

Karodia's Working Paper on Indaba's Education Report: A Guide to Some Neglected Policy Questions

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Introduction

Said Karodia's (1988/89) paper on the Indaba's Education Report makes a significant contribution to the identification of policy questions about the future of education in KwaNatal. It does so by arguing that Indaba's educational proposals are not sufficient to create what for convenience I will call Karodia schools, schools that are nonracial, multilingual, multicultural and classless.

Although this criticism is incontrovertible, it is worth noting why it is so. It is also worth noting that the abolition of racist laws and a vigorous drive towards mass education in KwaNatal, policies that are advocated by Indaba, are necessary but insufficient for the creation of Karodia schools.

I therefore want to do two things:

- to explain why the abolition of racist laws and a vigorous drive towards mass education in KwaNatal will not create Karodia schools *and*
- to identify a set of policy issues that tend to be neglected in the debate on the future of KwaNatal's education system.

A Conflict of Visions

Karodia's vision for KwaNatal's schools is more attractive and morally superior to Indaba's. At the same time, although neither vision is easy to implement by the year 2000, Indaba's vision faces less obstacles than Karodia's. These two poles, Karodia's perfectionism and Indaba's

pragmatism, create a classic and consistent tension that arises whenever policy decisions have to be made. This is why the disagreement is instructive and worth exploring.

Indaba's vision for KwaNatal's schools is limited by a number of self imposed constraints; Karodia's is not. What are these constraints. Why were they imposed? And how do they limit Indaba's proposals for the future of education in KwaNatal?

Karodia's paper is a good guide to answering these questions. It argues that Indaba's educational proposals are limited because they are imprisoned by the following major constraints:

- a constitution for the region's second tier of government that rejects the idea of transferring power and accepts the idea of sharing power;
- an understanding of change that accepts the need to abolish racist laws but neglects the need to dismantle the economic and social structures that these laws have created;
- a belief that the region's inhabitants should be given (a) a legal right to a period of public schooling that is equally long and equally funded; and (b) a legal right to determine the language in which their children are educated, as well as the cultural, philosophical and religious values to which they are exposed at school.

Karodia's vision for the future of education in KwaNatal is not constrained by these restrictions that Indaba's Education Committee placed on itself and its work.

I therefore wish to explore why the Indaba imposed these constraints on its work. The idea is to use this exploration to identify some of the significant policy questions that have to be considered by stakeholders in the future of KwaNatal's education system.

Constitutional Limitations on Education

There is not much that can be said briefly and usefully about the constitutional ideas that constrained and limited the Indaba's educational proposals. But the following points are worth making if only to clarify the difference between where Karodia and the Indaba are coming from.

Firstly I share Karodia's (1988/89, p.146) belief that "there is a direct link between a constitution and its education system".

Secondly, I don't share Karodia's (1988/89, p. 148) perception that the Indaba's constitution employs "a concept of partitioning the

country or partial autonomy for regions" that "is not very different from government thinking... on Bantustans, homelands and independent national states". This is the wrong context in which to place the Indaba's constitution. Its proposals do not require that "Natal would have to be separated from the rest of the country". They are for the region's second tier of government; for what the present system assigns to the provincial level.

Its "governor" therefore is the equivalent of the present Natal Provincial Administrator; its "legislature", which provides for two chambers, a standing committee for each provincial government portfolio, an economic advisory council, an education council and a number of cultural councils is a more complex and sophisticated arrangement than the present Natal Provincial Council; its "prime minister" is the equivalent of the leader of the majority party in the Natal Provincial Council, and so on.

Thirdly, I agree with Karodia (1988/89: 148) that, if they were implemented, the Indaba's constitutional proposals would not "promise power to those underprivileged economically" or "transfer control to the majority of the (region's) people".

These changes would not happen because the Indaba's constitution is driven, not by the idea of transferring power, but by the idea of sharing power. This amounts to a rejection of majoritarian democracy in favour of proportional democracy.

At least since 1912, South Africa has been a racist oligarchy; a country governed by laws that have been passed by a Parliament elected by the white minority. Proposals for new constitutions, for the nation, the provinces or the municipalities, are all variations on three themes on who has the final say when it comes to making laws:

- only a party elected by the majority of the white minority (a racist oligarchy);
- only a party elected by the majority of South Africa's adults (a majoritarian democracy);
- all the parties that are represented in the legislature (a proportional democracy).

The Indaba's constitutional proposals are a variation on the third theme, a set of proposals for a proportional democracy.

In a majoritarian democracy, laws that the majority of the voters make, either directly or through their representatives, are binding on everyone. Its great strength is its simplicity. Its great weakness is that significant minorities, minorities that always command a large

number of votes but never the majority of the votes, are alienated from the system and resentful of what they describe as "the tyranny of the majority".

