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Politicizing Literature and Literalizing Politics in Alobwed Epies the Death Certificate and Anyi-Kwe Armahs the Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born

CORRESPONDENCE



AUTHORS & AFFILIATIONS

Dr. Emmanuel Nchia Yimbu ¶*

Lecturer, Faculty of Arts

¶ Department of English and Cultural Studies, University of Buea, Cameroon

Langue Nkwendji Amelie Patricia

ABSTRACT

Volumes of literature and critical works have been written in an attempt to situate the place of politics in literature. Some postcolonial writers have argued vehemently that it is practically impossible to write apolitical literature in the postcolonial world. This paper considers Alobwed 'Epie and Ayi kwei Armah as writers in "Postcolonial Politics". Their novels are considered here as political pamphlets designed to castigate specific political regimes which have transformed the lives of the citizens into a perpetual nightmare. It equally examines the novels as those that expose some of the most gruesome and nauseating realities of postcolonial leadership politics. Furthermore, this paper sustains the argument that in the novels under study, the masses are projected as people who have been politically, economically and socially deceived, marginalized, oppressed, persecuted...

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AUTHOR CONTACT QR LEDGER

Dr. Emmanuel Nchia
Yimbuji*



FULL ABSTRACT

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Politicizing Literature and Literalizing Politics in Alobwed Epies the Death Certificate and Anyi-Kwe Armahs the Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born

Dr. Emmanuel Nchia Yimbu^{¶¶*} and Langue Nkwendji Amelie Patricia^{¶¶}

QUALIFICATIONS / ROLES

¶¶ Lecturer, Faculty of Arts

AFFILIATIONS

¶¶ Department of English and Cultural Studies, University of Buea, Cameroon

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Volumes of literature and critical works have been written in an attempt to situate the place of politics in literature. Some postcolonial writers have argued vehemently that it is practically impossible to write apolitical literature in the postcolonial world. This paper considers Alobwed' Epie and Ayi kwei Armah as writers in "Postcolonial Politics". Their novels are considered here as political pamphlets designed to castigate specific political regimes which have transformed the lives of the citizens into a perpetual nightmare. It equally examines the novels as those that expose some of the most gruesome and nauseating realities of postcolonial leadership politics. Furthermore, this paper sustains the argument that in the novels under study, the masses are projected as people who have been politically, economically and socially deceived, marginalized, oppressed, persecuted, enslaved, exploited and brutalized as a result of excessive greed, corruption, nepotism and tribalism. These ills are the major viruses that continue to deprive the pauperized masses from the benefits of independence as the transition from the colonial to the neo-colonial regimes was a mere change of political actors but the leadership tactics remained the same. From a Marxist and New Historicist theoretical paradigms, the analyses reveal that there is a thin line between the world of the novels and the social climate in which they resonate and adumbrate. Consequently, the novelists succeed in transforming political realities into eternal truths of the human condition in postcolonial Africa. The analyses further stress that the novels offer synthesis of the people's political experiences reconstructed in prosaic form. As such, the novelists consider the servant leadership and the moralization of political leadership as condition *sine qua non* towards a free, fair and transparent society.

Keywords: *literalising, politicising, leadership, tribalism, corruption*

Correspondence: Dr. Emmanuel Nchia Yimbu

1 INTRODUCTION

Independence in many African nations came with great hope, yet authors like Alobwed' Epie and Ayi Kwei Armah portray its bitter aftermath as one of disillusionment. Alobwed' Epie's *The Death Certificate* (2004) and Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) are seminal postcolonial novels that project the nauseating realities of postcolonial leadership and serve as critiques to the failed leadership that inherited colonial rule. Both novels depict new African leaders who simply replicate the injustices of their colonial predecessors by indulging in corruption, nepotism, abuse of power, and moral decay. These novels highlight how independence, rather than bringing freedom and shared prosperity, became "a nightmare and an illusion" in which indigenous leaders betrayed the ideals of freedom. Instead of delivering good governance, the postcolonial elite turned to self-enrichment and autocratic practices that thwarted the people's hopes for collective progress and socio-economic development. This comparative analysis examines how Alobwed' Epie uses satiric realism and Armah visceral

symbolism to expose the excesses of leadership ills in postcolonial Africa which as the novels reveal, is characterized by rampant corruption, moral decadence, abuse of power, nepotism, disillusionment and the ultimate failure of leadership to meet the basic needs of its citizenry.

2 POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE AND POLITICS

Postcolonial literature over the years have enjoyed an intimate relationship with politics and no sane African writer can try to avoid writing about politics because as Karl Marx has insinuated, man is a political animal and "if you don't play politics, politics will play you"(12). This declaration only highlights the relevance of politics in literature and to better situate our topic in perspective, it will be useful preparation to first of all define what we consider as politics from both the political and literary perspectives. Politics is defined by *The Complete Reference Encyclopaedia* as: "Ruling by the consent of the govern, an activity whereby solutions to social and economic problems are solved and different aspirations are met by the process of

discussion and compromise rather than by the application of degree or force” (703). From this definition, politics will simply mean an activity for the resolution of problems. It can also mean a person’s attitude and the management of power relations.

George Nyamndi in his thought-provoking political diary, *Whether Winning Whether Loosing*, says “politics has to do with choices and your choice is determined by the interest you pursue at any given moment” (55). Nyamndi here considers politics as a game of interest and his view very much resembles that of a one-time-Prime Minister of Cameroon, Simon Achidi Achu, who concluded that politics is a game of “permanent interest” as he puts it “Politics nanjangi, you scratch my back I scratch your own” (*Cameroon Tribune* 11).

The above definitions can only sound absurd to somebody who is not versed with neo-colonialist political agendas. Nonetheless, a vivid reading of the works of Alobwed’ Epie and Ayi Kwei Armah, validate the assertion that politics, especially within the context of colonial and postcolonial leadership, is dominated by individual interest. Politics on the literary level means representing the whole setup of society. Ngugi in *Writers in Politics* explains that:

“Literature cannot escape from the class power structure that shapes our everyday life. Here, a writer has no choice. His work reflects one or more aspects of the intense economy, political – struggle in society. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is whose politics? (xvi)

Politics in this sense is not streamlined to the existence and militancy in political parties as is the case with Nyamndi and Achu. It does not mean the right wing or left wing government. It is a human activity that engulfs all of man but, since man is a “political animal” and not homogenous, there are bound to be many politics. Thus, Ngugi’s question of “Whose Politics?” becomes very pertinent and his advice is that whenever people are exploited and oppressed, the literary artist should take sides with the oppressed, thus, becoming “a writer in politics” (Ibid xvi). In almost a similar perspective, Soyinka in an online article perceives a writer’s resort to active politics as unavoidable because to him, “the artist should not be engaged with the exigencies of everyday life but the totality of the human heritage” (Par.4).

The politics these writers propagate is that of the masses, the downtrodden, the subaltern or what Fanon considers “the wretched of the earth”. A committed writer therefore has to be the eyes, ears and voice of the suffering masses and as Achebe reiterates, “It is impossible to write anything in Africa without some kind of commitment, some kind of protest ... in fact, I should say our writers, whether they are aware or not are committed” (Innes and Lindfors 40). Ngugi, Soyinka and Achebe all argue that a writer cannot be apolitical. The notion of politically committed literature is borne by postcolonial Novelists like Alobwed’ Epie and Ayi Kwei Armah, who see themselves not as mere passive entertainers but also as firebrand activists and social critics in their various societies.

Enormous debates have arisen as to the relationship that literature shares with politics (let us posit unequivocally that the novel is rightly literature and most often, we shall relate to it as literature). Chidi Amuta has given due prominence to the relationships that literature shares with politics and his opinion deserves quoting here at length. To him:

“From the Homeric epics to the medieval morality play: from Elizabethan theatre to romantic poetry: from the literature of the Chinese culture to Russian socialist realism: from the literature of negritude to that of the Harlem renaissance: from African cultural nationalist literature to the contemporary anti-imperialist writings, literature has never parted company with politics. (ibid 43)

Amuta ends his discussion in an affirmative note by stating that any “artistic naturalism without political content is anachronistic and tragic” (43). Ngugi in *Writers in Politics* validates the assertion that literature and politics both deal with man and his environment as he states that “Literature and politics are about being men, women, children breathing, eating and crying ... men in history of which they are products and makers” (72). Similarly, Bate Besong argues that politics enters literature when the writer’s concern with the public is dominant. It is the most obvious subject for him to demonstrate that the cultivation of humanizing values is a permanent coda of his art” (ALA 96). Intimating the relationship between politics and literature, Ngugi further states that “The relationship has taken various forms. Often the writer and the politicians have been the same. In the very process of articulating a people’s collective consciousness, the writer is led into active political struggle” (73).

Likewise, Chinweizu et al in *Towards the Decolonisation of African Literature* conclude that:

“Literature and politics influence each other and writers are deluded who draw from absurd pretensions of art for art’s sake put on this airs of artistic elect who must keep their works unsullied by the political concerns of their fellow citizens. (Chinweizu et al, 1980, 251)

Furthermore, Barbara Harlow emphasizing the place of politics in a literary work states that “Politics in a work of literature is like a pistol shot in the middle of a concert, something loud and vulgar and yet a thing to which it is not possible to refuse one’s attention” (*Resistance* 161). From the above, one realizes that it is extremely difficult to separate literature from politics because as George Orwell says in “*Why I Write*”, “... no book is genuinely free from political bias. The attitude that arts should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude (Ibid, 68). Consequently, politics becomes so important to literature to the extent that Chinua Achebe insists that:

“... any African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary African (societies) will end up being completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames. (*Writers*, 1982, 74)

In the same line, Bole Butake in “*A Writer as a Combatant*” opines that “those who say literature has nothing to do with politics do not know what literature actually means” (*WEKA*, 27). Similarly, Chidi Amuta insists that African literature and literary discourse must shed its prodigal Western heritage and reintegrate with political discourse, which to him, is “where it rightly belongs” (*Theory*, 84). Consequently, it would be the height of academic oversight to underestimate the place of politics in literary discourse. Politics from a literary perspective thus refers to all

that involves man and his society and our interest in this paper is to show how the two novelists creatively manipulate their societal happenings into novels that are politically engaging and artistically profound.

2.1 TOXIC LEADERSHIP AND POSTCOLONIAL DISILLUSIONMENT IN THE NOVELS OF ALOBWED'EPIE AND AYI KWEI ARMMAH

The novels of Alobwed' Epie and Armah project neo-colonial sycophants whose leadership tactics are design towards satisfying their personal needs and interest. One is therefore not surprised when Nuruddin Farah concludes that "The African politician is a blind man: he moves only in one direction towards himself". (22) Their leadership politics are characterized by endemic corruption, exploitation, marginalization, tribalism, squandamania amongst many others. A close look at the nature of leadership in Alobwed' Epie's and Armah's novels validate Farah's claims that African politicians are greedy, self-centered, malicious and egocentric. Their leadership politics are designed for their personal satisfaction and self-aggrandizement with little or no concern for their masses. The major theme in the African novel as exemplified in the novels under study is the excesses of political leadership.

Olusegun Adekoya in a thought provoking paper entitled "Psychopaths in Power: the Collapse of the African Dream" posits that most postcolonial leaders' obsession to power have "breed moral corruption, dictatorship, derision, economic distortion and ruination, megalomania, perversion and desecration of all that is good in Africa" (1). The taking over of power by the neo-colonialist from their colonial masters, led to the evaporation of all dreams of greatness, nationalism, liberation from the colonial thralldom and poverty. As soon as the neo-colonialists took over power, they suddenly became worse than their colonial masters. The transition from the Colonial to the Post-colonial period has been described by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *I Will Marry When I Want* as a journey from "Cold land" to "Frost Land" (12) Ngugi's views are very similar to those of G.E Okereke who has also commented on the relationship between the colonialist and their emergent neo-colonial counterparts in her illuminating study of the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. According to her:

"The African predicament is compounded by the emergence of colonialism in new robes bearing a slightly different name, neo-colonialism. This is a new kind of colonialism because Europe is now controlling Africa not directly as in the colonial era but indirectly through the new African leaders whose aspirations are to perfect themselves in the art of oppression and exploitation, an art at which the European colonizers were adept. (Okereke, 1989, 132)

From the colonial to the neo-colonial period, there was little or no improvement in the lives of the masses who fought together with their enlightened elites to send away the colonialists. This is because the new third world elites simply fitted into the shoes of their former colonial masters. The departure of the colonizers and the attainment of independence by many once colonized countries was not a panacea for political, economic social and cultural freedom Ayi Kwei Armah, describes the journey from the colonial to the neo-colonial period as a change in "dancers" but the "dance" remained the same. As he puts it in *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born*, "New people, new style, old dance" (23). The old dance of oppression exploitation and marginalization of the colonized masses was intensified in a more intense and traumatic manner by the neo-colonialist. The relationship between the masses and the neo-colonial elite has been described by Fanon, as a pitfall of national

consciousness. In his thought-provoking review of Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o highlights the relationship between the neo-colonialist and their masses in the following lines:

"We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us- the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best-had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken over and barricaded themselves in. And from within they sought to persuade the rest through numerous loud speakers, that the first phase of the struggle had been won and that the next phase-the extension of our house-was even more important and called for new and original tactics, it required that all argument should cease and the whole people speak with one voice and that any more dissent and argument outside the door of the shelter would subvert and bring down the whole house. (*Homecoming*, 1982, 53).

Independence thus did propel a new set of leaders in most of the newly independent states. These leaders did not only fail to fulfil their pre-independence promises but presented their peoples with a series of betrayals and catastrophes. As Hilarious Ambe makes us understand, quick and rapid alliances and negotiations were forged or imposed by the new leaders as "a means of cementing and consolidating their new position: and then they settle down to a systematic and shameless looting of the collective wealth" (94).

Ambe further argues that either through improved legislation, presidential decrees/ ordinances, political manipulation or outright totalitarianism, the new leaders continued trampling on their citizenry, who remained dispossessed and incapacitated. Any attempt to protest or question the neo-colonial status-quo was silent by brute force. Describing the situation in most post-independence societies shortly after independence, Romanus Muoneke had this to say:

"The departure of the colonial master had created a vacuum, which the politician had neither the wit nor manner, nor even the goodwill, to fill up. During the struggle for independence, he had created great expectation in the minds of his people with promises of freedom, equality and peace. When he came to power, he gave the people greed, corruption, graft, thuggery, election rigging and despair. The people were totally disillusioned and disappointed and felt betrayed. Many joined hands with the politician to rape the country, while others expressed anger, cynicism and despair... (Muoneke, 1994,41)

In almost the same mannerism as their colonial predecessors, the neo-colonial regimes were characterized by oppression, exploitation, power abused, marginalization and religious hypocrisy. The excesses of neo-colonial leadership politics inform and continue to preoccupy most postcolonial writers including Ayi Kwei Armah and Alobwed' Epie.

2.2 CORRUPTION, MORAL DECAY, ABUSE OF POWER AND NEPOTISM IN ARMAH'S *THE BEAUTIFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN*

“

Fascinated, he breathed it slowly into his lungs. It was a most unexpected smell for something so new to have: it was a very old smell, very strong, and so very rotten that the stench of it came with a curious, satisfying pleasure [...]. He felt reasonably contented with the smell of the cedi's marvelous rotteness. (3)

Very few African novelists have been able to paint in such a provocative and nauseating manner, the extent to which social and moral decadence has eaten deep into the fabric of African society like Ayi Kwei Armah does in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Though made with specific reference to postcolonial Ghana, the quotation above x-rays the nauseating realities that characterize most post independent African societies.

Corruption, moral decay, power abuse and nepotism pervades the entire universe of Armah's novels as a central theme. They are depicted as the cancers eating away the post-independence society's moral fabric. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Ayi Kwei Armah presents a bleak portrait of a newly independent Ghana rife with endemic corruption at every level. The author employs striking imagery of filth, decay, and excrement to symbolize how deeply corruption has polluted the nation. The very environment is described in terms of waste and rot, mirroring the moral decay of public life. For example, a bus journey early in the novel becomes an allegory for the state as the sleeping passengers represent ordinary citizens, while the driver and conductor (figures of authority) collude to cheat them and then attempt to bribe their silence with a cigarette. As one critic observes, "the bus is like a country or a nation, which is in a state of decay... the driver and conductor are authorities conniving to defraud the citizens" (12). Such scenes underscore that corruption has seeped into everyday interactions, creating a social climate in which dishonesty is normalized.

Also, Armah's protagonist, an unnamed everyman simply called "The Man" struggles to maintain his integrity amid this rot. His honesty makes him a pariah in a society where bribe-taking and fraud are the norm. Indeed, "the social environment is rendered uncongenial for honest living by the prevalent dishonesty and selfishness", and anyone who refuses to join the corrupt system is derided and economically marginalized. An often-cited line from the novel crystallizes this moral decay: the society believes that "only two types of men" remain honest, "the cowards and the fools" In other words, upright characters like "The Man" (and his confidant, Teacher) are viewed as naive or stupid for rejecting corruption. This bitter cynicism reflects a collective moral decline where public values have inverted such that virtue is scorned and vice rewarded. Armah reinforces this through the character of the man's wife, Oyo, who chastises her husband for spurning a bribe. Oyo, tired of living in poverty, mockingly asks why he did not take a kickback at work, exclaiming that "maybe you like this crawling that we do, but I am tired of it" and scoffing that "we don't care" how corrupt officials like Koomson obtained their wealth (Armah 1968, 44) Her stance, preferring ill-gotten comfort over principled hardship exemplifies the moral erosion afflicting ordinary citizens under a corrupt regime. Even personal relationships are tainted as Oyo's moment of frustration highlights how systemic corruption pressures families to forsake ethical ideals for material gain.

2.3 ABUSE OF POWER AND NEPOTISM

Another major leadership ill critiqued in Armah's novel is the abuse of political power for personal gain, often manifesting as nepotism and cronyism. In Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the emblem of corrupt power is Joseph Koomson, a former dockworker turned powerful minister in Nkrumah's government. Koomson's meteoric rise from humble origins to lavish privilege is portrayed as a case study in how postcolonial leaders enrich themselves at the nation's expense. Publicly lauded as a success, Koomson is in fact "a public official who embezzles government funds to enrich himself", owning posh cars, luxurious houses, and even a well-stocked liquor cabinet far beyond what his salary could afford. His wealth plainly comes from corruption. In the novel, we are made to understand that Koomson has arranged foreign scholarships and perks for his relatives. For instance, securing a study-abroad opportunity for his wife's sister, a clear example of nepotism in practice. In one scene, the protagonist and Oyo visit Koomson's opulent home and marvel at "things of intricate and obviously expensive design" that signal the "power of their owner" (144). The irony is that the very anti-colonial firebrands who once decried the luxuries of Europe now use their power to chase those same luxuries for themselves. As one character cynically observes, "New People, New Style, Old Dance" (Armah 1968, p.157). Only the style of leadership has changed with independence, not the exploitative dance of corruption. This epigram encapsulates Armah's critique where the African elite are simply mimicking the colonial masters' abuse of power, lining their pockets and indulging in excess while the masses languish.

