed to European primordialism making it possible for white and coloured minorities to have continued access to whatever in their historic culture continues to have appeal for themselves - without imposing it on others. While canonical works from the post-industrial phase or those in the central tradition of rationality like the works of Descartes, Locke or Hume, may well find a negotiated place in a curricular overlapping consensus, European canonical works of a different tone or era may justifiably be viewed as primordial. There is a pungent irony in the idea that the Enlightenment, which with all its promise and all its very real scientific and political benefits has been as destructive to European wholeness and peace as to the peace of others, was itself a natural development of European culture. But this one phase of that culture is not in itself sufficient for anyone, including peoples of European provenance.

If it is argued that there is no need to provide South African minorities with space in a multicultural niche terrain because European themes and concerns dominate the contemporary world it must be insisted that the globalised version of only one phase of European culture - the Enlightenment culture of technology and universal rights - is simply *not* coterminous with European culture as such. It has to be recalled that the Enlightenment has been as destructive to European myth, religion, morality and aesthetic, as to the corresponding components of extra-European cultures. Indeed more so, for it has had longer to erode belief within the civilisation that gave it birth. This two-edged sword first turned upon European culture itself. Since the eighteenth century it has been increasingly difficult for Westerners to defend or justify the morality, religion and aesthetic associated at various times with the European tradition. Europhobes forget that by the end of the eighteenth century Enlightenment rationality - not yet globalised - was discrediting mythic elements in the European context. Like Orientals and Africans today, Europeans of that era were unable to turn their backs on it, dazzled as they were by the material benefits in its gift - and to the eighteenth century it also offered intellectual

seductions. But there was - and is - a price to be paid. The values of traditional European culture were - and still are - under siege. This relentless progress continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries even as the Enlightenment emanation spread its lure yet further afield. This globalised rationality, in spite of, or because of, its universalist claims, is no longer identifiable with European culture as such. It was once a European emanation but has since acquired a force and momentum all its own, menacing all primordial cultures alike.[6] The claims of the globalised Enlightenment culture to provide the common instrumental core curriculum are not founded on a bogus neutrality.

Space must be found, in the curriculum, for all forms of primordialism including that of Europe. And here is where the Western canon can be fitted in - part of which underpins the Enlightenment myth - paradox upon paradox - and part of which predates or undermines it. Once an equitable framework for multiculturalism has been constructed, defenders of the canon will be free to assert that European primordialism, though it has no *more* right to consideration than African primordialism, has in principle no *less*. For English-speaking whites as for others:

> Primordialism is ... partly a result of the thinness and the dangers of the enlightenment culture .... What we have overlooked in our desire for democratic solutions and developmental assistance is the need people have to revive myths as metaphors to enclose the spaces of their own lives.
>
> (Apter, 1977, p.66)

Westerners, though seen as imposing Enlightenment rationality on others, were themselves its earliest victims as well as its earliest beneficiaries, and for them, as for others, the healing power of ancestral myth and symbol must be used to counterbalance the onslaught of that unsparing rationality which poverty, or greed and the love of power, have rendered indispensable to all.

[6] European repugnance for the globalised version of Western culture is most obviously manifest in the anti-American or anti-Anglophone sentiment so often expressed in France.

English as instrumental language and as vehicle of primordialism

For the other peoples of South Africa - notably Africans and white Afrikaners - English is a purely instrumental language: they can safely see it as such, retreating to their own traditions when they need to nurture the spiritual and aesthetic life. This is why excising the canon and reducing the English language to something wholly instrumental seems to be a viable proposition to some of them. What they need to understand is that English in South Africa divested of the canon would leave first language speakers of all races deprived of any recourse to 'the richer depth of primordial metaphor' (Apter, 1977, p.88) within the language and tradition most easily accessible to them. Other groups take for granted that through their languages or religions and the traditions that inhere in them, they are entitled to a private non-instrumental sphere where outsiders do not attempt to dictate to them the terms of the experience. Like others, English-speakers also need to draw on the deep primordial sources whence come the symbols which structure and ignite spiritual and aesthetic life. Geertz defines culture as an 'accumulated fund of significant symbols' (Geertz, 1973, p.49) and the Western canon gives access to most of the significant symbols which have structured the consciousness of South Africans of European descent. If European myth and symbol are repugnant to others, then curricular components incorporating them can be optional. However, a particular culture being considered repugnant by others, would not in a liberal democracy, give those others the right to undertake a compulsory re-education programme for the children of its adherents.

