Knowledge in the blood.
Jonathan D. Jansen. Stanford: Stanford University Press / Cape Town: UCT Press. 2010 [2009]. 360 pp. ISBN: 978-1-91989-520-8.

Jonathan D. Jansen's *Knowledge in the Blood. Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past* is a challenging and creative publication, and very well-written. The depth and the width of its coverage are very impressive, based on a large number of resources, all well-integrated into the text, but with the necessary critical approach.

Knowledge in the Blood discusses the tension, the conflict, between the views, beliefs, values and attitudes which young white Afrikaans-speaking students, on average 18 years of age in 2007, acquired from their parents, family, friends, the schools they attended and their churches, on the one hand, and, on the other, the knowledge they needed to function effectively in post-apartheid South Africa in the 21st century. These two sets of knowledge Jansen calls "indirect knowledge"/ "inherited knowledge" and direct knowledge, respectively.

The indirect knowledge consisted, generally speaking, of the views, beliefs, values and attitudes which their parents, who, by simple arithmetic, must have been born in the 1960s, acquired at the time when apartheid reigned supreme in South Africa. Their parents' knowledge comprised, argues Jansen, a sense of racial superiority, of ethnic distinctiveness, of patriarchal dominance, of an unquestioned acceptance of authority and of memories of the ruthlessness of English governance, particularly the imperialism of the 19th century.

Post-apartheid South Africa, however, requires a very different set of views, beliefs, values and attitudes. Democratic South Africa requires an acceptance of each other, also of black, non-Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, an attitude of inclusivity, support for the development of social cohesion, and the promotion of equal access to opportunities, including educational opportunities.

Jansen was Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria from 2000 to 2007. When he took up his position, the staff and students in the faculty were wholly (or almost wholly) white and Afrikaans-speaking, and the knowledge transferred in the training programmes was "white Afrikaans knowledge". As a black academic, responsible for the academic and professional training of a large number of young persons who had chosen to become the educational leaders of South Africa's children of 2011 and beyond, he found this set-up totally unacceptable.

The aim of *Knowledge in the Blood*, from my reading, is to discuss the trauma, the sense of loss and defeat and the enormous challenges of young white Afrikaans-speaking students in dealing with the demands of a society which has undergone (and is still undergoing) radical changes, politically and socially, and the methods and mechanisms required to help these "misplaced" young people adapt to a new life.

Jansen, the dean, decides on a course of transformation in the Faculty: attracting non-Afrikaans-speaking students and staff , both black and white, from diverse experiences and backgrounds; exposing students to experiences they may not have had (such as visits to both the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria and the Apartheid Museum in Soweto), the removal of memorabilia of the white Afrikaner past (photographs of the former all-white Deans of the Faculty of Education in public corridors; exclusionary commemorative artefacts), changing the cultural character of the institution, and transforming the education curriculum. As he points out: he wants to establish a new knowledge (as opposed to the "indirect knowledge" of his students), which is "out in the open and is shared as part of making sense of how to live together in the shadow of a shared history

and with the prospects of a common future" (270).

As regards the "new knowledge", he argues that, in opposition to the common view of knowledge as "neutral, technical, fact-based information", knowledge is, in fact, "embedded in dominant belief systems that give it meaning, emotion and authority (60). This he illustrates with reference to the "knowledge", the belief systems of the Afrikaner about the past: that, for example: apartheid was a reasonable attempt to facilitate development because people develop more effectively within the context of their own cultural communities; that apartheid was, anyhow, actually first introduced by the English; and that the identity of the Afrikaner as a distinctive community must be protected at all costs because of their considerable achievements, for example: they created their language out of nothing, against the might of Dutch and the over-powering strength of English 150 years ago, developing it from a "kitchen-tongue" to a modern language suitable for use in high-function formal contexts. With this as an example, he argues that teaching is more than transferring "empirical" knowledge: it is also about socialisation, demonstrating the relativity of cultural differences and developing the capacity of citizens to live together in a divided country (110). A curriculum, also, he says, is not only a text inscribed in the course syllabus for a particular qualification but an understanding of knowledge encoded in the dominant beliefs, values, and behaviors deeply embedded in all aspects of institutional life" (172), and: "the choice (by a school and a teacher) about what to teach is not simply an intellectual decision about "appropriate knowledge (for a particular grade) but is also a political decision about valued knowledge" (262).