Furthermore, Armah details how Koomson abuses his office through schemes like the fishing boat scandal, which doubles as a nepotistic favor and financial racket. Koomson promises Oyo's family a fishing boat (to appease Oyo and her mother), but procures it under his young daughter's name which is a ploy to get around restrictions and effectively claim the asset for himself. He assures them that "the money is not the difficult thing. After all, the commercial bank is ours, and we can do anything" (136). This stunning admission lays bare the regime's mentality that state resources are treated as personal property ("ours") for those in power. Koomson's use of a government-controlled bank to finance a private venture illustrates embezzlement and crony capitalism, and his words bristle with the entitlement of a man who believes rules do not apply to him. Through Koomson, Armah exposes how postcolonial leaders hijacked public institutions for personal enrichment and patronage. The novel also shows that this abuse of power trickles down through every rank from the policemen on the road routinely extort bribes from drivers ("petty corruption") to low-level clerks who demand kickbacks for services rendered. Thus, from cabinet ministers to traffic police, authority is perverted into an opportunity for illicit gain. Those like Armah's protagonist who refuse bribes are castigated as obstacles in this system and this further proof that abuse of power has become institutionalized.

Furthermore, Armah's novels exposes how power abuse often extends to the personal sphere in the form of sexual exploitation. Armah show how lecherous leaders view women as perks of office. In *The Beautiful Ones*, it is casually noted that men like Koomson habitually keep girlfriends as a cynical villager asks, "Have you ever seen a big man without girls? Even the old ones?" Koomson and his colleagues in crime use their wealth and influence to seduce young women with gifts like imported European wigs, perfumes, blouses, and a sign of cultural decay where officials trade trinkets for sexual favors. Through this depictions, Armah makes it abundantly clear that postcolonial leadership has betrayed the populace's trust in every arena-economic, political and personal-in pursuit of self-aggrandizement.

2.4 POSTCOLONIAL DISILLUSIONMENT AND THE FAILURE OF LEADERSHIP IN THE BEAUTIFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN

The ultimate message in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is that postcolonial African leadership, marred by greed and corruption, has utterly failed its people. Instead of the prosperity and justice hoped for at independence, the masses are left disillusioned and destitute under a new indigenous elite that behaves much like the colonial masters. As Macheke writes, independence proved to be only a boon for the elite, who “grabbed all [the] goods” under the banner of Africanization while the majority saw no improvement. Armah portrays this betrayal as the central tragedy of the postcolonial condition. The lofty rhetoric of nationalist leaders is exposed as hollow once they assume power. Armah’s title *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* bitterly suggests that the truly virtuous leaders, the “beautiful” ones have yet to emerge in a society cursed with crooked officials. Through cynically drawn characters and situations, the author concur that the initial euphoria of independence quickly curdled into “mass apathy and despair” as citizens realized they had traded white colonizers for black oppressors. The hopes of freedom, equality, and good governance were dashed by cynical leadership and endemic corruption, leading to what one critic calls “socio-economic disillusionment” in the newly independent nations.

A significant incident in this novel is how this failure of leadership leads to violent catharsis in the form of a military coup. Armah ends their narrative with the overthrow of the civilian regimes, implying that the rot had become so deep that only forceful removal could reset the polity. Indeed, as one comparative study notes, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the military coups is caused by the mismanagement of the leaders”, essentially a last-resort reaction to rampant corruption and “misleading and mismanagement” by those in power. Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* culminates in the 1966 coup that toppled Kwame Nkrumah’s regime in Ghana. The event is presented through the eyes of the protagonist, who witnesses the sudden collapse of the corrupt order which he has long resented. The coup in Armah’s story is portrayed as a kind of dark poetic justice where the once-untouchable Koomson is reduced to a trembling fugitive. In a memorably grotesque scene, Koomson, so bloated by privilege and vice must crawl through a latrine hole to escape capture, literally swimming through filth to save himself. This imagery symbolizes the fall of the might into the muck they themselves created. In the coup’s aftermath, the novel offers a fleeting glimmer of vindication for honest individuals. The man’s wife Oyo, who earlier chastised his uprightness, now looks at him with newfound “respect and trust”, saying she is “glad [he] never became like [Koomson].” It is a small personal triumph as integrity is finally honored amid a larger societal upheaval. Armah thus suggests that while the immediate purge of corrupt leaders may cleanse the air, the deeper problem of finding incorruptible leadership remains. The title’s meaning resonates strongly even after the coup, the truly “beautiful” leaders are still “not yet born,” and Ghana (like Africa at large) must continue to wait for genuine change.

In the novels, the military coup is depicted as the drastic outcome of sustained leadership failure. Armah does not glorify military rule but rather, the coups underscore how grievously civilian leaders betrayed the public trust that armed intervention appeared preferable to the status quo. Critics have noted that this narrative pattern with the novel ending in a coup became almost a trope in African literature, reflecting the real-world political pattern of the 1960s–1980s. Armah’s works stand out for capturing the frustration and despair that drive such drastic measures. As one scholar observes, his fiction suggests that by the mid-1960s “the only solution... to remove [corrupt] African leaders” was

seen to be “through military forces. This bleak conclusion is a damning verdict on postcolonial leadership. Through his vivid storytelling, the author ultimately agree with Frantz Fanon’s harsh assessment of the new national bourgeoisie as “incapable of bringing national unity” or real progress, being “strung to defend its immediate interests” only. The collective tragedy portrayed in the novel is that the end of colonialism did not usher in the hoped-for era of justice and prosperity but instead, it unleashed homegrown rulers whose reigns were characterized by the same oppression, greed and decay.

2.5 CORRUPTION, EMBEZZLEMENT AND INSTITUTIONALIZED TRIBALISM AS LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES IN ALOBWED 'EPIE'S NOVEL

Corruption and embezzlement of state funds become a leadership strategy in Alobwed’ Epie’s novels. A case of the misuse, and the diverting, of aid and loans is noticeable in *Death Certificate*. In the novel, loans granted for agricultural projects never reach the farmers who are the beneficiaries. A loan given by the World Bank in conjunction with the European Economic Community Bank to the tune of 8.4 billion francs CFA, together with another one amounting to 1,620,000,000 FCFA, granted by the Canadian Cooperative Assistance to Third World countries meant to pay farmers’ arrears is never paid. The reason for the disappearance of this money, Alobwed’ Epie tells us, is that “Each big gun of the clearing house of the sums pocketed a large chunk of the money” (48). It is evident that with such a situation at hand, people sideline state interests and think more for their personal interests first. When such is the case, the economy is bound to suffer.

Besides siphoning money meant for investment purposes, food stuffs and other gifts which the government receives, does not reach the intended recipients. A good case in point is found in *The Death Certificate*. In this novel, foodstuff destined for victims of the Lake Dos disaster is diverted for private use. Rather than send these foodstuffs to the victim, they are diverted to Mongo Meka’s village to entertain guests during his burial. We are told in this light that:

“

The Director General of Customs said a ship load of rice, stock fish and a host of other provisions destined for the victims of the Lake Dos explosions had been diverted from the Tuada port to the small Badanga port where they would be transported to Meka’s village. (84)

In a similar fashion, another loan acquired from Canada meant for the improvement of urban roads has also been diverted for use to embalm the (supposed) dead Meka. All of this, we are told, is with favourable auspices from Jacqueline Diwona, Mongo Meka’s sister, who “As wife of the Minister of Territorial Administration [...] handles all foreign aid, be it relief supply, or aid for development” (123).

From the foregoing quotations, a couple of issues are raised. Being a member of the First Province, therefore of the ruling clan, the Director of Customs uses his authority to endorse acts which are contrary to those of state interest. By this, the novelist is castigating rulers for handling state matters as though they were family matters, or as though family matters supersede state matters in importance. Nepotism is also exposed. A similar case is the handling of relief supplies and developmental aid money by Jacqueline Diwona, simply because she is the wife to a government minister, who is also a person from the ruling clan. Despite her reckless handling of the job, she is never sanctioned. By this, we are hinted at the impunity which is the order of the day in this state. It is with these prerogatives in mind that she misappropriates resources meant to serve the entire country for the burial of Mongo Meka. With

this is mind, we are therefore not surprised that "money destined for the nation [ends] up in the pockets of the signatories" (51). Unfortunately, those public servants who ought to be on the lookout for the perpetrators of crime are rather the ones championing the course of corruption and embezzlement. We are not surprised that Mula, in utter bewilderment, asks Musa, his informant: "In this situation, who will raise the alarm?" (*ibid*). By this rhetorical question, Mula indirectly laments the fact that some criminals seem to be enjoying the protection of the state, and therefore are above the law.

As far as tribalism is concerned, *The Death Certificate* projects a society where institutionalized tribalism has become the order of the day. As far as state events in the country are concerned, those in power rather tilt their importance and make it a sort of tribal affair. Or, better still, whenever an event of tribal character coincided with a state one, priority was given to the tribal event, disregarding or undermining the value of the events of state significance. We are told in *The Death Certificate* in this light that Labour Day celebrations are completely disrupted in order to receive the corpse of Mongo Meka at the airport. Alobwed' Epie points out that "All members of government and members of parliament were at the airport. Labour Day manifestations were completely disrupted" (91). It is hard to believe that events in state offices are grounded simply because the remains of an individual are to be received at the airport. Granted that Mongo Meka was a state functionary of high standing, a selected number of persons could form the state envoy which will receive his remains, after which a funeral shall be properly scheduled for every well-wisher and sympathiser. In a similar vein, the Minister of Territorial Administration gives orders that the Commissioner for the 8th District should be arrested and a tape bearing the confessions of Major General Mbaneko, caught operating in a gang of armed robbers, be seized. It is worth pointing out that the Minister stresses the fact that the said Commissioner is above all, not a son of the First and Second Provinces, but of the 8th Province. This hierarchization of one's belonging to the state is on the one hand, a form of protectionism by the elite in power to their kin and kind, and on the other, a form of exclusion and maltreatment of those who are considered as not belonging to the ruling family. The lines below justify the fact that tribalism and other vices are leadership tactics in Ewawa:

“

The nation has to be worried because a few days earlier, the president of Ewawa in an address to the nation had condemned embezzlement of public funds, tribalism, nepotism and the untoward behavior of his ministers and senior civil servants. In the same vein, he had lashed out against the brutality and uncouth conduct of the forces of Law and Order and promised stern disciplinary actions against any Ewawaian found guilty of misdeeds.... But what has gone wrong now? Have the looters conspired to dethrone the president? How could that be? The head of the army was his younger brother; the head of the gendarmerie was his nephew; the delegate general of national security was his brother-in-law. Furthermore; three quarters of each of these security units were made up of people from the first province... (13-14)

The foregoing lines lay bare the nature of leadership in Ewawa. Leaders are portrayed as corrupt and brutal, prone to embezzlement and looting, and, above all, deeply tribalistic. This entrenched tribalism fosters nepotism, since appointments are made not on the basis of merit or competence but simply because individuals hail from the so-called "First Province."

Fairly on in the novel, a more nauseating picture of the tribalistic nature of the Ewawa society is projected during arrangements for the funeral of Mongo Meka. The declarations of Emda Odu show clearly that the society presented in *The Death Certificate* is highly tribalistic as almost every sector of the society is headed by a son or daughter from a particular area referred to in the novel as the "First Province". The following lines from Emda once again highlight not just the theme of tribalism and nepotism but equally emphasize the extent to which the Ewawa society has morally degenerated in terms of leadership politics. As she says:

“

My brother's house in the village was built as a weekend resort. It can only house 250 people. It has to be reconditioned. That work can be handled by E.S.I.U engineers. The director of E.S.I.U is one of us...The road leading to the house is 2km off the main road. It is Newly bulldozed and therefore bumpy. Shall we drive Meka's body on a bumpy road thereby completing what the accident left undone? Is the Minister of Public Works not one of us? The marbles for the grave and tomb are yet to be ordered for. We can get both from Gargini Funerary Home in Paris. We can use one of our cargo planes to transport the things. This too is easy. Is the Director of Ewawa Airways not one of us?... (44-45)

The expression 'one of us' consistently mentioned by Emda in the lines above refer to members from the First Province who occupy almost all the important ministerial positions and misuse state funds and resources with impunity. Alobwed' Epie in the lines above shows the extent to which the Ewawa society has degenerated as a result of tribalism. State funds and state properties are squandered indiscriminately by members of the First Province who constitute the ruling class.

The analyses above expose the tendency of post-independence elites to denude their state coffers and stash the money in safe, private bank accounts in Europe. As a consequence, the citizens suffer because there is little or no liquidity left in the handling of government business. It is a betrayal by the elite because they were expected to take over from where colonial rapacity ended, and then attempt to re-assemble what was left for the purpose of reconstruction, but the desire to get rich quick, as well as the lure to lead luxurious lifestyles, led to their dipping their hands into state finances. Tribalism gives rise to Nepotism and Alobwed' Epie decries the tendency to give opportunities like job openings to friends and family members while those who merit these jobs are sidelined simply because they have nobody to rely on. It breeds mediocrity and this seriously negatively affects the state. Nepotism breeds exclusionism and division as some are given preferential treatment while others are discriminated against. This is all due to tribalism which makes leaders not to see and act in terms of collective state interests, but from the parochial prism of tribalism. They are leaders who accord favours only to those from their areas while outsiders are totally excluded. The analyses above also give us an idea of how the economy of the state, after the granting of formal independence and the taking over of power by the Africans, looks. Rather than improve upon some of the issues which the Europeans intentionally did wrong, like the exploitation of Africa's human, financial, and natural resources, the Africans did much worse. They rather perpetuated these crimes which made the state and individuals suffer immensely.

Furthermore, Alobwed' Epie projects a society where even the church has become an advocate of corruption, embezzlement and tribalism. In *The Death Certificate*, Alobwed' Epie constructs a

devastating satire of the African Church as the modern inheritor of colonial domination. His fiction reveals a continent where the pulpit has replaced the governor's mansion and the priest has become the new administrator of fear. The Church, which once preached deliverance from sin, now colludes with the state to perpetuate social and economic exploitation. The novel exposes how religious fanaticism, once a missionary import, mutates into a postcolonial epidemic, sustained by ignorance, greed, and moral paralysis. In this transformed landscape, faith becomes a political language, and religion, once a refuge, becomes a predatory system. Alobwed' Epie dramatizes this through his most infamous clerics, Father Cosmas and Archbishop Boa in *The Death Certificate*. Each of them represents a stage in the degeneration of stewardship as their activities move from bureaucratic corruption to charismatic manipulation. Both men claim divine authority yet embody moral rot. Through their stories, Alobwed' Epie portrays the African Church not as the light of postcolonial liberation but as the lingering shadow of colonial control.

In the novels of Alobwed' Epie, there is a sustained critique on religion, particularly Christianity. The novel presents a society where even religion cannot savage the community and the church cannot guarantee the salvation of the pauperized masses. The church and its leaders are pathetically as corrupt as the state. In a heated debate between Mr Emda Odu, Arch Bishop Boa and Madam Jacqueline Diwona, we are made to understand that the Catholic church in Ewawa is part of the corruption conspiracy and highly involved in the waste and squandering of the state resources. The Arch Bishop's utterances and his actions are part of the many ills that Alobwed' Epie sets out to satirize in his novel and his words deserve quoting here at some length:

“...brothers and sisters in Christ within the flick of the fingers, we've lost two illustrious sons. As if that is not enough grief, we have also lost the Cardinalship that rightfully belongs to us...I thought the Arch Bishops and Bishops of a country make recommendations in conjunction with those of the government and the Holy See simply executes their will...Several people express their surprise at what the holy see had done-depriving the son of the soil and the head of the ecclesiastical wing of the ruling party, of the eminent appointment. Some opted for a break with Rome...Others suggested that a protest letter be written to the Pope. (63-64)

The lines above justify the fact that the church in Ewawa and its leaders are tribalistic, egoistic and corrupt. The Arch Bishop and the church were even referred to as 'the Ecclesiastical Wing of the ruling party' (64). Meaning just as the state, the role of the church is to exploit and oppress the masses and this justifies my claims in this paper that religion especially Christianity serves as an instrument of oppression, exploitation and the promotion of tribalism in Alobwed' Epie's *The Death Certificate*.

3 CONCLUSION

Alobwed' Epie's *The Death Certificate* and Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* offer searing comparative portraits of postcolonial African leadership gone awry. Both novels explore how the promises of independence were undermined by corruption, moral decay, abuse of power, nepotism, and a general failure of governance. Through direct narrative and potent symbolism, the authors critique leaders who, rather than lifting their nations, enriched themselves and perpetuated backwards injustice, corruption and tribalism. Alobwed' Epie employs

satire, vivid descriptions and irony to lay bare the absurdities of Cameroon's political class, their corrupt and tribalistic nature and lavish lifestyle and to show how an uncritical populace can be complicit in its own exploitation. Armah, in turn, uses unflinching realism and metaphors of decay to depict Ghana's slide into cynicism, making the reader almost smell the rot that accompanies moral decline. Despite differences in style, the two writers' visions converge as they both hold strong to the thesis that postcolonial misrule is a betrayal of the people's trust and one that replaced colonial domination with indigenous tyranny. Both novels end in the dramatic end of the corrupt regimes, yet these endings are cautionary rather than celebratory. They underscore a central theme which is that the true "beautiful ones", honest, selfless leaders with integrity are yet to emerge on the postcolonial stage. One can say therefore that Alobwed' Epie and Armah "denounce the highest echelons of society" for commandeering power and wealth at the expense of the masses. Their works collectively call for reflection and change, implying that only through accountability and ethical leadership can the postcolonial African nations realize the freedom and prosperity that were promised. In sum, *The Death Certificate* and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* remain powerful literary testaments to the ills of leadership in their era where corruption, nepotism, abuse of power, and moral bankruptcy become the other of the day. The novels also continue to resonate as grim reminders of how hard-won political independence can be squandered when those in power forsake the common good for personal gain.