In an era when Hispanics in the United States and Asians in Britain proudly assert difference and cultural particularism, despite their success in countries to which they freely emigrated it seems superfluous to have to plead for access to primordial sources for South African minorities. Their needs in this respect are surely as unremarkable as the attractions of traditional African culture for many highly educated African academics and intellectuals, or the continuing attachment to Japanese art forms and social etiquette of the democratic, technocratic and empowered Japanese who also - just in passing - see something worth their notice in the European classics! It is hard to escape an irrational conviction that humanity would be the poorer, and the totality of the human vision the lesser, for the disappearance of cultural variety. In Alaska the Native American Tlingit

struggle to keep their almost moribund language alive, while in Brazil the Krenak people search out half-forgotten tribal stories and rituals for their children. 'Discovering these words, stories [and] songs', said one of them, 'is to recover the path of our being' (Geary, 1997, pp.48-51). Why do they not submit to the majority cultures in their countries, especially since those majority cultures are so closely associated with empowering global culture? Why should they care what cultural symbols are passed to their children? Why struggle for anything that has no obvious rational or economic benefit? But to ask that question is to surrender to the terms imposed by the Enlightenment paradigm ....

The challenge to South Africans is to use technology for what it does best, without surrendering the richness of primordial metaphor. South Africa would be diminished without the immemorial lore and ancestral wisdom flowing from the African experience. Depriving the African people of all this in the course of a ruthless modernisation would benefit no one. And South Africa would also be the poorer if minority groups were to be denied access to the song and story, to the ancestral wisdom, of the early European experience. All of us have a right to the treasures of primordialism and the right to share them with anyone else, though such riches are never transferable to the fearful or to the scornful.

Traditions

Cultures, according to Kenneth Strike, emphasize narrative, solidarity and identity rather than truth, and stressing their historical character he reminds us that cultures always involve traditions (Strike, 1996). Those who cherish traditional African values have much in common with so-called Eurocentrists. Neither side should castigate the other party with terms such as 'neo-colonialist' or 'primitive'. Both parties, like primordialists everywhere, stand in a similar relation to rationality, technology, democracy and assimilationism. The necessary sparseness of any generally acceptable core curriculum makes the contribution of both parties indispensable to successful multiculturalism. *Neither Africanists nor Eurocentrics need be disparaged or brushed aside if only their*

aspirations can be placed within a framework in which they are not in opposition to each other or to the civic culture of progress and development. Without a recognition of the depth of human need fuelling demands by both African and European primordialists, multiculturalism here will be meaningless. In the primordial terrain beyond the negotiated overlapping consensus, there can be no question of dominance or majority status. Africanists and defenders of the canon need to see each other as allies in a struggle against crass instrumentalism and against the universalizing ethics of modernity. Powerful forces are pushing us all toward what Kolakowski called a barbarian unity - barbarian because it is a uniformity based on the loss of worthwhile traditions. One such force is the spirit of technology which has led us to undervalue any traditions which do not contribute directly to the progress of science and technology (Kolakowski, 1990).

Every community is entitled to draw what it wishes from its own past. Africans in this country are entitled to decide for themselves which elements of traditional African culture they wish to retain and pass on to their children, alongside whatever elements of global culture they wish to appropriate. Indian South Africans are equally entitled to a cultural synthesis incorporating elements from the African environment, from globalised Western culture, and from historic Hindu or Islamic culture. The same right must be vouchsafed to Afrikaners. Contemporary English-speaking communities around the world have a right to use, or to ignore, various elements within the historic culture of Britain which should be regarded by them as a common resource. What each of these contemporary communities chooses to appropriate from the canons of this, their distant European past, can and should differ, since each of these communities must construct its own unique synthesis by drawing what it needs from its European origins, and also from its American, African or Pacific environment. English-speaking South Africans, both white and coloured, would have no cause to feel guilty if they chose to retain - for themselves - aspects of the Western canon in a cultural synthesis which would also embrace themes drawn from their Southern African environment. If this is Eurocentrism then it is no cause for blame or recrimination.