In a proportional democracy, things are more complex, starting with the fact that no two systems are identical. But the basic idea is always the same and simple enough: any significant minority is able to protect itself from being subordinated to the interests and decisions of the majority.

The Indaba's constitution contains no less than 8 interlocking procedures that protect minorities from being subordinated to the interests and decisions of the majority. These are all mechanisms that encourage the region's competing interest groups to be moderate in what they seek to get and to create constructive compromises between what each of them wants.

These "mechanisms for moderation" are based on four key ideas:

- proportional representation of parties on all statutory bodies and committees so that the number of seats or members which a party has is in direct proportion to the number of votes it has been given by the electorate;
- a 15 member standing committee for each of the provincial government portfolios that will screen all proposed laws which fall within its sphere of competence and pass them on for debate by the chambers only if they receive 11 out of 15 votes;
- an executive in which half of the 10 members come from the majority party and the other half are chosen by the minority parties in both chambers;
- a procedure whereby any minority can veto any law that impacts on its language, cultural, religious or other rights.

Finally, I agree with Karodia (1988/89: 147) that a majoritarian democracy, one which gives "control to the majority of the people", does not necessarily lead to "compulsory assimilation or a denial of minority culture". On the other hand, while this is not necessary, it is possible. Therefore it is not enough to observe that this is not necessary. What is also required from Karodia is one of two things: evidence that it is highly unlikely, or alternative procedures from those that the Indaba proposed to prevent it from happening.

In the light of these brief comments on the Indaba's constitution, it should be clear that stakeholders in the future of KwaNatal's education system have to ask themselves at least three fundamental questions about the kind of constitution they want for the region's

second tier of government. Do they want a majoritarian, or a proportional, or some other kind of democracy? If they want a proportional democracy but not the one Indaba proposed, what does their version look like. If they want a majoritarian democracy, how will they prevent "compulsory assimilation or a denial of minority culture"?

Abolishing Racist Laws vs Abolishing Racist Structures

Political geographers study how a nation's land is used and who owns which areas of it. The fundamental questions they try to answer are potent guides to where a nation's economic and social power are located and why power lies where it does.

The two major forces that have decided these things are wars and laws. This is why political historians devote so much time to a nation's military and parliamentary history; these are the moments when different segments of a nation acquire or lose control of land.

Apartheid is a one word summary of South Africa's political history and geography; a summary of how its land is used and who owns it and how it came to be the way it is. In this sad story, nothing has played a more influential part than the creation, implementation and administration of the Group Areas Act (GAA). It is this act together with the Population Registration Act (PRA), that keeps racial domination going in South Africa. The GAA and the PRA have determined who owns, and is allowed to own, which portions of South Africa. Therefore they have structured where different groups of South Africans live, go to school, work and enjoy their leisure time.

The Indaba proposed the abolition of the GAA and the PRA, as well as all other racist legislation. What it has not done is to come up with proposals for dismantling the structures that these laws have created. In fact nobody, not even the ANC, has told us what can or should be done to dismantle these apartheid structures. Everyone goes only as far as a call for the abolition of the GAA and the PRA. And this is not strange: it will require a massive amount of money to eliminate segregated residential areas and replace them with desegregated ones. It may also require a massive amount of the power that comes from the barrel of a gun to compel and coerce people to desegregate themselves from each other.

The GAA and the PAA have also determined where schools are located and who attends them. Therefore very few of the country's schools have a heterogeneous group of pupils: the PRFA assigned

them to the same racial group; they are fluent in the same language; they have the same culture; they are located in the same economic and social class.

Although these Acts were abolished in June 1991, for a few decades the structures that they so successfully created and preserved will remain. The overwhelming majority of the country's schools will still have pupils whose race, language, culture and class are the same. And the enormous disparities and differences between urban and rural schools will remain.

Karodia's (1988/89, p.151) paper is on unassailable ground when it observes that the abolition of the GAA is not sufficient to create open and nonracial schools. It punches home the uncomfortable facts:

"the people of Natal will remain divided, geographically racially and by class ... the openness and non-racialism are theoretical ... most geographical communities will remain as they are, the legacy of apartheid and economic privilege; separated and racially exclusive".

All of this is indubitable and nothing more than the simple truth. But it raises a specific and a general question that all the stakeholders in the future of KwaNatal's education system have to face. The specific question is whether they should or shouldn't have pressed for the abolition of the GAA and the PRA. The general question is whether they should or shouldn't take necessary but insufficient steps towards the creation of a non-racial education system for KwaNatal.

The answers to these questions, like the answers to all policy questions are value-laden. Some stakeholders in the region's education system (the moderates) believe that it is a good thing to promote incremental, occasional and piecemeal change; to take necessary but insufficient steps towards one's goals. Others (the progressives) believe that only radical, general and holistic change is worth promoting, that one's steps must be both necessary and sufficient to achieve one's goals.