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“Hacia una Transformación de los Sistemas Alimentarios. los Estudiantes Como Agentes de Cambio Sociocultural”

Towards a Transformation of Food Systems: Students as Agents of Sociocultural Change

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AUTHORS & AFFILIATIONS

Dr. María Clara Melchiori ¶*

Facultad de Bromatología

Mg. Paula Rossi**Lic. María Belén Parodi****Lic. Carina Treise****Lic. Jesús María Barrios**

¶ Universidad Nacional de Entre Ríos, Argentina.

ABSTRACT

This study applied a Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) approach involving 65 first-year Nutrition students and 7 gastronomy graduates in Gualeguaychú, Argentina, during 2023. Through experiential learning activities conducted mainly outside the classroom, students engaged with local food producers, consumers, farmers' markets, and community initiatives to investigate the local food system. Activities such as market visits, food preparation using locally produced vegetables, and collaborative events encouraged healthier eating habits and active community participation. The project culminated in a “Soup Festival” and a participatory mapping exercise that documented experiences through photographs, videos, and dialogues. The findings demonstrate that CBPAR effectively promotes learning from primary sources, strengthens connections between educational institutions and communities, and empowers young people to act as agents of sociocultural change in transforming local food systems.

Index Terms: Community Participation • Community-based Participatory Action Research • Food systems • Nutrition Education • Youth Engagement

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AUTHOR CONTACT QR LEDGER

<p>Dr. Maria Clara Melchiorri*</p>	
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

“Hacia una Transformación de los Sistemas Alimentarios. los Estudiantes Como Agentes de Cambio Sociocultural”

Dr. Maria Clara Melchiori^{¶¶*}, Mg. Paula Rossi^{¶¶}, Lic. María Belén Parodi^{¶¶}, Lic. Carina Treise^{¶¶}, and Lic. Jesús María Barrios^{¶¶}

QUALIFICATIONS / ROLES

¶¶ Facultad de Bromatología

AFFILIATIONS

¶¶ Universidad Nacional de Entre Ríos, Argentina.

Abstract

The participatory action research strategy based on community involvement (PAR) involved 65 incoming nutrition students at the National University of Entre Ríos and 7 graduating high school students with culinary arts degrees. The project was developed in an atypical course format in 2023, under the premise that “The Argentine food system must be changed, and young people can do it,” empowering them to become agents of sociocultural change. The city of Gualeguaychú, Argentina, and a public policy implemented within its territory, provided the context for this initiative. An initial awareness-raising effort among the students and outreach to local leaders, undertaken by the teaching team, allowed us to implement the strategy. This strategy was primarily developed outside the classroom, through ongoing interaction with others and using a dialogue methodology that was either spontaneous or initiated with key stakeholders in the local food system. The farmers’ markets and fairs in the town squares, showcasing local fruit and vegetable production as part of the municipal public policy, along with a recently opened community-run biopark on public land, provided the ideal setting for students to conduct research using primary sources and through unplanned conversations with consumers and/or producers. A raffle for a bag of freshly picked, seasonal vegetables, and the challenge of preparing meals to share with peers during each visit to the markets, allowed the young people to experience the organoleptic qualities of these vegetables firsthand. This motivated them to make dietary changes throughout the year and encouraged others to participate in the experience. The participatory action strategy between the two educational levels culminated in the Soup Festival at the university, where the convergence of knowledge was put to the test with a variety of colorful and flavorful soups.

Keywords: *Investigación-acción participativa, Sistemas alimentarios, Gualeguaychú, Nutrición, Gastronomía, Agentes de cambio, Soberanía alimentaria*

Correspondence: Dr. Maria Clara Melchiori

RESUMEN

La estrategia de investigación-acción participativa basada en la comunidad (IAPBC) involucró a 65 estudiantes universitarios ingresantes de la carrera de Nutrición en la Universidad Nacional de Entre Ríos y a 7 estudiantes egresados como técnicos en gastronomía de una escuela secundaria, se desarrolló bajo una cursada atípica en el año 2023, con la consigna de “Hay que cambiar el sistema alimentario argentino y los jóvenes pueden hacerlo”, convirtiéndose en agentes de cambio sociocultural.

La ciudad de Gualeguaychú, en Argentina y, una política pública desarrollada en su territorio, nos permitió conducir la propuesta.

Una primera sensibilización del estudiantado y un acercamiento a referentes del territorio, por parte del equipo de cátedra, nos permitió abrir juego a la estrategia que se desarrolló fuera del aula fundamen-

talmente interactuando con otros en forma permanente y usando la metodología de diálogos que fueron o bien espontáneos o bien provocados con actores claves del sistema alimentario local.

Las ferias en las plazas y mercado de comercialización de la producción frutihortícola local que forman parte de la política pública municipal y un bioparque recientemente estrenado para laboreo comunitario, en tierras fiscales, dieron el marco ideal para la investigación desde fuentes primarias por parte de los estudiantes y en diálogos no planificados que ellos mismos mantuvieron con consumidores y/o productores.

Un sorteo de un bolsón de verduras frescas de estación, recientemente cortadas y, el desafío de elaborar con ellas comidas que debían ser compartidas entre pares, en cada ocasión de visita a las ferias; permitió a los jóvenes comprobar las bondades organolépticas de estas verduras motivando a generar cambios en su alimentación durante el transcurso del año e invitando a otros a acercarse a la experiencia.

La estrategia de acción participativa entre los dos niveles educativos culminó con el Festival de las Sopas, en dependencias universitarias, donde la confluencia de saberes se puso en juego en la mesa con un abanico de coloridas y sabrosas sopas.

La metodología IAPBC permitió en un mapa parlante final confluír ordenando y sistematizando lo realizado bajo el formato de fotografías, videos, y diálogos en distintos soportes.

Visitar para conocer, dialogar para indagar, actuar para comprobar, fue la metodología escogida. Destacamos la participación de los dos niveles educativos interactuando cada uno desde su perspectiva; la cursada fundamentalmente fuera del aula; la investigación desde fuentes primarias recolectando datos directamente en el territorio y el beneficio para la comunidad toda al confluír en la propuesta la sabiduría de los agricultores y el compromiso de los consumidores, compartida con nuestros jóvenes y estos más tarde como agentes de cambio sociocultural entre sus pares y miembros de su familia, transformando prácticas que pudimos efectivamente comprobar y compartir.

La estrategia escogida nos permitió incluso volver al territorio una vez más para devolver en forma de acción, propuestas de consumo de alimentos que los mismos productores no conocían y aventurar futuras líneas de Investigación acción sobre datos que entre todos concluimos.

1 TIEMPO Y LUGAR

La estrategia de investigación acción participativa basada en la comunidad tuvo lugar durante el año 2023 en la ciudad de Gualeguaychú, provincia de Entre Ríos, Argentina.

Gualeguaychú, con aproximadamente 130 mil habitantes, según el último censo poblacional, tiene dimensiones de una ciudad intermedia y se define particularmente como una ciudad de frontera. Fronteriza con la provincia de Buenos Aires por un lado y, separada por el río Uruguay, con la República Oriental del Uruguay.

La existencia de una política pública municipal desde hacía varios años en esta ciudad, el programa de alimentación sana, segura y soberana, destinada a promover la producción de alimentos de forma agroecológica; el apoyo a los pequeños productores locales de alimentos y, estrategias de comercialización en ferias en plazas públicas y mercados, dieron el marco ideal para la realización de la propuesta que presentamos. Además, la creación de un bioparque, espacio destinado a la producción de tierra adecuada para abono, plantines de hortalizas y bioinsumos para proveer a huertas comunitarias, acordadas en el mismo predio a grupos diversos, permitieron desarrollar la propuesta durante la cursada ese año.

1.1 Quienes Intervinimos

Tuvo como intervinientes a un grupo de jóvenes estudiantes de los niveles secundario, técnico con orientación en gastronomía y universitario, estudiantes de nutrición quienes, convocados bajo el lema. Hay que cambiar el sistema alimentario argentino y los jóvenes pueden hacerlo, se conocieron, convocados por la cátedra de Problemática Nutricional de la Licenciatura en nutrición, de la Universidad Nacional de Entre Ríos.

1.2 Cómo la llevamos a cabo?

1.2.1 Organización, Sensibilización y Marco Teórico del Cual Partimos. La estrategia comenzó con una sensibilización de los dos grupos de estudiantes en el aula. Se procuró valorar muy especialmente el rol de los estudiantes de gastronomía, incentivándolos a poner en juego sus saberes y prácticas. Nuestro grupo de ingresantes a Nutrición contaba también con dos jóvenes egresadas de aquella escuela secundaria, con lo que entendimos que el camino a recorrer sería más fácil.



Fotografía: María Clara Melchiori



Fotografía: María Clara Melchiori

Fue la ocasión donde además presentamos una somera idea del sistema alimentario argentino y en particular focalizamos en la ciudad de Gualeguaychú y un recorte de aquel sistema poniendo el foco en la producción de hortalizas, actividad que en la ciudad se viene haciendo y que nos permitiría llegar a los productores y comercializadores de tales alimentos y los consumidores de tales productos.

1.2.2 Ahora sí, la Investigación-Acción Participativa basada en la Comunidad.. Cómo íbamos a llegar al territorio? La estrategia utilizada fue ubicar a los estudiantes en el mapa de la ciudad (puntos amarillos y violetas) según la cercanía de sus residencias con las plazas donde se realizan semanalmente las ferias de comercialización de la producción verde local. Se trata de las ferias en las plazas Gardel, Belgrano y San Martín, ubicadas en puntos suficientemente distantes entre sí.

La estrategia de recorrido por ortalizas pro ca pre venta, productores y consumidores.

Esto nos permitió continuar el trabajo ya fuera del aula, visitando durante varias semanas estos lugares donde se provocaron y realizaron diálogos espontáneos con productores/ comercializadores y consumidores de estos alimentos.

Diálogos espontáneos con productores/comercializadores frutihortícolas locales.

Los estudiantes conocieron en terreno que se produce en la estación de la primavera argentina (meses de septiembre a diciembre); el precio de comercialización de las hortalizas; las características de cultivo; la incidencia del cambio climático en la producción y cómo



Fotografía: María Clara Melchiori



Fotografía: María Clara Melchiori

sororean dificultades los productores; las características de los consumidores habituales que llegan a las ferias, que compran, cuánto compran, usos que le dan a esos alimentos y decisiones de elección.

Los estudiantes pudieron recabar datos sobre la producción de plantines y de huertas comunitarias en el bioparque municipal. Contactar a los trabajadores de la tierra y conocer su rol como así también quienes llevaban a cabo tareas de producción en huertas comunitarias y el destino de los alimentos que obtenían en ellas, varios de ellos para comedores comunitarios.

Conocer acerca de la producción de plantines de hortalizas, visita al bioparque municipal

Cómo se incentiva a los productores, cómo se les facilita semillas, herramientas y técnicas para producir. Qué resultados obtienen de tales ensayos y que repercusión se obtiene en los consumidores de esos alimentos.

Estas fueron las fuentes primarias de datos que dieron cuerpo a la investigación. La recopilación y análisis posterior de estos datos permitió conocer el perfil de los productores de hortalizas locales y de los consumidores de alimentos concurrentes a las ferias de cercanía.



Fotografía: María Clara Melchiori

1.2.3 ¿Que Encontramos Entre Productores y Consumidores?. Los productores/ comercializadores locales de hortalizas son fundamentalmente hombres, de entre 30 y 50 años, aunque también existen mujeres. Suelen provenir de familias que, anteriores a ellos, también producían la tierra. Trabajan generalmente con ayuda de algún integrante de la familia, no con empleados.

Diálogos espontáneos con productores/comercializadores frutihortícolas locales.

Los consumidores de estos alimentos locales suelen ser mujeres mayores, que aprecian las características organolépticas de las hortalizas. Entre los hombres consumidores encontramos jóvenes padres que compran para alimentar saludablemente a sus hijos y valoran especialmente la producción agroecológica y el cuidado del ambiente.

El comprar para apoyar a los productores locales es característico del grupo de consumidores quienes van comprar desde hace tiempo cada semana y compran no solo para el día, sino para conservar y poder tener alimentos frescos, de cercanía cada semana hasta la próxima feria

Una segunda parte del trabajo fue realizada mediante diálogos ya programados por el equipo de cátedra con referentes del sistema alimentario local, especialmente invitados.

Dichos encuentros e intercambios fueron desarrollados en diversos escenarios tales como, el mercado y el bioparque municipal reciente-



Fotografía: María Clara Melchiori

mente inaugurado, como así también en la propia universidad y abordaron distintas aristas de la temática tales como:

Visita al bioparque municipal, intercambio con diversos actores del Sistema alimentario local



Fotografías: María Belén Parodi



Fotografía: María Clara Melchiori

Visita intercambiode experincias en el marco de la polii pblica local,el programde alimentain sana segura y soberana (PASSS)

Con Juan Cruz Demicheli, investigador del área de la economía agraria hablamos de su interés en estudiar el abasto alimentario de nuestra ciudad y del por qué cree él esta ciudad pudo crear y sostener por tantos años una política pública tendiente a garantizar alimentos sanos, seguros y de calidad para su población.

Con Betina Londra, ingeniera agrónoma y con Valeria Negro, facilitadora grupal ambientalista, ambas del Instituto nacional de tecnología agraria, INTA, dialogamos sobre cómo trabajaron grupalmente con los productores locales la introducción del zapallo Cabutiá y las batatas Gen entre sus cultivos. Ambos productos se comercializan desde hace años ya en la zona y son muy codiciados entre los consumidores habituales.

Con Alberto Pérez Gont, intercambiamos sobre cómo y desde qué áreas municipales se promovió y se sostuvo el plan de alimentación sana, segura y soberana del municipio de Gualeguaychú.

y por último con Maximiliano Nissero, joven productor agropecuario, supimos cómo se aventuró a producir granos de cereales y legumbres de forma agroecológica y cómo buscó formas de introducirlas entre posibles consumidores locales de alimentos. Cómo dio valor agregado a las mismas produciendo además harinas con esos granos más tarde.

Provocar para la acción, para la transformación En cada visita a las ferias el equipo de cátedra sorteó un bolsón de verduras frescas allí ofrecidas entre el estudiantado. La o el estudiante ganador debía luego elaborar con esos alimentos una comida y compartir la receta utilizada con sus compañeros en una estrategia que procuró que los propios jóvenes consumieran las verduras agroecológicas y pudieran ellos mismos apreciarlas, llevándolas a sus casas y dándolas a conocer en su propia familia.

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1.2 cada ocasión de visita a las ferias de comercialización.

La estrategia implementada de acción-participativa fue sumamente valorada por el estudiantado. No solo porque conocieron sobre la producción local de alimentos y pudieron valorar la calidad sensorial de las mismas en sus preparaciones, sino porque la estrategia sirvió para vincularlos mejor entre ellos y así lo testimoniaron al culminar el año.

Habiendo investigado entonces qué verduras pertenecientes a la estación de primavera se producían localmente, se motivó al grupo de estudiantes de gastronomía del nivel secundario a utilizarlas en la preparación de sopas.

Una primera práctica gastronómica y evaluación de la aceptabilidad de las sopas tuvo lugar en dependencias de la Escuela Técnica



Fotografía: María Clara Melchiori

Nro. 1 "Alferez de Navío José María Sobral", de la ciudad. Allí, los 7 estudiantes y su profesor elaboraron y presentaron para degustación un total de 10 preparaciones diferentes.

Los estudiantes de gastronomía poniendo en juego saberes en la cocina: elaboración, servido, degustación y evaluación de sopas elaboradas con verduras de estación

Colores, sabores y texturas diferentes fueron puestas a consideración de la evaluación sensorial de docentes y estudiantes del propio establecimiento educativo. Esta evaluación permitió escoger las mejores preparaciones que fueron más tarde elaboradas ya en dependencias de la universidad, en una instancia de intercambio en el laboratorio de cocina con los estudiantes de nutrición.

Los estudiantes secundarios con especialidad en gastronomía y su profesor

El festival de las sopas, así denominado ese encuentro, fue la instancia de mayor intercambio

y conocimiento de roles que cada estudiante puso en juego.

MENU FESTIVAL

Sopadd SOPAS

Sopa Vicchyssoise

Sopa de cebolla

gratinada

Sopa crema de

espinacas

Sopa de zanahoria y



Diseños: María Belén Parodi



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Sopa de remolachas 27/9 8a12 2023 am
Sopa sorpresa de Laboratorio de Cocina
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coci Facultad de Bromatología, Universidad Nacional de Entre Ríos,
Argentina.

Intercambio de saberes entre estudiantes de gastronomía y nutri-
ción

Las reflexiones vertidas por los estudiantes al culminar la cursada
revela que la investigación acción participativa basada en la comunidad
es una estrategia indicada para involucrarse y que permitió a los jóvenes
estudiantes ser agentes de cambio ya que, como ellos mismos indican,
pudieron a partir de ella modificar hábitos, recapacitando sobre prácti-
cas que habitualmente desarrollan y provocar efectos multiplicadores
en su entorno familiar y de amistades, tendientes a efectivamente cam-
biar el sistema alimentario argentino vigente.

La metodología utilizada fue: visitar para conocer, dialogar para
indagar, actuar para comprobar y confluje en la realización de este
mapa parlante ordenando y sistematizando lo realizado bajo diferentes
formatos tales como fotografías, videos y diálogos en distintos soportes.

2 Valoramos sobre todo;

el trabajo fuera del aula que motiva y permite el intercambio con otros.

la investigación desde fuentes primarias mediante diálogos espon-
táneos fundamental- mente, pero también aquellos programados con
referentes del territorio, todos actores relevantes del sistema alimenta-
rio local.

- El nexa entre estudiantes de diversos niveles y con diferentes
formaciones en un espacio común.

- A los jóvenes cómo propulsores/agentes de cambios modificando
sus propias prácticas y convirtiéndose en multiplicadores de las ac-
ciones.

2.1 Cómo Concluimos? qué Reflexionamos?

A modo de finalización de la estrategia volvimos al territorio y como
devolución de lo vivido compartimos con los trabajadores del bioparque
municipal un almuerzo en terreno.

El almuerzo permitió valorar sobre el plato el rol del que trabaja la
tierra indispensable para la producción de los plantines, el que cuida
la huerta hasta el momento de la cosecha y el que valora ese alimento
utilizándolo en una rica comida compartida.