Knowledge in the Blood is strongly directed at the transformation of a society which is "caught in the middle of a radical transition from long-established racial rule toward a non-racial democracy" (190), and proposes that this process should be dealt with through facilitating both reparation and reconciliation at the same time. In the Education Faculty at the University of Pretoria this means, he says (203–05), establishing new values, diversifying the academic and administrative staff in terms of race and gender, uprooting the formerly accepted philosophical orientation, the epistemological foundations and the social commitments of the existing curriculum, changing the institutional culture (specifically the assumptions around race, knowledge (as "fixed, certain, predictable, and knowable" (193)), and identity (ethnic, cultural, religious, language, and even political (261)), embedded in the Faculty) and attracting black students. He argues for the need to radically change teacher preparation programmes (261–67) saying that these programmes should challenge existing knowledge with "rival or alternative" knowledge, should challenge the "nature, origins, intensity and meaning of indirectly received knowledge" (knowledge in the blood), challenge and critically engage white students' indirect knowledge as a matter of social justice, and empower them with effective cross-cultural communication skills. The public curriculum must "include and integrate multiple knowledges within a social justice framework" (267).

Jansen realises, of course (in fact he gives it great prominence) that all these changes will lead to an extreme sense of anxiety and uncertainty in young white Afrikaans-speaking students, and will be very painful to them. The academic staff would also, equally, have to make deep-seated emotional, psychological and social adjustments. But, compared to the emotional, psychological and social destruction of black people in the time of apartheid, these adjustments should be easier to make and endure.

There are several more positive features in

this book which could be discussed, such as his interesting criticism of critical theory (256–60), pointing out that a critical theory approach in dealing with "post-conflict pedagogy" (277) is not wholly adequate. Interesting, too, is the author's discussion of his personal experiences as a transformative dean: how much he learnt from his interaction with students and that he even learnt to love his white Afrikaans-speaking students, despite their warped beliefs, views, values and attitudes that formed part of their received knowledge.

Knowledge in the Blood is, in my view, a good book, a stimulating experience. One can, of course, make a number of critical comments.

Firstly, though he stresses in several places in the book that he is aware of the diversity in the white Afrikaans-speaking community, and that he does not want to imply that all the members of this language community have the same beliefs, views, and so forth, his repeated use of the term "*the* Afrikaner" (see for example, 141; my emphasis) does, I think, become problematical. Despite his acknowledgement of the diversity in this community, and his distinction between different types of responses in the white Afrikaans-speaking community to the dramatic events between 1990–94, I cannot find myself anywhere in his characterisation of this community, despite the fact that I am an Afrikaans-speaking white South African who grew up and lived right through the time of apartheid, in its most vicious form. Perhaps it is necessary for Jansen to keep in mind that the term *Afrikaner* is not unproblematic. Even in the white Afrikaans-speaking community itself, some members of this community prefer not to call themselves Afrikaners, arguing that such a term generally refers to people who are markedly conservative. Similarly, his description of the views, beliefs and attitudes of Afrikaans-speaking white students (and secretaries who "jumped around in anxiety" (6) when he first arrived in the Faculty) is, in my experience, also overgeneralised. His analysis of the formative factors and agencies in the lives of many of these students is, I would accept, reasonably accurate, but the students I experienced at the University of Pretoria often had quite diverse views, socially and politically. And, again, his description of some of the major Afrikaans arts festivals (for example the so-called Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (Little Karoo National Arts festival) in Oudtshoorn and the Woordfees (Word festival) of Stellenbosch, is equally skewed.

Added to these problems with Jansen's use of the term Afrikaner ("white Afrikaans-speaking person") one can also raise the question: if the author feels so strongly about the classification of people by colour (see the Note from the Publisher at the beginning of the book), and insists on using the term "black" to refer to "every person who is not 'white'", is his comprehensive and exclusionary focus on *white* Afrikaans-speaking people, morally justified? Should he not explicitly have justified his decision to place the spotlight so exclusively on this racial (white) community?