The uses of the past

Education begins with 'the shaping of an animal into a human being by a process of socialization, followed (with luck) by the self-individualization and self-creation of that human being through his or her own later revolt against that very process' (Rorty, 1990, p.45). And how better to combat the process of adaptation to the unbearably thin and arid sustenance for the passions provided by contemporary global culture than by juxtaposing it with different paradigms? And for students of European provenance the Western canon provides challenge and enrichment without exacting a renunciation of the core value of contemporary Western culture which is rational individualism. Interwoven with classical or Christian morality it presents a series of crystallisations of each stage in the evolving sensibility and thought of the European tradition made by its most perceptive minds. Westerners sense obscurely, that things have gone dreadfully wrong. Like city children who see cows' milk only in supermarkets, they sense that they have been cut off from whole worlds of thought and feeling behind the omnipresent technology of our era. Representing as it does their only access to the primordial resources of their inherited tradition, the Western canon is essential to cultural transmission and to continuity through change, for South African minorities.

In this Report the main focus has been on countering the argument that retention of the European classics in the South African curriculum would be culturally hegemonic, and on arguing for minority right of access to the canon within a multicultural framework in which both national and particular preoccupations could be accommodated. It was stated at the outset that space would not permit a full exploration of the idea - very prevalent among English-speaking whites - that all cultural products from past eras are simply irrelevant to anyone in the modern world. A brief reference to this trend would be appropriate at this point, since it is a notion which would have curriculum planners for the humanities focus exclusively on contemporary culture. History must now deal only with recent and local events, and literature studies should be confined to contemporary works. Yet works of art and thought from distant periods can give access to the roads not taken, challenging our complacency with viable options organically related to the road we *have* taken. In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* a forbidden copy of

Shakespeare stirs rebellion against the bland superficiality of a world devoid of profound feeling. Allan Bloom (1988) is disturbed by the passionlessness, and the lack of idealism in contemporary youth culture. And as the global culture of pop psychology, soap opera, and rock music threatens to sweep all before it, Asian, African and aboriginal peoples are delving deep into their past and drawing on all their resources of primordialism. And for those of European descent this can be a no less rewarding exercise. Earlier periods of European civilisation now stand in much the same relation to contemporary, globalised, Western culture as do all extra-European civilisations. The range of lived alternatives preserved in the amber of the Western canon is astounding in its variety. From the fiercely heroic egoism of the *Iliad*, through the urbane reasonableness of Herodotus, to the sentimental religiosity of Richardson's *Clarissa*, where will we find its equal in scope and richness? We have pared down the European vision to an untenably thin rationality, so that the cowed and exhausted churches, the wary and sceptical poets and artists, the forlorn millions who look to new cults and old Oriental religions all bear witness to the contemporary poverty of global Western culture. Westerners need access to pre-Enlightenment ways of conceiving reality, access to alternatives of substance and rich complexity. But we are told that the study of past eras is 'irrelevant' to modern needs, or too difficult and obscure for students to grasp. One wonders why. If it springs from a contempt for the intelligence or imaginative capacity of the young it seems misplaced, for the children of our recent ancestors coped with classical languages and history while our children it seems are unable to cope with anything pre-dating the twentieth century. Can this trend have its origins in a proper contempt for the insights of cultures that now seem technologically backward? This suggests an inconsistency, since no one would now profess contempt for extra-European cultures on such grounds. Can it be that there is a fear that the values embodied in canonical works will merely reinforce existing attitudes? If so, then nothing could be more wrong-headed because it is the parochialism of the present from which we have most to fear. It is the products of the post-Enlightenment world which are most likely to reinforce existing stereotypes. Juxtaposing earlier worlds of thought and feeling with the contemporary mind-set could provide the real challenge to existing stereotypes. But then, perhaps we do not like our assumptions undermined, our mass-produced values questioned, or our soap-opera

aesthetics and our psycho-babble morality challenged. Could it be that the long ago and far away, the profound, the sublime and the beautiful would be unbearable to us now?