Todos somos actores de los sistemas alimentarios: desde el que
trabaja la tierra, el que hace plantines y transplanta en la huerta, el que
cosecha, el que elabora comidas y el que consume las mismas.

La ocasión permitió además conversar sobre futuras líneas de in-
vestigación que nos permitieran avanzar sobre lo recabado por ejemplo
en materia de evitar pérdida y desperdicios de alimentos y la necesidad
de sostener la política pública local que valoramos como muy ade-
cuada y pertinente para alcanzar un sistema alimentario sostenible y
sustentable.

En cuanto a reparos éticos de la investigación: todos los inter-
vinientes prestaron su consentimiento para poder divulgar imágenes,
audios y formas de participación.

La experiencia contó con el patrocinio del profesor Luis D'elia de
la Universidad de Alberta, Canadá, quien nos motivó a presentarnos en
la conferencia híbrida de ARNA 2024.

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A Afetividade Contribuindo Para Adaptação E Desenvolvimento Das Crianças Do Infantil I Do Cei Padre José Maria Cavalcante Costa

Affectivity Contributing to the Adaptation and Development of the Children of Preschool I At Cei Padre José Maria Cavalcante Costa

CORRESPONDENCE → +



AUTHORS & AFFILIATIONS

Elaine Maria Holanda Vale ¶

¶ Prefeitura Municipal, Fortaleza, Brazil

Dr. Wanessa Pinto de Lima ¶*

Professora Concursada

¶ Secretaria Municipal de Educação, CEI Padre José Maria Cavalcante Costa, Prefeitura de Fortaleza, Fortaleza, Brasil

ABSTRACT

This experience report brings together observations and actions that took place in the kindergarten class I of CEI Padre José Maria Cavalcante Costa in the first half of 2023, whose content was based on affectivity as an important strategy for the adaptation and development of children. The survey found that families agreed that affection made a big difference for children's adaptation and made them more affectionate and less aggressive, in addition to providing a safer and more welcoming environment. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers and schools to work more on affectivity in the school environment, so that children can learn about values, respect for others and solidarity.

Index Terms: affectivity • cozy • adaptation • child development

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Dr. Wanessa Pinto de
Lima *



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EXPERIENCE REPORT

A Afetividade Contribuindo Para Adaptação E Desenvolvimento Das Crianças Do Infantil I Do Cei Padre José Maria Cavalcante Costa

Elaine Maria Holanda Vale[¶] and Dr. Wanessa Pinto de Lima^{¶¶*}

QUALIFICATIONS / ROLES

¶ Professora Concursada

AFFILIATIONS

¶ Prefeitura Municipal, Fortaleza, Brazil

¶¶ Secretária Municipal de Educação, CEI Padre José Maria Cavalcante Costa, Prefeitura de Fortaleza, Fortaleza, Brasil

Abstract

O presente relato de experiência reúne observações e ações que ocorreram na turma do infantil I do CEI Padre José Maria Cavalcante Costa no primeiro semestre de 2023 cujo conteúdo foi baseado na afetividade como uma estratégia importante para a adaptação e o desenvolvimento das crianças. A pesquisa constatou que as famílias concordavam que a afetividade fez uma grande diferença para a adaptação das crianças e as deixou mais carinhosas e menos agressivas, além de proporcionar um ambiente mais seguro e acolhedor. Portanto, se faz necessário que professores e escola trabalhem mais a afetividade no ambiente escolar, a fim de que as crianças possam aprender sobre valores, respeito pelo outro e solidariedade.

Keywords: *afetividade, acolhedor, adaptação, desenvolvimento infantil*

Correspondence: Dr. Wanessa Pinto de Lima

1 Introduction

O presente estudo apresenta um relato das ações desenvolvidas através de observações ocorridas no primeiro semestre (2023), na turma do Infantil I, do CEI (Centro de Educação Infantil) Padre José Maria Cavalcante Costa relacionando a questão da afetividade como fator preponderante para a adaptação e o desenvolvimento das crianças. Acredita-se que o papel do professor (a) na sala de aula vai muito além de habilidades cognitivas e técnicas, é necessário o afeto, principalmente no momento que bebês e crianças muito pequenas (0 a 3 anos e 11 meses) têm o seu primeiro contato com a escola, uma vez que não é fácil para eles (as) o afastamento da família, ainda mais quando se trata do tempo integral em que a criança vai passar em torno de 9 (nove) horas na instituição escolar.

Destacam Martins, Santos (2020) que a afetividade na educação infantil vai além de abraços e expressões de carinho — está muito ligada a receber a criança em um ambiente totalmente fora da sua realidade, proporcionando trocas de experiências, estímulos à aprendizagem, despertar para as motivações. Dessa forma, o docente, especialmente nessa fase inicial, precisa se preocupar com aspectos que influenciam no desenvolvimento cognitivo da criança, como um ambiente escolar com afetividade, segurança e conforto.

Geralmente, quando a criança entra em contato pela primeira vez na escola, há um período muito longo de adaptação; elas se sentem desprotegidas e inseguras, e algumas nem conseguem se adaptar. Diante dessa realidade surgiu a seguinte indagação: como a afetividade pode contribuir para a adaptação e o desenvolvimento das crianças na turma do Infantil I?

Dessa forma, observou-se a necessidade de se apresentar uma postura diferente do que na maioria das vezes se têm em algumas escolas, principalmente nas que possuem características tradicionalistas¹, pois o que se percebe é que há uma ânsia em fazer a criança aprender as coisas de forma muito acelerada, e jamais apresentar afeto, evitar abraçar, carregar no colo, acalmar nos momentos de desespero. Sendo assim, nossa justificativa se baseia no fato de que utilizar o afeto como uma estratégia para trazer a criança para dentro da sala de aula deixa o ambiente mais agradável, confortável e prazeroso e conseqüentemente vai influenciar no desenvolvimento cognitivo, da autonomia e da motricidade, pois por mais que seja bem planejado o processo de adaptação com foco nas singularidades da criança, geralmente não é um processo natural, visto que a chegada na escola causa estranheza e desconforto. Além disso, tem o impacto da mudança da rotina com a família e o contato e cuidado de outras pessoas (profissionais) que não faziam parte do seu convívio.

Ponderam Martins, Santos (2020) *apud* Piaget (1976) que o desenvolvimento intelectual está dividido em dois componentes: o cognitivo e o afetivo — ambos caminham juntos, pois toda a atividade e o pensamento são ações cognitivas, representadas pelas estruturas mentais e afeto que é a força energética, a afetividade.

Sendo assim, a afetividade é um componente essencial para o desenvolvimento infantil, no que diz respeito aos primeiros anos escolares, e foi através do afeto que se conseguiu apresentar esta experiência

¹O professor é o guia do processo educativo e exerce uma espécie de “poder”. Tem como função transmitir conhecimento e informações, mantendo certa distância dos alunos. (https://www.ufrgs.br/psicoeduc/wiki/M%C3%A9todos_de_ensino-)

tão significativa tanto para as crianças, como para as famílias e nós educadoras.

2 Methodology

A experiência ocorreu com a primeira etapa da educação básica — turma do Infantil I (crianças até 2 anos de idade) — no período compreendido pelo 1.º Semestre (2023). Tendo como objetivo analisar como a afetividade pode contribuir para a adaptação e o desenvolvimento da autonomia das crianças na turma do Infantil I no município de Fortaleza/CE. O relato foi feito de modo contextualizado, com objetividade e aportes teóricos, apresentando resultados quantitativos e qualitativos através de pesquisa realizada por meio de formulário do Google Form² e no registro fotográfico das ações das crianças em sala de aula como forma de ratificar a experiência descrita no referido estudo. A pesquisa foi encaminhada para 16 (dezesesseis) famílias dos alunos(as) da turma do Infantil I do CEI Padre José Maria Cavalcante Costa do município de Fortaleza—CE, porém somente obtivemos respostas de 9 (nove) famílias, que foram muito significativas para a conclusão do nosso estudo.

3 Results and Discussion

Nesse aspecto destaca-se parte da rotina das crianças do Infantil I do CEI Padre José Cavalcante Costa, a partir do primeiro contato com a escola em meados de Fevereiro/2023, observando que cada tempo e a forma como ele é trabalhado faz toda a diferença no processo de adaptação e desenvolvimento das crianças.

3.1 Difficulties in Adaptation

Quando recebemos as crianças em meados de fevereiro (2023) tivemos muita dificuldade em organizar a rotina. Tínhamos no total 16 crianças — entre 10 meninos e 6 meninas — na faixa etária de 1 ano e 6 meses a 1 ano e 10 meses, que eram totalmente dependentes: precisavam deixar seus pais na entrada da sala de aula e foram recebidos (as) por duas pessoas desconhecidas — a professora regente e a Assistente da Educação Infantil — que também estavam tendo um primeiro contato profissional com o Infantil I. De modo que, na primeira semana, já começamos a observar algumas situações de insegurança, choro excessivo e inquietação em algumas crianças, e passamos a utilizar outras estratégias para a rotina. A primeira foi na chegada: sempre recebendo as crianças com músicas animadas, com um sorriso no rosto, muito afago e carinho e, claro, quem precisava de colo recebia o acolhimento necessário até o momento em que a criança se sentisse segura e acolhida.

3.2 Bath Time

Em seguida mudamos a estratégia do banho, utilizando o tempo com cada criança de forma individual, em que a professora conversava com as crianças, mostrando o material de higiene e o que estava acontecendo naquele momento, para que a criança não se sentisse desconfortável. Brincava com a água para aliviar a tensão, respeitando o tempo de cada criança e suas emoções. Após o banho, utilizava palavras motivadoras como: “você está bonito(a), cheiroso(a)” e um abraço. E assim o banho passou a ser um momento de aprendizagem, diversão e de fortalecer os vínculos afetivos, respeitando a individualidade de cada criança.

3.3 Mealtime

No momento da alimentação, os primeiros dias foram feitas refeições na sala de aula para que as crianças pudessem se conhecer primeiro e se sentir confortáveis com as professoras. Para muitas, foi um momento

bem difícil, mas com o nosso auxílio, a maneira como conduzíamos a criança para aceitar o alimento foi fundamental — com paciência, fazendo brincadeiras de aviãozinho — e em pouco tempo a maioria já estava comendo sozinha.

3.4 Nap Time

Momento sagrado. Criou-se um ritual para que as crianças pudessem entender que era hora do descanso: desligamos a luz, colocamos músicas relaxantes, cortinas para criar uma certa penumbra e arrumamos os colchões respeitando a individualidade de cada um no seu momento. Alguns se deitavam e dormiam; outros(as) precisavam de um afago, um carinho, um colinho para que logo o sono viesse a tomar conta de seus olhinhos pequenos.

3.5 The Practice of the Hug

A estratégia mais significativa que gostaríamos de ressaltar nesse estudo foi a da prática do abraço nos momentos de agressividade entre as crianças. Quando estavam se sentindo inseguras, pedir desculpas e dizer “eu te amo” foi algo que realmente nos fez perceber o quanto o afeto faz diferença nos primeiros anos da educação infantil. Algumas crianças passaram a ser propagadoras do afeto: quando observavam um colega agindo de forma agressiva com o outro, interferiam e abraçavam o colega como forma de dizer que não era com agressividade que se tratava o colega, mas sim com afeto e carinho. Além disso, trouxemos para a sala de aula um mamulengo³ (Chico) que se tornou o mascote do abraço. As crianças adoravam abraçá-lo e se divertiam quando o trazíamos para a roda de conversa.

A afetividade vai além de sentimentos de amor, ternura e carinho; ela está relacionada a emoção, estados de humor, motivação, atenção, personalidade, temperamento, dentre outros termos. Ela exerce papel fundamental nas relações, influenciando o interesse na aprendizagem, a autoestima, a memória, a percepção, a vontade e as ações, favorecendo a construção da personalidade humana (Martins & Santos, 2020, p. 02).

Através das ações das educadoras, as crianças foram observando e praticando com o colega a afetividade; a motivação os contagiou, criando um ambiente agradável e alegre, diminuindo os casos de agressividade entre as crianças e aumentando o número de abraços, de carinho e demonstrações de afeto.

Corroboramos também Souza (2013) quando afirma que a afetividade é fundamental para a construção das informações cognitivo-afetivas nas crianças e também nas relações que devem ser estabelecidas entre professor e aluno. É por meio dela que acontece a identificação com as outras pessoas, sendo assim o afeto, a sensibilidade e a maneira de se comunicar do educador(a) vão influenciar o modo de agir dos alunos e facilitar o desenvolvimento cognitivo, já que durante o processo de aprendizagem não se consegue separar no aluno o intelectual e o afetivo.

Nesse aspecto destaca-se outro momento em que, ao observar a professora fazendo intervenções em uma situação de conflito entre duas crianças, uma terceira criança veio e abraçou o colega que estava batendo no outro — ou seja, o ato demonstrava uma habilidade que havia sido aprendida, uma vez que as educadoras sempre abraçam as crianças, destacando a importância do carinho e não da agressividade.

Compreende Ostetto (2008, p. 23) que:

²Link da Pesquisa: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc0GjYugmL-jMf6lJD SK1v8aVP-X0NWmcf5frnchH9nW9EOg/viewform?usp=pp_url

³O Mamulengo é a forma popular e tradicional do teatro de bonecos no Brasil. Nasceu nos interiores do Nordeste e, de lá, migrou para grandes centros e outras regiões. http://www.mamulengofuzue.com.br/?page_id=7

“

No contexto da educação infantil, o educador é aquele que caminha junto com as crianças, observando/registando, discutindo e refletindo sobre suas ações e sobre seus modos de expressão. Assim, ele rompe com a educação centralizada somente no adulto e passa a ter a criança como foco, adotando, então, uma postura não só de observador, mas também de investigador das várias maneiras de ser e viver a infância.

É o que confirma Freire (1996) quando menciona que a afetividade tem que estar ligada ao processo educativo. A formação da criança não pode ser vista apenas no aspecto cognitivo, mas também no social e emocional; o afeto na educação infantil cria um espaço de segurança, e onde crianças são valorizadas e respeitadas é possível desenvolver relações de respeito e diálogo, tornando as próprias crianças protagonistas de seu processo educativo, facilitando o seu desenvolvimento e aprendizagem.

Hooks (2021) também afirma que a afetividade vai além do amor e carinho, trata dos cuidados emocionais necessários na primeira infância, e que as ações afetivas da professora irão afetar a construção de autoestima e de identidade na fase de maior importância para a formação do ser humano.

Por fim, confirma Wallon (1975) *apud* Souza (2013) que as emoções são muito importantes para o desenvolvimento da criança. Através delas, o aluno(a) exterioriza os desejos e as vontades, de modo que a afetividade, segundo Wallon, depende de dois fatores — o orgânico e o social — que se relacionam entre si, principalmente quando as dificuldades precisam ser superadas pelas condições favoráveis entre ambos. Tal ligação se modifica durante o desenvolvimento da criança: o que antes era uma reação orgânica passa a sofrer influência do meio social, portanto a afetividade tem uma evolução progressiva que se distancia do fator orgânico e vai prevalecendo o fator social.

Sendo assim, através da observação feita no período de adaptação na sala do Infantil I do CEI Padre José Maria Cavalcante Costa, percebeu-se a necessidade de criar um vínculo de confiança com as crianças. Entendemos que nossas práticas pedagógicas precisariam somar com a afetividade e, dessa forma, utilizamos ações que valorizassem a necessidade de cuidados e individualidade de cada aluno.

Além disso, aplicou-se vivências que despertassem curiosidade e interesse, como também ações que valorizassem o reconhecimento, utilizando palavras motivadoras, elogios e abraços, para que eles se sentissem amados, acolhidos e livres para expressarem suas emoções. Percebemos, individualmente, que cada criança tinha sua necessidade afetiva, o que nos fez criar uma conexão de aproximação entre as crianças e as professoras. Aos poucos, percebeu-se que as vivências afetivas foram fundamentais para o melhor desenvolvimento das crianças, tornando o ambiente da sala de aula um espaço agradável, acolhedor e de aprendizado.

Dessa forma, através de diálogos e da pesquisa feita com as famílias, foi possível constatar que nossa estratégia de proporcionar um ambiente afetivo e acolhedor para as crianças do Infantil I foi percebida pelas famílias e proporcionou a interação das crianças, o desenvolvimento da autonomia e, principalmente, a propagação da afetividade dos alunos(as) dentro e fora da sala de aula — o que enfatiza a importância da relação entre família e escola, refletindo no melhor desenvolvimento das crianças.

Das 9 (nove) famílias que responderam à pesquisa, 100% afirmaram que a afetividade contribui para a adaptação e autonomia das

crianças e que a afetividade contribuiu para o desenvolvimento das crianças do Infantil I do referido CEI.

Com relação ao questionamento: “Você consegue observar que há afetividade na turma do Infantil I? Como foi o semestre para seu filho(a)? Você percebeu alguma mudança positiva?” Obtivemos as seguintes respostas:

- a) “Sim. Percebo que meu filho se sente confortável e acolhido no ambiente, onde inclusive para de chorar nos braços da professora. Acredito que sem essa ligação e afeto conquistado não seria possível uma boa adaptação e contato entre eles”;
- b) “Foi um semestre muito significativo pra nós e pra ela — adora abraçar e dizer eu te amo e agora vem junto com um abraço que aprendeu na creche, está muito afetiva”.
- c) “Sim, começou a entender mais os próprios sentimentos, aprendendo novas palavras e desenvolvendo em vários aspectos”.
- d) “Com certeza faz toda a diferença; sinto que meu filho consegue expressar com mais facilidade suas emoções e sentimentos; além disso, o progresso de interação social dele está praticamente 100%”.
- e) “Sim. É nítido, pois sentimos segurança na receptividade das professoras, na forma de tratar, zelar e cuidar. Minha filha volta para casa com gostinho de quero mais. Ama participar de tudo que é proposto. Ela desenvolveu perfeitamente o respeito para o próximo, sempre atenta em ajudar o próximo”.
- f) “Todas as mudanças positivas possíveis; minha bebê desenvolveu 100%, hoje ela é outra criança — muito bem educada e super independente — com a ajuda das tias do Infantil I”.
- g) “Sobre afetividade, meu filho foi bem acolhido; percebi que há uma relação de amor e cuidado entre eles. Esse semestre foi importante; teve várias mudanças positivas, entre elas a socialização, que eu acredito ser um ponto muito importante para o desenvolvimento dele!”.
- h) “Sim, meu filho desenvolveu bastante na questão da fala, cores e também começou a ficar mais independente; aprendeu a comer sozinho, uma coisa que ele não sabia, e na questão da alimentação também”.
- i) “Sim, minha filha desenvolveu muito bem; agradeço primeiramente a Deus e, em segundo lugar, às tias do Infantil I”.