Moderates have no objection to taking as few steps as possible to reach a goal. Nor do they object to taking whatever steps must be taken as quickly as possible. What distinguishes them from the progressives is this: they believe that it is worth taking necessary but insufficient steps towards a goal, even if these steps are ambiguous and can be used to fob off demands for more radical change.

On the other hand, progressives believe that it is dangerous to

bring about necessary but insufficient change because, although one may create opportunities for further incremental change, what one has achieved may be used to fob off demands for more radical change. In other, more clichéd terms: moderates point to Rome and remind us that it wasn't built in a day; progressives agree and go on to argue that this is why it's jerry built!

When both sides in a dispute support their arguments with the same facts, their arguments reveal what they value and why they value what they do. In the end, therefore, moderates and progressives should accept that they are not likely to convert each other by appealing to the same, or very similar, facts. They stand a better chance of doing so if they spell out as carefully as they can the consequences of what they want to do, as well as how they propose to deal with the unintended consequences of what they are doing, or hope to do.

For progressives, like Karodia, this means answering two questions that are equally difficult: who has, or soon will have, the power and resources to bring about the abolition of apartheid laws and structures in one fairly quick and complete step? What should have been done between 1988 and when apartheid laws and structures were abolished by mid-1991 to see that the difficulty of changing the system quickly and completely is not used as an excuse for not changing it at all?

By generating these questions, and in particular the general question about whether one should or shouldn't take necessary but insufficient steps towards one's goals, Karodia's paper underlines the fact that both moderates and progressives have neglected some very important policy and strategic issues. They both still have a lot of homework to do if they want to be credible players in shaping the future of KwaNatal's education system.

What Rights Should People Have?

The Indaba's Education Report proposes that the region's inhabitants should be given two legal rights:

- a legal right to a period of public schooling that is equally long and equally funded; *and*
- legal right to determine the language in which their children are educated, as well as the cultural, philosophical and religious values to which they are exposed at school.

Karodia's paper argues, clearly and cogently, that if the region's

inhabitants are given these rights, they will be able to frustrate the creation of schools that are non-racial, multilingual, multicultural and classless. This conclusion cannot be refuted and should not be ignored. At the same time, this conclusion points to the fact that all policy options for transforming KwaNatal's education system are less than ideal.

Once again, stakeholders in the future of KwaNatal's education system can be divided into moderates and progressives. This time the moderates are those who, in addition to being prepared to take necessary but insufficient steps towards their goals, are prepared to choose what they regard as the best of two imperfect options. On the other hand, the progressives, in addition to refusing to take steps towards their goals that are not both necessary and sufficient, refuse to advocate or implement policies that are less than perfect.

A right to schooling:

Karodia's (1988/89, p.149) paper seems to align itself with the progressives. It points out, quite correctly, that "mass schooling movements in class divided societies" cannot "achieve social equity through education". In these societies "inherited class or group position dictates the degree of success in the education system". Even if, as the Indaba has proposed, all the region's inhabitants have a period of public schooling that is equally long and equally funded, inequalities and inequities will remain:

"the class position achieved through racial privilege, and the resultant economic and social power, will still dictate success both in the education system and society".

This argument parallels the one that exposes the absurdity of believing that the abolition of racist laws is sufficient to dismantle racist structures. And so a moderate response can't be anything else but three observations:

If a classless society is attainable at all, it is not going to be created in the next decade.

A vigorous drive towards mass education, while far from perfect within apartheid structures, is a necessary step towards the achievement of greater equality and equity than now exists.

In any case, everyone should be given a legal right to a period of public schooling that is equally long and equally funded.

These three points do not refute the progressives' complaint that,

in a class divided society, mass education is unable to achieve adequate standards of equality and equity. They merely pinpoint another policy issue which moderates and progressives have to consider: should or shouldn't mass education be promoted in KwaNatal while it is so deeply divided along racist and class lines?

A right to decide:

Karodia's (1988/89: 150-151) paper is deadly accurate when it observes that if the region's inhabitants are given a legal right to determine the language in which their children are educated, as well as the cultural, philosophical and religious values to which they are exposed at school, then this will inhibit and perhaps prevent the creation of nonracial, multilingual, multicultural and classless schools.

This general point is illustrated by speculating what may happen in most Afrikaans and English medium schools. Because Indaba proposes that school committees should have the right and the power to control

"who is enrolled and who teaches at a particular school ... Afrikaners ... would continue to educate their children in the already well equipped Afrikaans schools with no contact with any other class or race groups".

Because the Indaba advocates

"the democratic concept of handing education control to the community ... parents could prevent the enrollment of children culturally different or not fluent in English".