Furthermore, although there are, today, still extremely racist "Afrikaners", his statement that the parents of the 2007 first year students "upheld, enforced and defended apartheid" is, in my experience, grossly exaggerated: these parents were probably 16 or 17 years old in 1985, 5 years before the unbanning of the ANC and the Communist Party, and the freeing of Nelson Mandela, and obviously still enjoyed the "benefits" of apartheid, but they were certainly not all pro-apartheid activists.

Jansen, I suggest, transgresses a principle against which he warns in several places in his book (particularly in his very valid objections against the essentialisation of black South Africans in his discussion of the *Ubuntu* course in his Faculty): the tendency to essentialise. Despite his wholly justified and strong feelings about this tendency, he often gives

the impression that he, too, sees the white Afrikaans-speaking community as culturally wholly homogeneous, with clearly distinctive boundaries, clearly separating them from neighbouring communities.

Related to his representation of "the Afrikaner" is his view about people who support the retention of Afrikaans as a language of high-function formal domains, such as a language of tertiary education. He designates pro-Afrikaans activities as supposedly motivated by the principle of language rights, but says that they are in reality directed by the defence of race and of "culture": "racialised claims of supremacy", "ethnicised claims for protection" (62) and "keeping blacks out of white schools" (36). This interpretation is in my view also, as a participant in these activities, too narrow. The fact is that many of these pro-Afrikaans activities, like the activities directed at the promotion and development of the country's African languages, are based upon educational considerations and a dedication to South Africa's constitutional commitment to the meaningful effectuation of the philosophy of pluralism.

Several further examples of exaggerated statements can be cited, such as: that the recent Afrikaner's "knowledge" of black people was that black people were "terrorists" and "communists" (85), that modern-day Afrikaans students come from "insular and closed white environments" (87), and that it was "a myth" that the University of Pretoria, "arguably the wealthiest university on the continent of Africa", had "academic standards" (210).

An explanation for Jansen's oversimplified characterisation of "the Afrikaner" may lie in the fact that several of his sources are out of date, and contain observations no longer applicable. On page 70, in a discussion of "the Afrikaner" of 2007, he quotes from a source dated 1980, and on page 75, his reference is to a publication which appeared in 1979, just a short while after television was introduced in South Africa.

A last critical comment: Jansen's support for social, cultural, political and, especially, educational transformation is convincing, and he provides clear and persuasive guidelines for the ways in which transformation in these domains can be realised. However, one must ask him whether one shouldn't also be clear about the end-product of the transformation process. Does he think, for example, that South Africans should develop into one cultural community, assimilating to the dominating entity in South Africa: "the English", with all of us becoming "pseudo Englishmen or -women"? Or should South Africans develop into a new, unique, socio-cultural entity through the integration of the present culturally disparate communities? Should South Africans not rather invest in giving meaning to their constitutional directives, and develop into a pluralistic society, where socio-cultural difference (along with the many socio-cultural similarities) are acknowledged and respected, and people learn to "live with difference", enjoying the richness of the country's diversity?

If this should be our national goal, where does transformation stop? How do we promote national cohesion yet retain difference? How are these two philosophies to be brought into balance? How do we manage changes to the knowledge which is in our blood in a mutually enriching way?

A final positive remark, once again. In addition to the depth of information in Jansen's book, the width of its coverage and the seriousness and honesty with which serious core topics are dealt with in a face-to-face manner, *Knowledge in the Blood* was, for me, also, a journey of introspection, of soul-searching.

I grew up and lived in the time of apartheid, I enjoyed all the privileges which were freely available to white people: a stable home, enough food, the necessary health care, a

reasonably good education, freedom to determine my own professional future, a positive self-esteem, the right to use my home language where and when I desired to do so, a strong sense of belonging, and social and economic security. Furthermore: although I never actively participated in anti-apartheid activities, I never, despite my personal home background, voted for the ruling National Party. I supported Helen Suzman and her Progressive Party.

May I, then, given Jansen's book, ask whether I can really be regarded as *responsible* for the atrocities committed against black South Africans – still brutally evident in the poor education many of them still receive today, 17 years after democratisation? I never committed a race-related crime, so I had nothing to confess to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Am I guilty? Was I a perpetrator? And if I was/am, what can I do about it today?

Perhaps I should read *Knowledge in the Blood. Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past* once again.

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