Através dos depoimentos das famílias foi possível observar mudança no comportamento e nas atitudes das crianças, o que ratifica nossa pesquisa e confirma que o afeto é fundamental para o período de adaptação e para o desenvolvimento das crianças na educação infantil.

4 Final Considerations

Portanto, através do que foi observado e registrado durante o primeiro semestre de 2023, e também com o depoimento das famílias, constatou-se que a afetividade tem um valor essencial para a educação infantil, especialmente no momento da adaptação da criança, de sua chegada pela primeira vez na escola. Pois a partir do afeto, a criança vai conseguindo compreender melhor o significado de sua presença no mundo, seus anseios, seus medos e inseguranças. Além disso, a afetividade possibilita despertar o que há de melhor na criança — desenvolver o cognitivo, a criatividade, as relações com o outro.

Ao possibilitar um ambiente amoroso, afetivo, seguro e confortável para as crianças, principalmente nos primeiros anos escolares, o professor(a) vai paralelamente possibilitando para si mesmo um momento de puro amor, de uma troca que o faz crescer e se desenvolver também como profissional. Pois as crianças são puras — têm uma grandeza inigualável, nos fazem aprender todos os dias, nos ensinam o real sentido da vida.

Em tempos tão difíceis — como os que vivemos após uma pandemia, em que as pessoas ficaram isoladas, sem contato com ninguém — é de suma importância que, no momento em que a criança retorna ao convívio escolar ou que chega pela primeira vez, o olhar do educador seja afetivo, cuidadoso, capaz de perceber o que a criança necessita naquele momento. Sabe-se que há um número significativo de crianças, mas com paciência, disponibilidade e vontade há de se chegar a um resultado positivo, em que as crianças fiquem adaptadas à rotina e desenvolvendo suas habilidades de forma natural, cada uma em seu tempo.

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The Sarra Trilogy: Some Thoughts

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AUTHORS & AFFILIATIONS

Dr. Ian Mackie

📍 Researcher, Australia

Dr. Gary MacLennan ¶***ABSTRACT**

On the 13th of November 2015, Dr Chris Sarra delivered a groundbreaking lecture to the Australian Senate on Indigenous policy. In that lecture, Sarra tells us how, the then Prime Minister, Malcom Turnbull had asked him to list three things the government could do to make a difference in the Indigenous policy space. Sarra admits here that he was somewhat distracted by the fact that it was the day of the NRL Grand Finals and his beloved Cowboys were playing the Broncos, but he did promise to get back to the PM, and he did so with the following three points, which have since become known as the 'Sarra Trilogy'. They are Acknowledge, embrace and celebrate the humanity of Indigenous Australians. Bring us policy approaches that nurture hope and optimism rather than entrench despair. Do things with us, not to us! In what follows, we first give a short summary of our philosophical and methodological orientation. Then we will proceed with a commentary on each of the elements of Dr Sarra's Trilogy, which we will argue constitutes a relational and policy manifesto that marks a vital and necessary departure from current policy settings.

Index Terms: Indigenous policy • Sarra Trilogy • Critical Realism • Recognition • Indigenous Australians • Hope • Mateship • Sovereignty

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AUTHOR CONTACT QR LEDGER

Dr. Gary MacLennan^{†*}



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REVIEW

The Sarra Trilogy: Some Thoughts

Dr. Ian Mackie[¶] and Dr. Gary MacLennan^{¶*}

AFFILIATIONS

[¶] Researcher, Australia

Abstract

On the 13th of November 2015, Dr Chris Sarra delivered a groundbreaking lecture to the Australian Senate on Indigenous policy. In that lecture, Sarra tells us how, the then Prime Minister, Malcom Turnbull had asked him to list three things the government could do to make a difference in the Indigenous policy space. Sarra admits here that he was somewhat distracted by the fact that it was the day of the NRL Grand Finals and his beloved Cowboys were playing the Broncos, but he did promise to get back to the PM, and he did so with the following three points, which have since become known as the 'Sarra Trilogy'. They are Acknowledge, embrace and celebrate the humanity of Indigenous Australians. Bring us policy approaches that nurture hope and optimism rather than entrench despair. Do things with us, not to us! In what follows, we first give a short summary of our philosophical and methodological orientation. Then we will proceed with a commentary on each of the elements of Dr Sarra's Trilogy, which we will argue constitutes a relational and policy manifesto that marks a vital and necessary departure from current policy settings.

Keywords: *Indigenous policy, Sarra Trilogy, Critical Realism, Recognition, Indigenous Australians, Hope, Mateship, Sovereignty*

Correspondence: Dr. Gary MacLennan

1 INTRODUCTION

On the 13th of November 2015, Dr Chris Sarra delivered a groundbreaking lecture to the Australian Senate on Indigenous policy. In that lecture, Sarra tells us how, the then Prime Minister, Malcom Turnbull had asked him to list three things the government could do to make a difference in the Indigenous policy space. Sarra admits here that he was somewhat distracted by the fact that it was the day of the NRL Grand Finals and his beloved Cowboys were playing the Broncos, but he did promise to get back to the PM, and he did so with the following three points, which have since become known as the 'Sarra Trilogy'. They are

1. Acknowledge, embrace and celebrate the humanity of Indigenous Australians.
2. Bring us policy approaches that nurture hope and optimism rather than entrench despair.
3. Do things with us, not to us!

In what follows, we first give a short summary of our philosophical and methodological orientation. Then we will proceed with a commentary on each of the elements of Dr Sarra's Trilogy, which we will argue constitutes a relational and policy manifesto that marks a vital and necessary departure from current policy settings.

2 PHILOSOPHICAL ORIENTATION

Here, our commentary is guided by two principal paradigms Roy Bhaskar's Critical Realism and the work of the neo-Spinozians. From Critical Realism, we get the necessary emphasis on ontology and ontological depth. We can come to know reality, but we will never know how much of reality we know (Bhaskar, 2008). From the neo-Spinozians

we get the understanding of the importance of the affective dimension, which is described as a Triad consisting of Desire, Joy and Sadness. From this triad all other emotions are derived (Fisher, 2009; Lordon, 2014, 2024; Taylor, 2022).

We can regard humanity as desiring entities, machines if you like, and our task is to educate or inform desire, and thus to steer people away from sad passions, such as hatred and resentment and move them towards joyous passions, such as hope and loving kindness.

The essence of the education or informing of desire is captured in this quote from the French philosopher Miguel Abensour (1939-2017). He advocated the necessity of imagining the possibility of and, also, of working for a utopian society:

“...we enter utopia's proper and new-found space: the education of desire. This is not the same as a 'moral education' towards a given end: it is rather, to open a way to aspiration, to teach desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way (As cited in Playfair, 2015).

Our use of Spinoza here gives us a particular orientation. We believe that the current conjuncture is dominated by a crucial ontological absence and that is the absence of informed desire. This is increasingly seen, we believe, at the national level. We believe that decades of neo-liberal policy making, when we went from being citizens to consumers (Streeck, 2012a, 2012b) has disoriented, and perhaps weakened, the drive to build the "humane and compassionate nation" (Smith, 1980): one that we can all be proud of. We also seek to express with a good deal of confidence that for us the Sarra Trilogy can be seen as a means of absenting the absence of informed desire and thus of contributing to the nation building that we wish to support.

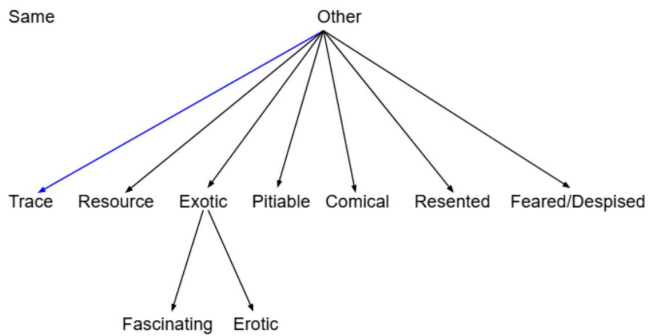


Figure 1. The Affective Frames of the Other (Smallwood, 2015)

We will now proceed to consider the elements of the Sarra Trilogy individually.

2.1 Acknowledge, Embrace and Celebrate the Humanity of Indigenous Australians.

Our approach to this part of the trilogy is to treat acknowledging, embracing and celebrating the humanity of Indigenous Australians as part of the process of recognition. We accept that the act of recognition is largely determined by the political and social paradigm within which the act of recognition takes place. That means that, in the case of Australia, the process of the recognition of Indigenous Australians has tended to be determined by the political and social paradigm of settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2010). It also means that the dominant thrust of policy, at least initially, has been to eliminate Indigeneity. This also helps us understand the struggles that have erupted around ceremonies like the need to change the wording of our National Anthem from ‘We are young and free’ to ‘We are one and free’, Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Elders, the status of the Aboriginal Flag, and the dating of Australia Day. These ceremonies and the campaign to change the date of Australia Day directly challenge the settler colonial imperative to eliminate Indigeneity.

What follows is an attempt to create a schema which helps us unpack the process of recognition.

There are seven major categories or affective frames from the most negative, Feared/Despised, to Trace, the most positive. The category of the Exotic is subdivided into Fascinating and Erotic.

The Feared/Despised Other is fairly easy to grasp, and it is the frame intrinsic to racism and the politics of conquest. It is less explicitly encountered today, but in informal settings as Sarra (2005, 2011) has demonstrated repeatedly this is still a major affective and interpretive frame (Butler, 2005; Huchet 2023; Rae, 2022) for inserting Indigenous Australians into. It is worth re-emphasising that one of the enduring contributions of Sarra’s (2005, 2011) research was to document the continuing power of racism in shaping the imaginary of mainstream Australians.

The frame of the Resented Other is a more recent addition (Smallwood, 2011, p.51). It is meant to convey the process where the Indigenous person is misrecognized and seen as privileged. This is a complex matter treated by Fraser (1995, pp.82-86), where she makes a distinction between affirmative and transformative remedies. She writes

By affirmative remedies for injustice, I mean remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them. By transformative remedies, in contrast, I mean remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework (Fraser, 1995, p.82).

For Fraser, the problem is that the affirmative approach tends to result ‘in strongly cathected, antagonistic group differentiation’ (1995, p.85). In other words, affirmation can cause the creation of the Resented Other. A good deal of empirical research is needed here (and with the other categories) to quantify the existence of resentment. But for the present the frame is a useful approach not least to the kind of recognitions articulated in Pauline Hanson’s maiden speech (Smallwood, 2011, p.40), or in the kind of talk back program hosted by Howard Sattler

Sattler: Let’s take a call. Tony’s on the line. Hello Tony.

Caller: Hello Howard.

Sattler: Yes Tony.

Caller: I and thousands of other people are sick to death of whingeing Aboriginals ... we’re also sick to death of the privileges available to Aboriginals that aren’t available to other Australians(as cited in Mickler, 1992, para.1).

The categories comical, pitiable and exotic are the sites, I would argue of considerable performative self-othering. It is quite obvious as MacLennan (2010) points out that the frame of Feared Desire Other and to a lesser extent Resented Other are perilous frames to occupy. As Smallwood puts it, ‘The feared Despised Other has no rights. They are lynched or murdered or set on fire or bullied endlessly’(2011, p.38). As Judith Butler (2005) argues even their deaths are not grievable. Understandably, there is an easily understood motivation to present oneself as pitiable, comical or exotic.

We will return to the question of self-othering, but for the moment let us consider the final two categories resource and trace. The other as resource would appear to be for MacLennan(2010), (Sarra, 2005, p.52), and Smallwood (2011, p.42) above all else an economic category. In this case, the Other is seen as of value to capital, or to put this in Marxist terms as a source of surplus value. We do not believe that having a job is equivalent to a fate worse than death. We are conscious, of course, of the need for human worth not to be reduced to a unit on a ledger. But for us, having a job is the beginning of the process of self-emancipation, so the Other as Resource cannot simply be understood in terms of being a resource for the boss. The worker is also a resource for herself, her family and her community.

What then of the category of the Other as Trace? Clearly here MacLennan (2010) was intending to incorporate the work of Levinas (1981, 1998, 2001). The latter is well known for the rigid demarcation he made between his religious writings and his philosophical work (Critchley, 2002, p.22). Though there would appear to be at least some slippage between the two domains, especially in the domain of ethics (Attridge, 2010). As (Critchley, 2002, pp.2-3) points out, Levinas’ work was first received and popularised in Catholic and Protestant universities. The matter of the relationship between religion and ethics is of some importance when it comes to the notion of the Other as Trace which MacLennan(2010) following Levinas defines as the trace of the Absolute Other that some call God. Arguably, what this frame indicates is an underlying tendency towards religious transcendence, a case, perhaps, of the God that dare not speak its name.

However we view the meaning of the Other as Trace, it is a frame that takes us away from the politics of the elimination of Indigeneity and towards the politics of respect. For that alone it is a framing worth preserving and putting into practice. It is also the interpretive frame that encourages empathy and, we believe, is closest to the politics of recognizing and celebrating the humanity of Australia’s First Nations.

We are anxious here to highlight that the process of recognition also contains the process of self-recognition. How Indigenous Australians recognize themselves has a serious impact on their lives. If they interiorize or absorb the negative interpretive framing that non-Indigenous Australians offer them, then that will have a poisonous impact on their



Figure 2. Sydney Parkinson: Endeavour Drawing

lives. As Professor Gracelyn Smallwood points out self-respect is an existential matter for Indigenous Australians (2012).

Here, we turn to Dr Sarra's acceptance speech at the NAIDOC AWARDS in 2016. There he made, as Walter Benjamin's put it in Thesis XIV, 'the tiger's leap into that which has gone before' (Benjamin, 1977) and there he found the courage and pride of the old people and the certainty that every Indigenous Australian is a product of their bravery. He said

For 50,000 history-making years, our old people lived like kings in lands where camels die of thirst. They stood as ironbark upright, strong, tall, standing and unbreakable. Their lessons, their songlines, their legacy and their dreamings. They are our true north. They are the truth not only of who we were, but who we can be again. My brothers, sisters, believe me when I say this. We are stronger than we believe. And smarter than we know. Solidly anchored by an honourable past, more than any other human beings on the planet, we can take our place in an honourable future. We have survived and now we must thrive (Sarra, 2016).

We too, the non-Indigenous people must essay our own leap into the past and there we must find the truth of who we were and seek for what we can be. We advocate here the moment of the Paul Keating Redfern Speech, where the then Prime Minister had the courage to speak truth to our past and say what the settler colonists did to the First Nations of Australia (Keating, 1992).

We might also follow in Bernard Smith's footsteps and seek other moments of what he calls the development of a concerned conscience. In the third of his Boyer Lectures, Smith mentions the remarkable instance of the first visual representation of Indigenous Australians on the East Coast made by the non-Indigenous made the devout Quaker, Sydney Parkinson, who sailed with Cook (1768-1771).

3 Smith writes

The Drawing on the left side of the page is a strange one. The men of the Botany Bay Tribe, now extinct, wore a characteristic body-paint design. Triangular in form, it stretched from both shoulders to the center of the chest, then down the center of the body to the waist. But Parkinson in making his drawing perceived these tribal markings in the form of a crucifixion, for reasons which I feel will never be fully explained. As a

botanical draughtsman he was not given to fantasy. In no other drawing that he made, to my knowledge, does his Christian upbringing, for he was a devout young Quaker, impose itself so forcibly upon his perception. Was Parkinson subject, we might well ask to a visionary experience? Did he perceive that with Cook's coming these 'merry and facetious [playful] people', as he himself described them, would be subjected by his own race to a prolonged humiliation and degradation best symbolized by the tortured body of the Man of Sorrows. We do not know. But the drawing is evidence that at the first moment of European contact on our eastern coast one conscience was at least troubled (Smith, 1980).

It is through knowing of and acknowledging instances like Keating's Redfern Speech and Parkinson's drawing that we might draw closer to what Smith called 'the liberating power of sympathy' (Smith, 1980). We might also be closer to an understanding of what it would mean to treat the Other as Trace of the ultimate Other that some call God.

We now proceed to considering the second item of the Sarra Trilogy

3.1 Bring us policy approaches that nurture hope and optimism rather than entrench despair Hope

As counter intuitive as it sounds, the demand for policies that foster hope may constitute the most complex and controversial element of the Sarra Trilogy. Our intent here is provide something of an explanation as to why hope should be controversial. Part of that controversy is, we believe, involved with the question of whether hope is a virtue or an emotion. Our intent is to treat hope as an emotion, but we are mindful of the theological tradition which sees hope as a virtue, especially the tradition influenced by the writings of Aquinas (Lamb, 2016; Metzler, 2022).

Our concentration on hope as an emotion will centre around the question of whether hope is a gift from something external to us or a property of the human condition. We will begin with the Nietzschean proposition that hope is an external gift, in this case a malevolent one. This will lead on to a critical engagement with the Indigenous intellectual, Dr Chelsea Watego, and her Fvck Hope orientation, which maintains that hope is external to us, in effect a curse laid upon First Nations people by the settler colonists. We will conclude this section with the affirmation that hope is an internal matter, a striving for a better future which is present on all humans and therefore in the people of the First Nations.

3.2 Nietzsche on Hope

Hope. Pandora brought the jar with the evils and opened it. It was the gods' gift to man, on the outside a beautiful, enticing gift, called the "lucky jar." Then all the evils, those lively, winged beings, flew out of it. Since that time, they roam around and do harm to men by day and night. One single evil had not yet slipped out of the jar. As Zeus had wished, Pandora slammed the top down, and it remained inside. So now man has the lucky jar in his house forever and thinks the world of the treasure. It is at his service; he reaches for it when he fancies it. For he does not know that that jar which Pandora brought was the jar of evils, and he takes the remaining evil for the greatest worldly good—it is hope, for Zeus did not want man to throw his life away, no matter how much the other evils might torment him, but rather to go on letting himself be tormented anew. To that end, he gives man hope. In truth, it is the most evil of evils because it prolongs man's torment. (Nietzsche, 2022).