These speculations are rooted in reality. Moderates can reply with nothing stronger than a hope: although they may be a very small minority some school committees will use their right and their power to control "who is enrolled and who teaches at a particular school" to take some steps towards creating nonracial schools. At the same time, moderates will remind progressives that the apartheid structures which the GAA and the PRA have created will be greater obstacles to the creation of nonracial, multilingual, multicultural and classless schools than the attitudes of the most reactionary school committees.

Like all the other disagreements, this one points to some fundamental policy questions: who should choose the language in which one's children are educated? Who should control who enrolls and who teaches at a school? Who should determine the cultural,

philosophical and religious values to which one's children are exposed at school?

Moderates, like the Indaba's Advisory Board on Education, want parents and school committees to have these rights and powers. Progressives, like Karodia, may wish to give these rights and powers to a central authority or to do nothing until the apartheid structures and attitudes that may pollute the implementation of democratic and decentralised decisions have been dismantled and changed.

A Neglected Structural Inequality

Karodia's paper is an excellent guide to how racist laws and capitalist practices have created structures that will have to be dismantled before one can have genuinely nonracial, multilingual, multicultural and classless schools. But it is not only racist laws and capitalist practices that have created, and still create, structural inequalities in our society; the first language that South African children learn places them at an educational, and therefore at an economic and social, advantage or disadvantage. This happens because most of the world's knowledge is stored in English; but this is not the language that most South African children learn first. And this structure that generates inequality is virtually impossible to dismantle or eliminate.

The evidence for the dominant place that English has in the storage of knowledge lies in our university and reference libraries, including those in Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Potchefstroom and Bloemfontein. The overwhelming majority of their books and journals are in English.

This means that children who learn English before they learn any other language have an enormous headstart in the acquisition of knowledge. Even if all the schools in a post-apartheid KwaNatal are genuinely open to all, in those that use English as a medium of instruction, two problems will arise, starting in Sub A. Some children will enter the school from homes where they spoke English more often than any other language. They will have an educational advantage over the children who come from homes in which some other language dominates. At the same time, everything that is done to compensate the children who did not learn English before they learned another language, will erode their allegiance to the language that dominates their home.

South African Jews understand all this. They expect their rabbis and cultural leaders to be proficient in Hebrew but make sure their

children's English is up to scratch. South African Indians have followed their example in concentrating on English rather than on their cultural and religious languages. The rest of South Africa's people have not come to terms with these facts and place their children at an educational disadvantage because they teach them another language before they teach them English.

These considerations give another twist to Indaba's belief that parents should be given a legal right to choose the language in which their children are education. It means that Indaba believes that there are limits to the control which a central authority should have over a child's education, even if that limitation may disadvantage the child and make it more difficult, and perhaps impossible, to create nonracial, multilingual, multicultural and classless schools. This moderate and permissive position doesn't generate a new policy question; it simply underlines the fact that moderates and progressives have to declare where they stand in the debate on how centralised and controlled the region's future education system should be.

In Place of a Conclusion

I have used Karodia's paper on Indaba's Education Report to identify policy questions that do not receive as much attention as they deserve. I want to conclude by listing the questions in the order in which they appeared. And I want to end in this way to remind myself and others that we are still a long way from having a coherent and defensible set of policy options for the future of education in KwaNatal.

Here then, are the seven sets of questions that have to be debated more thoroughly:

- Should the region have a majoritarian, a proportional or some other kind of democracy? If it should have a proportional democracy, but not the one that Indaba proposed, what should it look like? If it should have a majoritarian democracy, how will "compulsory assimilation or a denial of minority culture" be prevented?
- Should stakeholders in the future of KwaNatal's education system take necessary but insufficient steps towards a nonracial education system for KwaNatal?
- Racist laws are abolished, what can be done to see that the new opportunities are actually taken? What can be done to see that the abolition of laws like the EAA and the PRA are not used to fob off demands for changing apartheid structures?

- Who has, or soon will have the power and resources to bring about the dismantling of apartheid structures in one fairly quick and complete step? What should be done between now and when apartheid laws and structures are abolished to ensure that the difficulty of changing the system quickly and completely is not used as an excuse for not changing it at all?
- Should or shouldn't mass education be promoted in KwaNatal while it is so deeply divided along racist and class lines?
- Who should choose the language in which one's children are educated? Who should control who enrolls and who teaches at a school? Who should determine the cultural, philosophical and religious values to which one's children are exposed at school?
- Should decision-making in KwaNatal's education system be as decentralised and democratic as possible while apartheid structures and attitudes may pollute what is decided?

My answers to these questions incline towards the moderate options, towards Indaba's proposals for the future of KwaNatal's education system. But it's Karodia's paper that has put them on mine, as well as everyone else's, agenda.

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