Embracing minority status

The time has come for a recognition by the English-speaking white minority that an essential prerequisite for enjoyment of the consideration due to their minority status, is an abandonment of the old attempt to claim that all aspects of their culture have universal value. They have to accept that a large part of the Western canon should, therefore, not be imposed on all South Africans as part of a common curriculum, but should instead be vigorously defended as something to which they themselves have a right.

Having divested themselves of the old hegemonic pretensions and reoriented themselves in relation to the globalised, universalizing, empowering phase of Western culture, English-speaking whites may come to accept that no group has an exclusive right to the role of donor or protector over others (Abrahams, 1996). Part of the problem is that during the Apartheid years most of the intellectual and moral leaders of this group felt that it was their duty to speak for the voteless. A reorientation and refocusing is now imperative. 'Trusteeship over my own heritage, for my own sake', said Abrahams, 'implies no insult or threat.' He continues:

> The opening of our society lends a new urgency to the maintenance of our standards as individuals and as bearers of our inherited culture. Our standards are the wealth we bring out of our personal experience, our education and our communal past; and they are the resource out of which pours whatever we are capable of contributing. We have to guard our own, not *against* others but, in the first place, *for ourselves*, and in the second place, *for* others, our compatriots, against the time when, if ever, they *may* choose to share it ....
>
> So, while I will not try to proselytise anybody or establish a cultural colony, neither will I desert my own values. I will not dissolve my culture in the melting-pot of diversity .... I will hold on to the things I love.

> All this, too, is needful if I am to embrace our African destiny.
>
> (Abrahams, 1996, pp.26-27)

Anyone who contends that there will be no need to set up formal structures for the achievement of this aim, has only to contemplate the fate of Chinese culture in Malaysia where it has been virtually eradicated at secondary and tertiary levels of public education (Rothermund & Simon, 1986) despite the Chinese having constituted a very large minority, and despite the historic prestige of Chinese civilisation. A sense of security is the indispensable basis for the generosity, the willingness to share and exchange, which we all hope for, and which will not be possible while any one group is made to feel that its culture is a mere foreign importation expected to wither away in due course, along with other obstacles to the nation-building process.

Conclusion

It would surely be unreasonable if any party of people professing allegiance to the maintenance of an inherited culture were to refuse to others a sympathetic understanding of *their* situation, and to expect that those others should summarily abandon a cherished tradition merely on grounds of economic or political expediency - and here I refer to Africanists and Eurocentrists alike. And perhaps assimilationists and universalizing liberals are still mired in a hope, or dream, that one could identify the kinds of knowledge or understanding that could provide depth for people as individuals instead of in terms of their collective affiliations (Apter, 1977). But this dream does not take account of human limitations. Geertz has shown just how important cultural symbols may be to human intellectual development, while Garrison's pronouncement that 'culture has us before we have it' should be a sobering reminder of the power of culture even over those individuals who seek to examine critically the very culture that structures and supports their critical endeavours. 'The real alternative to primordialism would require so complete a utilization of individual genius and potentiality, so revolutionary a realization of each person's "species being", that people would need to be gods to

achieve it' (Apter, 1977, p.66). Individuals grow up in cultural communities, nurtured and supported by shared symbols. This is not to deny that there will always be peopl who freely choose to cross cultural frontiers, or to straddle more than one such community; the boundaries between cultures, never clearly drawn, are fluid and shifting. But this whole process of cultural change and exchange is always a long and complex one whose terms and timing cannot be prescribed by educational planners. There is no quick fix for diversity. This does not mean that we must see culture as static, or as sacred or immutable, only that we need to recognize that when development, mutual influence and negotiation do take place it will be from starting points within existing cultures. And each one of our contemporary communities has the right to offer to its children the symbols and the cultural icons that have structured the consciousness, the inner worlds that history has bestowed and that individuals now find within themselves.

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Author Meyer B P
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