We began with the famous Nietzschean aphorism from Human all too Human. We do so not because of its 'visceral incarnations of ...mythological wisdom' (Thomas, 2005), rhetorical brilliance or even its well-practised Nietzschean manoeuvre of making the acceptance of what is, to appear to be the most radical choice. For make no mistake about this, for all his radical reputation, Nietzsche opted every time for a prolonging of the dominant power relations of his day (Losurdo,



Figure 3. Pandora and the Box

2002). Rather, we chose Aphorism 71, because it makes a crucial error, which, as we will see, the fiery Indigenous academic Dr Chelsea Watego duplicates. The error that Nietzsche makes is to see hope as something external to us. For Nietzsche, hope is not a property of our humanity but rather something gifted from outside. In this case, it is a malevolent gift from Zeus, the chief of the gods.

We will return to this theme when we consider resources for hope but let us first address the thoughts of Dr Chelsea Watego.

3.3 Watego on Hope

For Watego, Hope is totally bound up in being with the non-Indigenous or the settler colonists. She does not recognize the multicultural moment, nor does she have anything to say about the day-to-day struggle against racism by Australians of Pacific Islander, Asian, African etc descent. Watego's argument appears to be that "hope" is the process by which the colonised willingly interact in a passive manner with the coloniser. That interaction is fuelled by the assumption that the coloniser will act differently, and as such, Watego argues it is a betrayal of what it is to be Indigenous. It is also a refusal of the anger she feels is necessary for the movement towards Indigenous liberation. Thus, she expresses pride in Lydia Thorpe's performance in the Australian Senate. We are sure Watego's heart soared when Thorpe shouted "You are not our King" at Australia's monarch, King Charles III (Crabb, 2024). Watego was not alone in that.

As an alternative to hope, Watego advocates the philosophy of Black Nihilism based on the award winning African American novel *Sell Out* (Beatty, 2015). Beatty's novel is an ingenious satire of contemporary United States. One of its chief targets is the existence of Blind to Color Racism. This is based on four tactics of mechanisms. These are Abstract Liberalism, Naturalization, Cultural Racism, and Minimization of Racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Zamudio & Rios, 2006).



Figure 4. Senator Thorpe confronts the monarch.

The joke at the heart of the novel is how the protagonist seeks to bring back overt racism including slavery. The novel concentrates its ire particularly on a character based on Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, who has ruthlessly and routinely deployed the Fourteenth Amendment to destroy any attempt to reverse the impact of structural racism (Afflerbach, 2021; Leader-Picone, 2020).

There is much in Beatty's novel which could enable one to cast a critical eye on racism in Australia. But Watego's use of the book centres on the lead character FK Me's outlining of a vision of blackness that has four categories. The first of these is the "neophyte Negro" who wants to be white. The second is the 'Capital B Black' who believe that black is deadly, but still takes its orientation from white people. The third type is that where race is transcended. 'Serenity on the mountain top' is achieved by a handful of charismatic individuals. Yet nothing has changed for Black people. There is a fourth vision and that is called Unmitigated Blackness. She describes this approach in the following quotation.

He [FK Me] says, 'I'm not sure what Unmitigated Blackness is, but whatever it is, it doesn't sell. On the surface Unmitigated Blackness is a seeming unwillingness to succeed. It's the serious black actor. It's a night in jail. Unmitigated Blackness is simply not giving a fuck.' It's the Tarneen Onus-Williams 'burn it down' kind of Blackness. Unmitigated Blackness, Beatty states, 'is coming to the realization that as fvcked up and meaningless as it all is, sometimes it's the nihilism that makes life worth living (Beatty, 2015).

Watego explicitly endorses Unmitigated Blackness as a strategy and tells us that "it is the closest thing to an embodied sovereignty that I have heard articulated".

The word sovereignty has central status for Watego. Her people have never conceded it. So, it exists as a rallying call in the struggle against the settler colonist, a struggle which must, and does, continue. There is though little or nothing programmatic that we could detect in Watego's use of the term "sovereignty". There does not appear for instance to be any consideration of the role of a Treaty process. We will consider, albeit very briefly, the question of a treaty when we discuss the third element in the Sarra trilogy: doing things with not to.

This absence of a political program around the restoration of sovereignty cannot be covered up with curse words. Something more is needed than the anger of Watego and the, admittedly comic, despair of FK Me (Beatty's hero). We would note here the contrast between the political program of the Black Panthers, a program which was explicitly revolutionary and socialist, and which represented such a danger to the status quo in the US that the FBI devoted massive resources to crushing it (Harris, 2001). We also note that the Australian Black Panther, the late Hooper Coleman, came to work closely with Dr Sarra at Cherbourg State School (Sarra, 2012, pp. 165-168).

We would also like to draw attention to Dignity and Power Now (DPN), a contemporary grassroots movement that grew out of Black Lives Matter (Farrag, 2018). DPN is deeply spiritual and explicitly prefigurative in that it aims to anticipate in its organizational practice the kind of world it seeks to bring about. The focus is on acceptance and healing as well as resistance of the status quo. Farrag asks

How do those brutalized by a system gain the personal power to fight the same system that traumatizes them? How do they do so without replicating the same systems of oppression they are attempting to overcome? Black radical organizers have asked these questions for generations and for DPN and BLM, the answer is simple, heal the self, change basic relationships fundamentally, create just organizations built on equitable leadership, and give people opportunity and possibility to imagine and the future will emerge. When trauma, brutalization, denial of purpose, and loss of community are discussed, their container allows the target to move from state violence to member disputes to mindfulness practices, it allows the focus to move from outside, to within, from past to present, from history to future (Farrag, 2018, p.85).

We have no doubt that Watego intended her book as a manifesto for Resistance, and we respect that. In historical terms it could be seen as a rejection of Bennelong's cooperative approach and a championing of Pemulwuy's guerrilla-resistance approach (Wilmott, 2003). Watego is at war with the coloniser and sees Hope as Ulysses saw the Sirens. However, this is also a war to which Watego appears to see no end. There are only small acts of celebrating being different from the coloniser and also savouring moments of revenge over individual representatives of the colonisers. Here Watego is trapped at the level of tactics. There is no strategic vision at all of a reconciled nation nor a strategy for achieving one. Indeed, some of her deepest expressions of scorn are reserved for the very notion of a 'reconciliation action plan'.

Here she repeats the Nietzschean error and sees hope as something alien to the indigenous experience. For Nietzsche, it is Zeus who peddles hope, while for Watego it is the settler coloniser. She tells us

Like role models, capacity-building agendas, reconciliation action plans and an Indigeness derived from nowhere, hope offers up change without change. This is why colonisers are so insistent we have it -hope is not an enabler of our existence but of theirs (Watego, 2024, p.171).

It is worth repeating that strategically, Watego does not appear to have any vision of how to construct a genuinely non-racist Australia. Yet, the shameful heckling and abuse directed at Bunarong elder Mark Brown, as he delivered the Welcome to Country address at the Dawn Service in Melbourne is deeply disturbing (Wilson, 2025), and indicates we need to be serious about improving social relations within the Contact Zone (Pratt, 1992) between the non-Indigenous and First Nations Australians. Also disturbing was the earlier victorious state election campaign run by the 'Queensland LNP with its focus on demonizing Indigenous youth and repeatedly labelling them as 'untouchables'(Smee, 2024). The state government's subsequent expansion of its 'adult crime, adult time' legislative agenda shows that Indigenous Queenslanders are threatened with extremist policies that will work against the creation of a reconciled nation. As the Qld State government doubles down on the 'Adult Crime, Adult Time' legislation, it would appear we are on the cusp now of a renewed series of attacks on Indigenous youth. We would argue, frankly, that in this conjuncture "Nihilism" is a non-productive strategy.

Our pre-reading of the Fvck Hope chapter was that it would turn out to be an expression of resentment. Having read the chapter we hold ever more strongly to that view. However, our response is also modulated by our intent to operate at the level of assertoric solidarity with the First Nations of Australia. Our responses are guided throughout

by the expressively veracious statement, "If we had to act in these circumstances, this is what we would act on" (Bhaskar, 2008, p.221). We do not seek to tell First Nations people what to do. Nor do we wish to play the role of masochist to someone else's sadist. Sartre argued that the polarities of Sadist Masochist defined our relations with the Other (Sartre, 1976). We seek instead the High Expectations relationship that Sarra has talked about (Sarra, 2014; Sarra et al., 2018). For us, this means we will speak truth to power, and we expect the same from all Indigenous people we interact with.

How then can one reply in assertoric terms to the Fvck Hope chapter? To begin with the spectacle of a people without hope is a devastating one. Hope is one of the positive emotions that Spinoza derives from Joy. So, in Spinozian terms to be hopeful is to be stronger. Saying 'no' to hope is to embrace the 'Sad Passions' and with that a turn to a diminution of power and a life of servitude (Taylor, 2022, p.247).

3.4 Resources for Hope

Hope does not arrive like a gift. It is built—painfully, deliberately—through the work of communities who refuse to accept despair as their inheritance. Every time our people take each other's hands, create a program, fight for a voice, challenge a policy, or insist on dignity, we manufacture hope. Hope is not soft; it is made of labour: Megan Davis, "Blackfellas Don't Need Saving" (The Monthly, 2020).

Before proceeding to discuss the resources for hope we would like to put despair in context.

3.5 Despair in Context: The Paradigm of the Suffering Subject

Robbins (2013) plots the development of Anthropology as follows. First anthropology was devoted to the exploration of the Exotic Other/ (Noble) Savage.

No one talks about the Savage any more, and that is a good thing. Instead, anthropology became concerned with the universality of suffering. But as we moved away from the Savage paradigm we lost something. For Robbins, that something is the possibility of examining cultures which are different from ours and so potentially the source of a possible critical perspective on our own culture. Anthropology's change to an engagement with the Suffering Subject also had the unintended consequence of weakening attempts to improve life. If we are all fated to suffer, what's the point?

The suffering subject is still the dominant paradigm in the Indigenous Policy space, and it manifests itself in an exclusive preoccupation with domestic violence, child-abuse, intergenerational trauma, deaths in custody, Stolen Generations and the absence of family responsibility. These categories refer to real problems but the danger is that they have become the defining characteristics of the Indigenous lived experience. So suddenly the Indigenous People were no longer the Strong and Smart ones. We had nothing to learn from the oldest continuing living culture. They became the pitiful ones. It is understandable that some Indigenous people colluded with that paradigm because if they are feeling pity for you, then they are not killing you. And the killing fields were very real (Ryan et al., 2024).

3.6 Resources for Hope (Continued)

One of the exceptions to the prevailing adherence to the Suffering Subject paradigm was the Stronger Smarter philosophy, which is premised on an absolute belief in Indigenous strengths and a commitment to build a good life. In his NAIDOC Speech, Sarra addressed the Suffering Subject indirectly but insisted it did not represent the totality of what it meant to be Aboriginal. He said

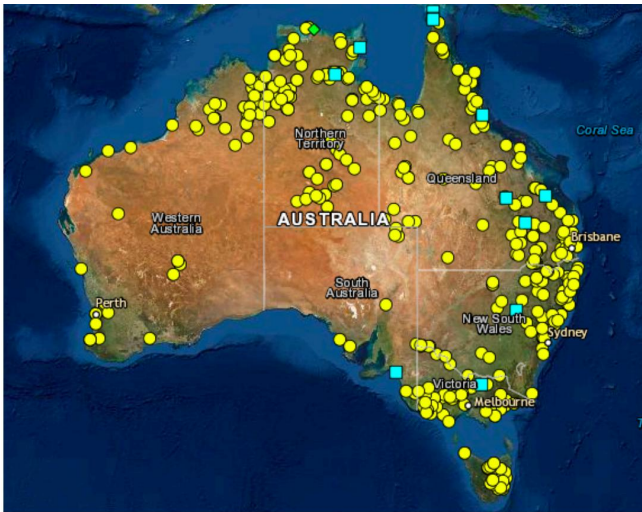


Figure 5. Map of the Massacres of First Nations People (Ryan et al., 2024).

We are more than victims and mere survivors. The scars we carry aren't who we are. They aren't signs of guilt or culpability. They are the not the truth about our potential or capacity.

They are a part of ourselves that still need healing. And healing cannot happen while ever we believe the lies that we are a weak, desperate people, devoid of humanity and incapable of helping ourselves (Sarra, 2016).

For us the truth is that every single Indigenous person in Australia is the 'product of bravery' (Dean, 2026) and that is what the Strong and Smart philosophy means. And that is what every Indigenous Child needs to hear.

3.7 Hope in Context: Generative Hope (Lempert, 2014)

A similar position to Dr Sarra's Stronger Smarter philosophy was reached by the filmmaker and anthropologist, William Lempert. He made a series of films in the Kimberley that showed the people had lived through the apocalypse, but they had survived and still sought to build good lives.

Figure Six: Dunba

Lempert relates how he travelled with Dunba along the Indian Ocean coast near his community of Beagle Bay in North West Australia, delving into his life story as we visited sites from the iconic pearl-shell church that he helped construct to his favourite fishing spots along the beach. Over several days, Dunba's quiet and humble personality gave way to intimate and expansive stories that expressed an enduring optimism despite unimaginable heartbreak and hardship, which began when he was removed from his mother, who had contracted leprosy, and was placed in the Beagle Bay

Mission far from his Walmajarri Country, family, and language.

Lempert's film shows that Dunba, despite the suffering, is more than a survivor. He has fought the good fight and come through. As he tells us with justifiable pride "I grew up hard, me. I've been through hell. I've faced the worst, tough people in my time, but I stood my ground."

In Figure Seven we see a scene from an Indigenous community. The place looks like a disaster and the woman in the photograph seems sunk in despair. A dog picks through the detritus of lives that seem hopelessly marginalized. In Spinozian terms, we are in the domain of Tristitia (sadness) and the effect is to drain us all of power the power to change and to make a better life for ourselves.

In Figure Eight we have a still from the Kimberly film Dunba. This series of films made by the Kimberly Aboriginal Media is designed to generate hope. The couple and their young family have done their best.



Figure 6. Still from Dunba (Kimberley Aboriginal Media)



Figure 7. The Quadrant Approach — An Indigenous Community (Ross, 2022)

There is no disguising that this is a poor family, but it is a family that is not defeated by despair. It is a family that has pride and dignity. In traditional Australia parlance this is a family of battlers, who are having a go.

Figure Seven comes from the Quadrant School, which is dedicated to pretending to care about First Nations People while it sows despair. Figure Eight is self-representation. It is how a group of Indigenous People like to see themselves, and also how they like others to see them. Figure Seven belongs to the discourse of despair, while Figure Eight belongs firmly to the discourse of hope.

3.8 De Beauvoir in Algeria-Sarra in Cherbourg: The face of the child

Consider the following quote from Simone De Beauvoir's book on ethics. She is discussing the Arab children who lived under the oppression of French colonialism in Algeria. She would have seen the children one of her visits to Algeria during the War of Independence (1954-1962).

Yet, with all this sordid resignation, there were children who played and laughed; and their smile exposed the lie of their oppressors: it was an appeal and a promise; it projected a future before the child, a man's future. If, in all oppressed countries, a child's face is so moving, it is not that the child is more moving or that he has more of a right to happiness than the others: it is that he is the living affirmation of human transcendence: he is on the watch, he is an eager hand held out to the world, he is a hope, a project. The trick of tyrants is to enclose a man in the immanence of his facticity and to try to forget that man is always, as Heidegger puts it, "infinitely more than what he would be if he were reduced to being what he is;" man is a being of the distances, a movement toward the future, a project. (De Beauvoir, 1949, p.143)



Figure 8. Chris Sarra reading to the children in Cherbourg

The above was cited in abbreviated form by Jacques (Maritain, 1964, p.391). Maritain is generally scathing about De Beauvoir's work, as one would expect from a leading Thomist philosopher, yet he does enjoin his readers to be grateful for the above insight (Maritain, 1964, p.391).

De Beauvoir is working with two notions, that of transcendence and that of immanence. The immanent is what is. The transcendent is what might be. In Bhaskar terms, that might be is a real possibility in process, and as such it forms the grounding of concrete rather than fantasy based utopianism (Bhaskar, 2008, p.294). Anyone who has visited a playground in an Indigenous community will have seen the same movement towards the future in the face of the children.

A final point on the challenge that Sarra made when he asked Turnbull to bring policies which entrenched hope rather than despair might be necessary here. What Sarra was doing was to challenge Turnbull to prove his own humanity for Sarra has never been in doubt about the humanity of his own people.

Fvck Hope, then, seems less likely to succeed than the strategy of forming alliances with empathic non-Indigenous Australians. Our firm belief is that the way forward for all of us is to take to heart and react positively to Krznaric's claim that

We are in the midst of a great transition from the Cartesian age of "I think therefore I am" to an empathic era of "You are, therefore I am" (Krznaric, 2014, loc.109).

To develop fully the notion of Krznaric we need to turn to the third element in the Sarra Trilogy

3.9 Do Things With Us Not to us

In this section we take three historic instances where the descendants of the Settlers undertook to do things with and not to the First Nations people. These are the support given to the Warlpiri Walkout, the eruption of spontaneous community support following the Floods in Bundaberg in 2013, and the Job Guarantee initiated at Western Cape College. However, before beginning our discussion of these three instances we wish to stress that doing things with requires a treaty process and we fully endorse the call for 'a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations' (First Nations National Constitutional Convention, 2017).

4 THE WAVE HILL WALKOUT

Vince Lingiari (1919-1988) was an elder of the Gurindji people. He had led a strike/walk off at Wave Hill Station which run by the Vestey Corporation (Hardy, 1968). The strike began on August 23 1966. At issue were the pitiful wages, appalling conditions, and the mistreatment of Warlpiri women by white stockmen. The strike was to last for over nine years, and over the course of the struggle, it morphed into a demand for Land Rights. The strike attracted widespread support from Left



Figure 9. Frank Hardy and the Striking Stockmen



Figure 10. Lingiari and Gough Whitlam on the 16th of August 1975

wing intellectuals and unions, including the Waterside Workers Union and Actors Equity. The noted writer Frank Hardy (1917-1994) played a prominent role in coordinating that solidarity (1968). Hardy's book on the Walk Off is also a record of a white man coming to understand something of the Indigenous experience through working with and for First Nations people. We, too, can glean something of that journey from the following extract from Hardy's book.

I asked Vincent Lingiari what he had been thinking about down at the strike camp. He replied: 'Well at first, I bin thinkin' I'm right walkin' away.' Then he made a remark that I did not take enough note of at the time. 'And I bin thinkin' this bin Gurindji country. We bin here longa time before them Bestey [Vestey] mob.'

