

Book Review

Jansen, J. *Knowledge in the blood: confronting race and the apartheid past*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

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The first draft of this review was begun before the University of Free State's installation of Professor Jonathan Jansen as its Vice-Chancellor. Which also means it was begun before he took the stand he did in relation to the 'Reitz Four', and the national reaction evoked by this stand – in all its diversity. Thus, the initial review demanded something more, for how can one ignore, not only the context in which the 'Reitz Four' could emerge and engage in the actions they did, but Jonathan Jansen's handling of the matter? So while Jansen's inspiration for *Knowledge in the Blood: Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past* came largely from his time as Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria (2000–2007), it can now be seen as contributing to his rationale for the stand he took in Bloemfontein. Secure in his sense that he now 'knows' the Afrikaner – as *Knowledge in the Blood* indicates – Jansen's actions at the UOFS can be seen as a continuation of a longstanding pattern of provocative, courageous, often arrogant, often charismatic behaviour, a pattern that frames his rendering of Afrikaner youth in post-apartheid South Africa in *Knowledge in the Blood*, as simultaneously seductive, troubling, and insightful.

In this book, Jansen presents the reader with a very powerful conceptual framework for understanding the reactions and behaviours of the white, Afrikaans speaking students (and staff) he encountered on the University of Pretoria campus as they face the reality of a 'new' South Africa – and 16 years later, I would argue, our democratic dispensation can quite legitimately still be seen as 'historically new'. The notion of 'knowledge in the blood' comes from lines written by the Irish poet, Macdara Woods (2007). Woods says, "When we look back on what we have done, or not done, we realize that it is the knowledge in the blood that has impelled us". Though many will see a close alignment between 'knowledge in the blood' and Bourdieu's 'habitus' (1972, 1991, 1992), the graphic rendering of this metaphor will, I suspect, resonate more powerfully with a non-academic community than 'habitus', thus making it accessible to a wider audience than simply colleagues in various higher education institutions. Which is why Jansen is such a powerful figure in the

contemporary political and education landscape. He can speak (and write) in such a way as to apparently embrace the reality of all ‘ordinary’ men and women, whilst simultaneously provoking sensibilities and touching raw nerves. And so it is with this book.

Jansen (page 171) describes his understanding of ‘knowledge in the blood’ in eloquent and thought-provoking ways. It is, for example, knowledge “embedded in the emotional, psychic, spiritual, social, economic, political, and psychological lives of a community”. In the context of white, Afrikaner youth, this knowledge sits so deep (the blood imagery invoking a life, or death, issue), that it cannot “simply dissipate[s] like the morning mist under the pressing sunshine of a new regime of truth”. It is also ‘emphatic’ knowledge in that it “does not tolerate ambiguity”, and ‘defensive’ in that it is a knowledge “that reacts against and resists rival knowledge, for this inherited truth was conceived and delivered in the face of enemies” (in this case, “the English imperialists, the barbarous blacks, the atheistic Communists – all of them”). And while conceding that knowledge in the blood is not ‘easily changed’, it does not mean that “through the transfusion of new knowledge the authority of received knowledge cannot be overcome”. Thus, “for this reason, knowledge in the blood is used here both as an assertion and a question. As an assertion, the phrase draws attention to deeply rooted knowledge that is hard to change; as a question, knowledge in the blood is itself subject to alteration”. Thus *agency*, is central to his understanding of the nature of ‘knowledge in the blood’, making the possibility of change inherent to the ‘blood’ – in much the same way as a real blood transfusion is inherently tasked with ‘change’.

The key point Jansen makes in his book is that:

It will never happen again. This is the first and only generation of South Africans that would have lived through one of the most dramatic social transitions of the twentieth century. Nobody else would be able to tell this story with direct experience of having lived on both sides of the 1990s, the decade in which everything changed (2009, p.1).

However, while Jansen is particularly concerned with ‘second generation Afrikaner youth’ in this book, and how they come to hold the same attitudes and values their parents did in relation to the end of Apartheid, *despite not experiencing it directly*, it is quite obvious that this phenomenon can be applied to all ‘second generation youth’ in almost any context. In other words, that ‘knowledge’ which is ‘in the blood’ flows through us all. The vast

majority of every ‘next’ generation reflect the beliefs and attitudes of the previous one, so it is critical to think into why Jansen has focused exclusively on white Afrikaner youth, with few and sometimes almost non-existent references to any other racial group.

Perhaps one reason resides in the complexity of his own nature and history. He is a mighty intellectual, an intrepid activist, a habitual attention seeker, and a man with a deep Christian faith. In the Afrikaner, rather than any other racial group I would argue, Jansen sees much of himself, and thus fascination (with ‘sameness’) rivals with repulsion (of difference) to make sense of the hitherto incomprehensible – hence his preoccupation with this particular group. Chapter 7, for example, is entitled ‘Mending Broken Lines’, and has a quote from Clendinnin (1999, p.19) below it which reads: “The recognition of ‘likeness’ in the face of different and dissonant knowledge paralyses rather than liberates imagination”. The point of this quote is to frame the contents of the chapter which essentially relate to how “my white students” started to “chip away at the suspicion, the reticence, and the moral certainties that I carry as a black South African in relation to my white compatriots” (p.203). But these ‘white compatriots’ are of a specific ilk – determined to rule the land they inhabit, governed by patriarchal norms (and so, by implication, sexist), easily given to violence in the defense of what they believe to be theirs, and deeply religious. All familiar and ingrained elements of Jansen’s own background, and that of his role in, and support of the Struggle. So one of the discomforts of reading this book is having to be immersed in the gendered and like-minded egoism of two, disconcertingly similar historical narratives to the exclusion of almost all others.

Having said that, the book should be read. From an academic and intellectual perspective, it offers insights and tools of imagining that can be mapped extremely effectively onto other social, education and institutional ‘problematics’. In (dis) assembling the concept of ‘indirect knowledge’, for example, Jansen offers the following characteristics of this form of knowledge, viz. that it is:

1. . . . “*knowledge*, and not about experience or trauma or pathology” [all italics from here on in original].
2. *Indirect* i.e. that this ‘knowledge’ is “carried so powerfully among the non-present”, it is as if it *is* ‘direct’ knowledge i.e. self-experienced. So where does it come from to hold such power?

3. *Transmitted* i.e. how this ‘direct’ knowledge becomes ‘indirect’ knowledge. So he asks the question: “What are the mechanisms for transmission and how do they work intergenerationally?”
4. *Influential*. In other words, how “does this received or inherited knowledge affect children, the second-generation recipients of knowledge of something they were not a part of?”
5. *Relational* i.e. “that there cannot be knowledge about a child without knowledge of an adult”.
6. *Mediated* – and ‘mediating agents’ will vary in number and nature according to context, which is why ‘context’ must be central to any of this ‘searching’.
7. *Paradoxical* in so far as asking how we explain ‘owning’ knowledge about something that one did not witness (or was integral to creating) oneself. This raises the problematic of ‘knowability’ and “generates complex philosophical and moral questions about ‘not having been there’” (Jansen, p.171).

The book must also be read because it forces one, whatever one’s ethnic and/or linguistic and/or cultural grouping, to engage – with the Afrikaner and the black man, with patriarchy, with the reality of institutional transformation, with the gendered nature of our South African society, with the role of education and schooling. Jansen’s emotive vigor and many would say, often offensive analyses, leave the reader with little choice but to react – in one way or another. Which is exactly what Jansen would no doubt say, is what he intended.

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