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Knowledge in the Blood
Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past
By Jonathan D. Jansen

(Stanford University Press, April 2009)

For nearly four and half decades, until the end of Apartheid era in South Africa, Afrikaner nationalist sentiment was successfully assimilated in white Afrikaans schools and universities. There was an “everyday character of normality” in white university life which ran through the curriculum, sports, and informal faculty-student exchanges. Jonathan Jansen describes his entry into this world (after getting a doctorate at Stanford) at the end of the Apartheid era, as the first black Dean of education at an elitist, historically white University of Pretoria.

Knowledge in the Blood describes how Jansen took over the task of transforming the university in fundamental ways, from changes to the curriculum to introducing native black languages, all with a view to providing a better understanding of majority black culture to his predominantly white colleagues and students who were now part of a racially integrated university.

Early on in his tenure, Jansen was struck both by the very firm views about the Apartheid era (held by white and black students alike) and a deep denial about a criminal Apartheid past among white Afrikaner students, even as televised truth and reconciliation hearings were being held for the first time. He asks, “How could young people, still young children around the time of Nelson Mandela’s release from prison, recall so vividly events and experiences from the past? How did they know? Who told them? Where did they get this knowledge?” This became the question that besieged him early on his tenure and became the impetus for this book.

Calling it knowledge in the blood, Jansen describes it as “knowledge embedded in the emotional, psychic, spiritual, social, economic, political, and psychological lives of a community...It is not, therefore, knowledge that simply dissipates like the morning mist under the pressing sunshine of a new regime of truth.” He compares this to the trauma of Holocaust, which is borne by subsequent generations who bear witness to the terror long after it was actually experienced.

In Jansen’s view this “bitter knowledge” became the main resistance to the reforms he wanted to introduce into a close knit and authoritarian Afrikaaner culture. The resistance came not only from students and their parents. But, surprisingly, also from colleagues including junior black faculty trained within the Apartheid academy. “With my colleagues in Education there was a rigid knowledge of race and ethnicity as biological and cultural givens, not as social and political constructions, and this made it very difficult—especially in the context of the social sciences—to begin training or reorienting colleagues in a broader theoretical understanding of received knowledge.”

The resistance must have been considerable as Jansen decided to quit after eight years, tempering his own assumptions about the possibility of educational reform and genuine social change. However, the book

includes vivid stories of reconciliation, moments when the reader is convinced that Jansen's white students make an epistemic leap, as it were, experiencing history from the other side of the color divide, as blacks displaced from their lands and farms, and not just as arsonists or threats to public safety.

Jansen concludes on an optimistic note with ideas on how educators can develop a "postconflict pedagogy" in divided communities. For that to be possible, Jansen argues that those formerly oppressed and their erstwhile oppressors need to agree on what happened, their stories of the past should be "mutually conceived and resolved." Jansen adds "it is essential that students understand that from the beginning white resisters to slavery and colonialism were fighting on the side of the black cause. In Rwanda stories must be told of Hutu resisters who lost their lives as one of the most efficient genocides in history was visited on the Tutsi minority by their Hutu neighbors. Stories must be told of the Germans who stood by Jews, of the Afrikaners who stood by blacks, of the whites in the civil rights marches in the United States—all of whom faced the same ferocity of attack as those originally targeted for their race or ethnicity or religion. Embedded in such stories of solidarity are stories of hope. What students learn is that there is no genetic or social "essence" that predisposes any group of people toward hatred, or for that matter toward love."

While *Knowledge In The Blood* deals with education in divided communities of South Africa, it holds insights, even lessons, for dealing with racial and ethnic divisions in schools and society everywhere.

Jonathan D. Jansen is Honorary Professor of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand and Visiting Fellow at the National Research Foundation, both in South Africa. He was a Fulbright Scholar at Stanford University and Dean of Education at the University of Pretoria. His latest co-authored book is *Diversity High: Class, Color, Character and Culture in a South African High School*

Stanford University Press

April 2009		360 pages
Cloth Edition	\$65.00	978-0-8047-61949
Paper Edition	\$21.95	978-0-8047-61956