Three worlds were meeting: the tribal Aborigine, the 'assimilated' Aborigine [Dexter Daniel] and the white man from the South and there was a feeling as of brothers between us under the sky full of stars.

I discovered that wages were not the only, perhaps not even the main issue for the Gurindji men. They were concerned about their women, about the children getting an education, about housing, about dignity and self-respect, about tribal identity- and there hovered vaguely behind every thought a desire to live alone in their own land (Hardy, 1968).

Lingiari and his people, with the aid of Dexter Daniels (1916-1999), the Indigenous union organiser, won the strike and in the aftermath the Whitlam Govt gave some of the land back to the Gurindji people. This was the first transfer of land back to the Indigenous people. As he poured the Red Earth into Lingiari's hands, Whitlam said:

Vincent Lingiari, I solemnly hand to you these deeds as proof, in Australian law, that these lands belong to the Gurindji people, and I put into your hands part of the earth itself as a sign that this land will be the possession of you and your children forever."



Figure 11. The Bundaberg Flood of 2013

Let us live happily together as mates, let us not make it hard for each other... We want to live in a better way together, Aboriginals and white men, let us not fight over anything, let us be mates.

4.1 The Bundaberg Floods of 2013

We take the aftermath of the Bundaberg Floods of 2013 as an instance when a community spontaneously emerges, and things are done with and not to. What follows is a moving account by Dr Chris Sarra of how the community of Bundaberg rallied around his mother and his family and worked with them to alleviate the disaster that had struck the family home.

After the 2013 floods devastated my hometown of Bundaberg, I stood overwhelmed at our family home after it had been smashed and swallowed by water. My brother and I stood helplessly, unsure and wondering what to do next. I was even more overwhelmed by what happened next. People just turned up. Without being asked and without checking who we were. Without running some mental calculation about whether we looked like them, voted like them, or even prayed like them. They came with shovels, with food, and with quiet determination to help us in an hour of need.

That reflex that instinct to just show up is Australia at its most thriving and vibrant best (Sarra, 2026).

It is at moments like this that we can understand that the demand to do things with and not to is also a demand for a society which is fundamentally a moral community. A mateship emerges but this is a mateship purged of sexism and racism, and it is there for a mateship which we can all be proud of. We turn not to considering the example of the Job Guarantee that Dr Mackie initiated at Western Cape College. We give it as an example of how we can do things with and not to the young who are the future of Australia.

4.2 The Job Guarantee

Dr Mackie organized a job guarantee when he was Principal of Western Cape College (2006-2010). Quite simply, he decided to declare war on unemployment and the precarity that was dominating the lives of his students. He was scandalized by the extent of youth unemployment, and he resolved that no graduate from his school would be sat home alone without hope. He refused to accept that it was ok for the school to produce NEETs, that is, graduates who were not employed, not in further education or not in training. Accordingly, he made a simple and direct promise to all the students. He told them that if they stayed at school and completed Year 12, He would personally guarantee them a job, if they chose not to go onto further training or tertiary education.

There was a great deal of incredulity not only on the part of the students but also of some staff members. There was, in addition, a

feeling in some quarters that the school had no business guaranteeing anything never mind a job.

However, Dr Mackie took the view that we needed to adapt an expanded view of the school in terms of time, space and relationality. He understood that what happened to the students after they left school would have an impact on those who were still at school. The reason is that what happened to the graduates became the future in the present of those still at school. He was convinced that if the Year 9s, in particular, could see that those who stayed to year 12 really got a job, then schooling would begin to make sense to them. They would be able to see that staying on at school and acting properly would have a positive impact on their lives. They would be in control of what happened to them in the future.

As the guarantee rolled out two things happened with remarkable speed. When the first crop of year 12s got jobs, the year 12 program expanded very rapidly. Mackie was particularly gratified to see an unprecedented increase in year 12 enrolments by Indigenous students. Secondly, the Year 9s avoided the alienation trap that traditionally sets in around that year and knuckled down to the business of getting an education. What was a t work here was the movement from anticipation to expectation (Bryant & Knight, 2019). With anticipation the future, because it is unknown, can invade the present and become a source of great anxiety. Mackie replaced anticipation with the solid expectation of a safe and known future, and so the students could put the future to one side and enjoy an expanded present

As well as expanding the notion of the school along the dimension of time, he also expanded it in terms of space. He fought hard against the notion of the "Fortress School" surrounded by uncaring and even hostile forces. He thought instead of the school being everywhere. I insisted that the staff think of the school as spatially free. Like the Amazing Nightcrawler from the X-men, the school could turn up anywhere at any time. Like Mystique, the schools shape could change but it was still the school. When the graduates got jobs, they took the school with them. When Mackie went to a chamber of commerce meeting to plead for support the school was there with him. When he visited parents and sat down to congratulate them on how well their child was doing, he was bringing the school into their home.

The third dimension of school he added was that of relationality or connectedness. He sought to create a school that was the 'centre of gravity' (Clausewitz, 1832) of the communities it served. The ideal for Mackie was that he would insert the school into an ever-expanding network of relationships that would benefit the students. He sought sponsorships. He declared an open-door policy for parents and elders and community members and he meant it. He had conversations large and small with everyone he met or contacted. Always, he brought the subject around to how the school could help them, and how they could help the school. That meant that he personally contacted every employer or employer group. He set up a committee of parents, elders and employers that tracked every graduate, and made sure that the graduate was placed, and was provided with support as they entered the world of work. For the first time ever, the schooling system was doing things with every level of the community and not doing things to the community.

The project was so successful that it was taken up by the then federal government and became the Learn, Earn Legend program. Not the least of the achievements was the creation of intergenerational harmony. The students could see their elders going the extra mile to help them and that set off the chain reaction of reciprocity.

In summary to do things with and not to our students, we need to expand the notion of the school in time, spatial, and relational terms.

For Mackie, the pivoting point for that mission was a job guarantee for every year 12 graduate.

One of the key lessons learned from the Job Guarantee program was that there are real benefits of a return to the time when we could say “The state’s your mate” and actually mean it. Such a change is required, because the present model is not working for far too many people, especially those in need many of whom are Indigenous. We have been through a period where the role of the state, especially in the Indigenous sphere, seems to have been to administer poverty with punishment, and to cover that up with rhetoric about “tough love”. There has been too much ideological talk about “welfare reform” and not enough thought about how we could get back to doing things with people to improve their lives. If we think of “welfare reform” as an end in itself, we end up approaching people as suspects not assets. The relationship between the state and so many people has been poisoned, and because we have been looking for compliance and obedience, we have unwittingly encouraged resistance and disobedience. That disobedience can even extend to self-harm. We need to shift towards co-operation and collaboration. An enabling state that is committed to doing things with people is both possible and necessary (Mitchell & Fazi, 2017). What is essential, especially in the Indigenous sphere, is that we reject the alternative paradigm of Punish to Rule (Wacquant, 2012, 2025).

5 CONCLUSION

In this paper we have discussed and openly advocated for the Sarra Trilogy as the necessary policy and relational setting to address the vexed relationship between the First Nations people and the rest of Australia. We have echoed and indeed applauded Sarra’s call for the Government to commit to

1. Acknowledging, embracing and celebrating the humanity of Indigenous Australians.
2. Bringing the First Nations policy approaches that nurture hope and optimism rather than entrench despair.
3. Do things with the First Nations, not to the First Nations

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AUTHORS & AFFILIATIONS

Erich Weede ¶*

¶ University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany (OA)

ABSTRACT

In the 1990s supporters of economic freedom had reasons to be optimistic. Because of its economic superiority the West had just won the Cold War. The Soviet Union and its empire were dissolved. The threat of nuclear war and mutual assured destruction had receded. Western economic superiority was ultimately rooted in economic freedom and decentralized decision-making. As Mises (1922/1988) and Hayek (1945) had recognized, private property rights in the means of production and decentralized decision-making are essential, if we want to benefit from of a rational allocation of scarce resources and to exploit human knowledge which is dispersed across millions of minds. Decentralized decision-making is maximized in market economies with limited government where consumers rule and people enjoy entrepreneurial freedom. It is minimized in centrally planned economies.

Index Terms: Economic freedom • globalization • capitalist peace • geopolitical rivalry • hegemonic stability • extended deterrence • public debt • China-US relations

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Surrendering Economic Freedom, Losing Prosperity and Peace

Erich Weede^{¶*}

AFFILIATIONS

¶ University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany (OA)

Abstract

In the 1990s supporters of economic freedom had reasons to be optimistic. Because of its economic superiority the West had just won the Cold War. The Soviet Union and its empire were dissolved. The threat of nuclear war and mutual assured destruction had receded. Western economic superiority was ultimately rooted in economic freedom and decentralized decision-making. As Mises (1922/1988) and Hayek (1945) had recognized, private property rights in the means of production and decentralized decision-making are essential, if we want to benefit from of a rational allocation of scarce resources and to exploit human knowledge which is dispersed across millions of minds. Decentralized decision-making is maximized in market economies with limited government where consumers rule and people enjoy entrepreneurial freedom. It is minimized in centrally planned economies.

Keywords: *Economic freedom, globalization, capitalist peace, geopolitical rivalry, hegemonic stability, extended deterrence, public debt, China-US relations*

Correspondence: Erich Weede

1 INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s supporters of economic freedom had reasons to be optimistic. Because of its economic superiority the West had just won the Cold War. The Soviet Union and its empire were dissolved. The threat of nuclear war and mutual assured destruction had receded. Western economic superiority was ultimately rooted in economic freedom and decentralized decision-making. As Mises (1922/1988) and Hayek (1945) had recognized, private property rights in the means of production and decentralized decision-making are essential, if we want to benefit from of a rational allocation of scarce resources and to exploit human knowledge which is dispersed across millions of minds. Decentralized decision-making is maximized in market economies with limited government where consumers rule and people enjoy entrepreneurial freedom. It is minimized in centrally planned economies.

In the 1990s the West still believed in the expansion of free trade and in the benefits of globalization. By promoting economic freedom globally we wanted to increase economic growth rates and to expand prosperity globally. Faith in socialism and central planning receded to a few miserable outposts like North Korea. Even critics of capitalism like Piketty (2015) had to concede that in the long run mass prosperity was more dependent on economic growth than on the distribution of income. Economic freedom expanding reforms in giant countries, like China and India, enabled hundreds of millions of people to escape from dire poverty during the era of globalization (Milanovic, 2016). Poorer countries could grow faster than richer countries. This was an opportunity, no more. Asians benefitted more from this opportunity than Africans. The Chinese did not yet benefit from it under Mao's rule, when tens of millions were starved to death (Dikötter, 2010). They had to reform their economy first and to find their comparative advantages in the global division of labour (Lin, 2012).

One may label this opportunity the 'advantages of backwardness' and explain it partially as an external effect of economic freedom in other countries which provide a model for emulation as well as destination for poor country exports (Weede, 2006). During the era of globalization the global distribution of income between individuals or households became more equal in spite of the opposite trend within some countries, including the United States or China (Milanovic, 2016). If one includes home ownership as well as social insurance entitlements, the distribution of wealth nevertheless became more equal within most Western societies (Waldenström, 2024). Although the fruits of economic freedom and prosperity were not equally shared, they certainly were widely shared.

2 A CREEPING LOSS OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM, FUTURE PROSPERITY ENDANGERED

At the turn of the millennium one could still overlook the problems which accumulated below the surface. The ratio of government expenditures to GDP had grown. At the beginning of the 20th century it was about 10 percent in most Western countries, at the end it was about 40, in some countries even about 50 percent (Tanzi, 2011). The most dynamically growing part of government expenditures had been social transfers which currently tend to be close to 30 percent of GDP. The expansion of the welfare state and social transfers implies a loss of individual freedom and responsibility of adults for themselves. Since government revenues tend to be lower than government expenditures in most places, public debt is growing. Among the biggest Western economies, it is safely below GDP only in Germany. But the current German government is following the poor example of others and rapidly expanding its debt. On top of the explicit government debt referred to above, there is the implicit debt arising out of government promises to pensioners and those in need of medical care. Including these,

government obligations are a multiple of GDP almost everywhere in the West. This burden darkens future prospects by either growing tax burdens or inflation or a mixture of both.

In Europe, the transformation of the European Union from a common market towards a transfer union generates a further problem. Since Greece and other nations in financial trouble received financial assistance from the ECB and the EU in the 2010s, the no bail-out rule has been replaced by the expectation that countries in need will receive assistance. Such an expectation necessarily undermines incentives for responsible budgeting. Why should politicians impose austerity at home and suffer the electoral consequences, if the more comfortable option of outside assistance is available? Currently, the evolution of the French public deficit and debt are the main issues of concern. Since France is a much bigger economy and a more important member of the EU than Greece, surviving a French debt crisis would be a much bigger challenge for the EU than the trouble with Greece ever could be.

To make matters worse the negative outlook for government finances is combined with a poor demographic outlook (Morland, 2024). In almost all Western countries the number of children per women is significantly below the 2.1 required for population stability. Among the major democracies the outlook is worst in Germany, Italy, and Japan. Migration from poor countries with lots of young people to rich countries with too few of them theoretically looks like a solution. Since childbirths are below replacement level and falling almost everywhere, including even many Muslim countries, most future migrants must come from Africa. Africa is demographically the most vital region and simultaneously the poorest. It is hard to imagine that the poorest continent can supply migrants with the education which people need to satisfy the requirements of much richer destination countries and their job markets. Cultural differences will add to the difficulties of successful integration. Moreover, hostility toward migrants seems to have risen in many Western countries at the same time when demography suggests that there should be more immigration. Assuming that current trends in migration and the rising hostility in destination countries continue, we face the question of how to confront the rising ethnic and cultural heterogeneity. Obviously, prosperity helps to mitigate domestic conflict. Contrary to widely shared beliefs, recent econometric research has established that economic freedom or capitalism exerts a pacifying impact within nations by reducing common murders as well as the risk of civil war (de Soysa, 2026). Since economic freedom is in retreat, Western societies face an abundance of economic and social problems at home.

3 EMERGING GREAT POWER RIVALRY INSTEAD OF HEGEMONIC STABILITY

After the end of the Cold War the United States of America was the undisputed hegemon of the world. Most other rich and strong countries were US allies. There had been some tacit cooperation between the US and Communist China against the Soviet Union before the end of the Cold war. But China is simply too big for being permanently satisfied with playing second fiddle to other nations. The Chinese population is about four times as strong as the American. The exploitation of the advantages of backwardness had to give China the opportunity to grow much faster than advanced Western nations could. Western economic freedom could be exploited by the Chinese. They could observe Western models of organizing enterprises and the economy, send students and engineers to Western countries to learn new skills for later application at home. They could invite Western capitalists to invest in Chinese manufacturing and use joint ventures to enter Chinese as well as Western markets. China could integrate itself in global supply chains. It could repeat the export-oriented growth strategy of the four small tigers in

China's neighbourhood, i.e. South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, which could benefit from rich and open markets in the West.

During the first decades after Deng Xiaoping's successful reforms China subordinated everything under the goal of promoting economic growth. It succeeded beyond reasonable expectations and delivered a miracle (Coase and Wang, 2013; Lin, 2012; Weede, 2022). Because of the expansion of economic freedom in China, Western observers hoped for a corresponding expansion of political freedom. Some even expected China to become a democracy. Since the Republic of China on Taiwan had overcome autocracy, the cultural heritage of China which both Chinese states shared could hardly be an insurmountable obstacle to democratization. After Xi Jinping's rise to power, however, this hope was slowly lost and replaced by a deepening pessimism about Chinese politics and the future relationship between China and the West.

At least one could hope for a commercial or capitalist peace between China and the West because of the flourishing trade between them and mutual investments in their trading partners. By and large, historical evidence and lots of quantitative analyses of it demonstrate the existence of a capitalist peace (Weede, 2018). The peace based on economic interdependence and trade, however, crucially depends on the widely shared expectation that markets, whether for raw materials or other inputs or for final consumer goods, remain open in future (Copeland, 2015). This expectation must have been shattered by the growing use of economic sanctions. The Chinese must have observed American and Western sanctions against North Korea or Iran in order to prevent these states from acquiring nuclear weapons. They must have seen the escalating sanctions against Russia after its attack on the Ukraine and concluded that access to Western markets is precarious and may easily be denied in future. Because of the disagreement between China and the US over Taiwan, it has been all too easy for the Chinese to imagine what might make them a future target of American or Western sanctions. Thus, the pacifying impact of trade had been blunted for China and the West, even before Trump began his tariff war against friends and foes.

Since the recession of 2008 in the West, the Chinese began to believe that the West is in decline whereas China itself is a rising nation. In the middle of the 2010s the economic size of China began to equal the American size in purchase power parity terms. Given current exchange rates, China has not yet surpassed the US, but its contribution to global manufacturing already is about twice as much as the American contribution and might become its triple in one or two decades (Campbell and Doshi, 2025). Thus, China is by far the most credible challenger to American global dominance. While Russia still commands more nuclear weapons than China, its economic base is far too weak to take this role. Worse still for Russia, its attack on the Ukraine together with Western sanctions have made the Russian economy dependent on trade with China. In the long run, the main geopolitical effect of the war against the Ukraine might be that Russia becomes the junior partner in a vast Chinese sphere of influence extending to the Baltic Sea. The longer the war continues, the more likely such an outcome becomes.

In the past, the integration of China into the global economy and interdependence between China and the West did contribute to a capitalist peace between China and the West. In my view, the capitalist peace is superior to a democratic peace for two reasons. First, economic freedom or capitalism contributes to the avoidance of war in a pair of nations already, if one of them enjoys it. By contrast, democracy reduces the risk of war in a pair of nations only, if the other nation is a democracy, too. In mixed autocracy democracy pairs, the risk of war is even higher than among two autocracies. Second, it is well-known that prosperity contributes to the evolution and survival of democracies (Lipset, 1994).

As argued above, without economic freedom or capitalism one should expect misery and stagnation instead of prosperity.

Unfortunately, free trade and the capitalist peace seem to require hegemonic stability. The rise of China seems to have undercut it. The era of globalization overlaps with a unipolar configuration of power or American hegemony.¹ It began with the decline of the Soviet Union. It has been weakened by the rise of China. Since Trump's second acquisition of the presidency, it is obvious that great power rivalry undermines free trade. Whereas free trade benefits consumers in all nations who take part in it, it does not conserve the dominance of the hegemon or the status ordering of nations. Geopolitical rivalry and concern about one's place in the pecking order promotes interference with free trade. Instead industrial policies and tariffs spread. The freedom of consumers to buy the best product at the cheapest price from domestic or foreign providers is reduced as well as the freedom of entrepreneurs to outsource inputs globally.

But economic freedom suffers from another attack, too. Within nations, it is undercut by the tax and transfer state as well as by excessive regulation and bureaucratization. Within the West, lawyers have a fairly dominant position in the bureaucracy and even in legislative bodies. As Wang (2025) recently suggested, one reason for the rise of China is that its ruling elite has a background in engineering instead of law.

4 EMERGING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST UNDERMINE EXTENDED DETERRENCE, TOO

If the commercial or capitalist peace doesn't apply, the escalation of conflicts of interest to war still may be avoided by deterrence. Although nuclear deterrence is not fail safe or fool proof, it is more likely to work than conventional deterrence. In nuclear war it is easy to imagine that both sides suffer so terribly that meaningful victory becomes unthinkable. The idea of mutual assured destruction pacifies. By contrast, at the beginning of a conventional war both sides can easily imagine a quick victory, as happened in 1914. But deterrence can also cover the relationship between some non-nuclear states, as has happened during the Cold War in Europe. Then, some nations were allied with or subordinated to the American superpower, others to the Soviet superpower, both of which wanted to avoid nuclear war. Fearing escalation, they would not permit their subordinate allies to fight the other side. Extended deterrence did work (Weede, 1983). Trump's criticism of free riding allies², his doubts about the value of NATO allies for the US, and his desire to take control of Greenland against the objection of America's Danish allies must have undercut the value of the American nuclear shield for allied partners. The more questionable extended deterrence becomes, the stronger the incentive for nuclear proliferation becomes. Most experts regard the prospect of proliferation with alarm, because more fingers at nuclear triggers raise the risk of miscalculation and accidental war.

Another reason why extended deterrence suffers an erosion of credibility is the slow emergence of disharmony and conflicts of interest between major Western nations. Before Trump's second presidency it looked, as if the US and Europe together would assist the Ukrainians to defend themselves. Trump insists that only Europeans carry the financial burden of doing so, arguing that Britain, or France, or Germany command larger economies than Russia. Whereas the economic strength of Europe would make the burden shifting feasible, Trump

¹One may argue that unipolarity has not yet ended or that multipolarity is an expectation instead of an established reality (Mohan, 2026). Certainly, the US is still the strongest power. But its status is no longer unchallenged.

²Actually, there is another reason why Americans were disappointed by their major allies. Had the Europeans and the Japanese performed better economically, G7-dominance of the global economy would not have declined as rapidly. The end of unchallenged Western economic supremacy has not been America's fault (Prasad, 2026).

overlooks that it would nevertheless undermine extended deterrence. By contrast, continued cooperation of America and Europe in assisting the Ukraine would strengthen extended deterrence.

Whereas Europeans again feel threatened by Russia, Americans face other concerns. One may even call it a clash of national security interests. Europeans want to deter and contain Russia and therefore are ready to help the Ukraine. The Americans know that Russia no longer is a serious rival – except, of course, for their nuclear weapons – and that a declining great power does not need to be contained. From the American point of view, China is the only serious rival. In order to focus on China, the Americans want to delegate the defence of Europe and the Ukraine to the Europeans. Therefore the Europeans need to rearm themselves. The more important the armaments industry becomes, the stronger necessarily government interference in the economy is, the weaker economic freedom becomes. One should remember that Lenin's model for economic planning was the German war economy during World War I. Without questioning the necessity of Europe taking care of its own defence, it has to be underlined that this requires not only accepting the financial burden, but also some curtailment of economic freedom and the consequences for prosperity, international trade, and peace. Irrespective of strategic needs, European support for the Ukraine may overburden the domestic politics of the greying and deficit-plagued welfare states of Europe.

The emerging conflict of strategic interests between Europe and the US undermines the credibility of extended deterrence. Since the Russians recognize that Trump's relationship to Europe is ambivalent, American readiness to defend Europe with troops and nuclear weapons becomes less credible. One may even detect an emergent harmony of interest between Trump's America and Putin's Russia. The longer the war in the Ukraine lasts, the worse the dependence of Russia on China becomes. In the long run Russia might be destined to become the junior partner of China and even part of its sphere of influence. A Chinese sphere of influence extending all the way to the Baltic Sea is a nightmare for both Russia and America. That is why there might be a reconciliation of America and Russia, at the expense of Europe and the Ukraine.

There is not only a conflict of interest between the Americans and the Europeans, but also one between the Ukraine and its European supporters. If the Ukraine really still wants to re-conquer its lost eastern regions as well as the Crimea, then they must want the Europeans not only to support them financially, but also to support them with troops. Are the Europeans ready to do it? I doubt that politicians in Brussels and London, in Paris or Berlin are sufficiently aware of this conflict of interest.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Economic freedom is a value in itself, but simultaneously a means to become and remain prosperous. Economic freedom has been in retreat during the 20th century because of the growth of government, the establishment and expansion of the welfare state, and a growing preference to pay for public expenses with debt instead of taxation. Demographic trends make this set of preferences and policies worrisome. By and large, Europe is more affected by these disabilities than the United States. The rise of China and its recent change from a minimal deterrence posture to something closer to a counterforce strategy requires the United States to increase its defence spending. The Russian aggression against the Ukraine requires Europe to do so. Emerging conflicts of interest within the West and growing doubts about the effectiveness of extended deterrence by the US against Russia raise the pressure on Europeans to prepare themselves for greater strategic autonomy. Simultaneously, the rise of China has overcome hegemonic

stability and the pacifying effects of free trade. That is why we face the prospect of less economic freedom, less prosperity, and a higher risk of war.

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Reflections on Learning and Memory in Light of the Executive Function of Memory

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AUTHORS & AFFILIATIONS

José Manuel Salum Tomé PhD. ¶*

PhD, Doctor of Education

¶ Department of Education, Collaborative Research Group for School Development (GICDE), Autonomous University of Chile, Temuco, CI (OA)

ABSTRACT

Animals in the wild face numerous challenges to survive. One fundamental one is obtaining food, and to do so effectively, they must remember the places they have searched. Successfully completing this task requires a system of memory and attention. "Attention is understood as the mechanism that activates the processes involved in the processing of information, participates in and facilitates the work of all cognitive processes, regulating and exercising control over them." (García, 1997; Rosello, 1998; Ruiz-Vargas, 1987). Attention is a selective process of receiving information that controls the threshold of our cognitive system and also fulfills alert functions, involved in educational and study learning processes, participates as an alert in high-risk professions, in the concentration and focus of research, memory and learning among others.

Index Terms: memory • natural environment • attention • thought

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José Manuel Salum Tomé PhD, [¶]^{¶¶*}

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^{¶¶} PhD, Doctor of Education

AFFILIATIONS

^{¶¶} Department of Education, Collaborative Research Group for School Development (GICDE), Autonomous University of Chile, Temuco, CI (OA)

Abstract

Animals in the wild face numerous challenges to survive. One fundamental one is obtaining food, and to do so effectively, they must remember the places they have searched. Successfully completing this task requires a system of memory and attention. "Attention is understood as the mechanism that activates the processes involved in the processing of information, participates in and facilitates the work of all cognitive processes, regulating and exercising control over them." (García, 1997; Rosello, 1998; Ruiz-Vargas, 1987). Attention is a selective process of receiving information that controls the threshold of our cognitive system and also fulfills alert functions, involved in educational and study learning processes, participates as an alert in high-risk professions, in the concentration and focus of research, memory and learning among others.

Keywords: *memory, natural environment, attention, thought*

Correspondence: José Manuel Salum Tomé PhD.

1 STUDY METHOD

The work mainly corresponds to a theoretical-reflective study of a documentary nature.

- It is based on the review and analysis of scientific literature from cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and education.
- It integrates contributions from various authors who have researched memory, attention, learning, and executive functions.
- It uses a conceptual and analytical approach, whose purpose is to reinterpret the role of memory in learning processes from the advances of neuroscience.
- It does not present empirical work or collection of experimental data, but rather an academic reflection supported by specialized bibliography.

The method corresponds to a theoretical analysis based on an interdisciplinary literature review, aimed at conceptually reinterpreting the relationship between memory, attention and learning.

2 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The central objective of the text is to reflect on and rethink the role of memory in learning, especially considering the executive function of working memory, from the contributions of cognitive neuroscience. More specifically, the study seeks to:

- Analyze the relationship between memory, attention, and learning.

- Examine how working memory and its executive function are involved in the organization of thought and behavior.
- Move beyond the traditional view of memory as a simple storage of information, proposing an active and dynamic role in cognitive processes.

3 LINE OF RESEARCH

The work falls mainly within the following line:

Educational Neuroscience / Cognition and Learning
More specifically, it addresses:

- Cognitive processes in education
- Memory and learning
- Executive functions
- Relationship between neuroscience and educational practices

This line of research seeks to understand how the neural and cognitive processes that support learning work, in order to improve pedagogical strategies and educational processes.

Synthesis Element	Description
Method	Theoretical-reflective study based on a literature review of cognitive psychology and neuroscience
Aim	Analyze the active role of memory—especially working memory—in learning processes
Line of research	Educational neuroscience, cognitive processes, memory and learning

Table 1. Paper Synthesis

4 INTRODUCTION

The three most important functions are selecting information, controlling limited capacity, and keeping physiological, emotional, and neurological processes activated and alert.

Attention is divided into three mechanisms: selective, divided, and sustained attention.

The selectivity of attention can be easily shown in studies that indicate that we focus only on some details of interest to us, and add what is missing based on what we remember.

In general, the complex process of attention is a mechanism that integrates and involves feelings, emotions, and physiological structures that allow our mind to access all existing stimuli. It gives us the ability to select, distribute, and give our own meaning to each thing, object, or place, so that we can discriminate how pleasant and interesting a given event seems to us, in order to effectively guide our tastes, aspirations, and individual potential and to better integrate ourselves socially.

What kind of ability is attention? Psychologists have not yet agreed on this; some consider attention to be just one aspect of perception and other cognitive abilities.

We choose what we will see or hear by anticipating the structured information it will provide. Only those episodes to which we pay attention are anticipated, explored, and recorded; in other words, the act of perceiving requires selectivity.

The selective nature of attention can be easily demonstrated; one way to do this is by recording people's eye movements as they look at paintings or photographs. Studies of this kind indicate that we focus only on certain details; then, based on these cues, we fill in the missing information, perhaps drawing on memories.

Evidence supporting selective attention also comes from divided attention studies. People can learn to perform two complex tasks simultaneously, but there are well-defined limitations. In general, attentional capacity depends on the resources required for the tasks being attempted. If few resources and conscious control are needed, a person can perform other tasks concurrently. If the task is far from automatic, it will require a significant amount of the person performing it. If one wants to perform two difficult tasks simultaneously, it is necessary to practice one of them first until it becomes relatively automatic and requires little attention.

The environment in which we live is complex because it includes a large amount of information that we must attend to and sometimes requires us to respond to more than one piece of information simultaneously.

When attentional and memory processes are activated, we are more receptive to events in the environment and perform an activity or task more effectively, even if it requires more effort.

Through care we become aware of the physiological and pathological changes in our internal environment, whether physical or mental.

Attention does not function in isolation, but is directly related to other psychological processes such as memory.

5 THE BIOLOGICAL VIEW OF MEMORY

With the advances neuroscience has made in understanding how memory works, the view of memory as simply a storage or retrieval of data is

changing, giving a more active and dynamic role to the process of memorizing. The use of neuroimaging technologies such as fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging), PET (positron emission tomography), EEG (electroencephalography), and MEG (magnetoencephalography) is allowing us to understand how the brain works, moving away from the black box of decades past, filled with unused data and information, and opening up a different perspective on the concept of memorization and, consequently, on learning.

Currently, neuroscientists have identified the existence of different types of memory, either through research or by observing them in people affected by injuries or illnesses (Gluck, Mercado, & Myers, 2009). In his book, *The Brain and Learning*, Jossey-Bass states that memory is not a unitary construct; rather, the characteristics of learning are related to the ability to remember, which is not a passive event but a series of events that organize memories into a meaningful sequence. He considers memory a phenomenon that encompasses the entire brain. Furthermore, he maintains that the brain structures linked to learning mathematics differ from those linked to learning to read or to learning to play the piano. The same is true for the memory systems linked to these activities, which develop at different times. Similarly, remembering who you are or where you are from activates different memories in separate brain regions.

Understanding how memory works reveals the role that experience and practice play in the learning and memorization process by modifying neural structures. On the one hand, there is a direct relationship between the number of experiences involved and the complexity of the environment with the number of structures that change in the brain; and on the other hand, practice increases the capacity to learn and memorize. It is also known that learning and memory not only affect the number of synapses, but also change the structural dynamics of the brain by modifying the supporting cells, the astrocytes, and the blood capillaries that provide nourishment to neurons.

Memory is considered a "storehouse" of information from which data is retrieved when needed. Eric Kandel, Nobel laureate in Medicine in 2000, defines it as "the ability to acquire and store extremely diverse information, from trivialities of daily life to complex abstractions of geography and algebra. Thanks to this ability, we can solve problems by recalling different experiences" (Kandel, 2007). Kandel mentions that with the birth of cognitive neuroscience, about 40 years ago, it became possible to link the strategies used in psychology with biological methods for studying the brain. This allows us to biologically examine the mental processes that take place in the brain, suggesting that creative activities such as language, music, and art are functions involving specialized neural circuits in different brain regions, which are made up of nerve cells, neurons (Kandel, 2007). Taking this biological perspective on the processes involved in learning and memorization, we can say that learning gathers stimuli from the environment through different neural circuits, which then pass them on to be stored in various neural networks—memories. Memory carries out a process of neuronal "manipulation" to store information in these different neural networks, so that finally, through a process of recall, different circuits and neural networks are connected to produce a behavior or solve a problem. This biological view allows us to see a more active role for memory in this entire stage of information processing and retrieval, rather than simply

as a “storage” system. It involves a series of spatiotemporal neuronal interactions between different memories to generate a response to the environment.

6 MEMORY IN AN EXECUTIVE ROLE

One of the memories that led me to start this reflection and rethink that they have a more active role in cognitive processes and therefore in learning, is undoubtedly the executive function of working memory, which has been defined “as the center of the cognitive construct that supports general intelligence and creative thinking” (Geake, 2009).

The executive function of working memory reflects, in a way, the educational field’s interest in identifying the brain’s center responsible for mentalizing or performing metacognitive functions, controlling processes related to products, planning goals, and maintaining attention on important tasks (Geake, 2009). Working memory manages information by manipulating and maintaining it to accomplish a task, and it plans and organizes goals as the situation demands. This memory undergoes continuous updating and reorganization to fulfill the proposed tasks and is also involved in unconscious processing mechanisms that allow us to find solutions to problems after a good night’s sleep. In addition to storing information in long-term memory, working memory manipulates information to guide behavior. Researchers have found evidence of executive control of working memory in many cognitive functions, including: updating memory by receiving and evaluating sensory information to transfer it to long-term memory and retrieve it from there, and deciding which memories are needed for which tasks; The establishment of goals and plans, recording goals, planning how to achieve them in advance, and setting priorities; task switching, monitoring external cues for information indicating the need to switch from one task to another; and stimulus selection and response inhibition, allowing the evaluation of a stimulus selection and the inhibition of a habitual response, shifting attention to a new alternative that responds to a specific context (Gluck, Mercado, & Myers, 2009; Geake, 2009). According to M.C. Etchepareborda, working memory is responsible for channeling the flow of information in the neural system, performing attentional functions, encoding and retaining verbal information, language acquisition, and the processing of visuospatial information. It governs memory systems, distributing attention to each task according to the demands placed on the neural system, the individual’s level of experience, and the demands of the environment. Furthermore, as a task is mastered, less attention will be needed, allowing the execution of other compatible tasks, giving working memory a more dynamic and executive role than a simple data file.

Another interesting aspect is the location of the executive center for working memory. Neuroimaging studies show that the neural functions of the frontal cortex are linked to working memory performance. This strengthens the idea of an active role for memory, since the frontal cortex, on the one hand, is the region that would be best connected to perform all these tasks and, on the other hand, has all the necessary inputs and outputs to develop an executive function regarding cognitive and operational control over selective attention (Geake, 2009).

Given what we’ve just seen about the executive role of memory, the question arises: can we still think that memory is limited to simply storing information? Clearly not; we would have to look at the concept of learning and memory in a different way.

7 LEARNING VS. MEMORIZING

Let’s now look at one of the most widely used definitions of learning, that of John Anderson: “Learning is the process by which lasting changes occur in behavioral potential as a result of experience” (Andersen, 2001)

(Londoño, 2008). The incorporation of experience is an aspect we can assign to learning, while in recall and behavioral change, one hardly finds a clear distinction between the role of memory and learning. L. Londoño uses the term “lasting” to differentiate between learning and memory. He argues that lasting changes over time endure in learning, while recall does not (Londoño, 2008). If we consider memory as a file storage system, this might be true, but as we have seen, the way memories interact through an executive center gives it a more active role in managing cognitive processes.

According to S. Machado (Machado, et al., 2008), there is a boundary between learning and memory. Both originate in neuronal plasticity, with learning being the process by which we acquire knowledge about our surrounding environment, and memory being the individual’s ability to retain and use information in different ways and over different periods.

If we also consider that the executive function of working memory is located in the frontal cortex, we can see that memory plays an active role in complex thinking skills and that we can differentiate it from the role of learning. Memory is defined as that which encodes, stores, retrieves, and manages the information necessary to solve problems or generate behaviors, while learning encompasses all the processes and strategies related to acquiring information about the environment for memory.

8 CONCLUSIONS

For education, differentiating the roles of learning and memory would allow for the optimization of pedagogical strategies aimed at promoting better learning and memorization. These two processes are intimately related and could be situated at two different yet complementary moments in the series of neural processes through which organisms manage and process information provided by the senses to adapt to the demands of their environment. Learning plays a role related to the acquisition of stimuli and the incorporation of new experiences into memory, while memory takes on a more executive role, managing all that information to provide the best response to the environment or the best solution to a problem. As we discover how the dynamics of neural networks operate in the brain during the learning and memorization process, and how this adaptive neuroplasticity occurs to change cognitive capacity, we will be able to better define the domains of learning and memory.

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