

The Ethiopian example: Time for taking bold steps in our neck of the woods?

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The iconic status of Ethiopia in Africa is well deserved. With the exception of two short botched attempts by Italy to colonise its 'share of a European share of Africa', the country was never colonised by Europe or any other state. Ethiopia is the most mountainous country in Africa – home to more than 80% of the continent's elevations above sea level. Perhaps its geographical setting played a role in the preservation of a unique social ecological space where indigenous ethnicity and environmental biodiversity have prevailed on a continent that is still scarred by the legacy of colonialism.

Ethiopia is a slumbering giant. Since the start of the new millennium, its economy has taken off. There have also been signal changes in recent times.

In 2019, a new 43-year-old president, Abiy Ahmed, set about restoring Ethiopia's relations with Eritrea that had broken down more than two decades ago. In the process of creating an atmosphere of collaboration in East Africa, he won the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize. Abiy courageously released political prisoners, revoked repressive laws, promoted an open economy, appointed women in senior leadership positions, recognised human rights and became a leader who listens to Ethiopia's ethnic and growing urban voices.

The way ahead is littered with obstacles, but there are indications of the political will to seek normalisation at a time when a predominantly rural society is urbanising at a blistering pace (Hagmann & Tronvoll 2019).

There have been notable developments. In 2011, Ethiopia's government, at the time of the Arab Spring in North Africa and the Middle East, announced that it would start construction work on the \$6 billion Grand Ethiopia Renaissance Dam (GERD). On completion in the 2020s, GERD will be the largest hydropower dam in Africa – paid for by the Ethiopian state. The country was unable to raise the funds on international markets for building the dam, but there is evidence of financial responsibility. In 2017, the then cost of \$4.8 made out a decent 5% of the country's gross domestic product.

The finalisation of the project requires serious negotiations with neighbouring states, Egypt and Sudan. There has to be consensus over the responsible management of the much-valued water of the Blue Nile that has its origins in Northern Ethiopia (Hammond 2013; Lawler 2019; McCann & Blanc 2016; Mengistu 2018)

The country's phenomenal economic annual growth rate in recent times, along with that of Kenya, has attracted considerable global economic interest in East Africa (Moller 2015, 2016). Ethiopia currently remains amongst the fastest growing states of the world. What can we learn from Ethiopia's example? And what does it have to do with Southern Africa?

The world's leading medical and pharmaceutical researchers, along with a plethora of specialists in other fields, have now embarked on exploring the human genome on the African continent. Africa has the greatest human genome diversity on the planet. Securing African data implies that people of African descent will have access to medical and especially medicinal treatment. It will also contribute to our growing global knowledge of health.

Most of the research – especially in the uncertain fields where science may have no knowledge – corresponds to substantial international and current transdisciplinary research (Bentley, Callier & Rotimi 2019:179–186). The medical world knows much about natural science. African data can now be incorporated into a knowledge system based on Northern Hemisphere science breakthroughs since the 20th century. It is of global relevance.

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However, when it comes to understanding indigenous culture, and the need to ethically determine a responsible ethical strategy for generating knowledge that is from the freebooting harvesting of valuable data generated in Africa, there need to be firm ethical principles. The free market has to be disciplined, but not obstructed. African humanists and social scientists have their work cut out for them. Natural scientists may value collaborating with them.

Theoretical and methodological experts in the humanities and social science disciplines have to start (or continue) with an internalisation and re-invention process that can pave the way for a better global understanding of African and universal knowledge.

In Southern Africa, we have allowed under-development to proliferate and undermine societies. Think about South Africa, Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe as examples. It is time to engage more closely with Ethiopia, and the likes, if we want to make headway. In the fields of multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary research, a considerable amount of work needs to be done. We need to promote benign migration, although temporary, from silos of existing knowledge, even though it does not correspond exactly to the demand for much-needed African knowledge to feed into global academic wisdom.

In this volume of the *Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* (TD), there are two important contributions worth mentioning. In the first article, Mkhize (2019) combines mathematics and accounting – a field explored some time ago at the University of Pretoria and University of South Africa (Rehwinkel & Gouws 2015). Now the focus has shifted to using transdisciplinarity to integrate maths and accounting at undergraduate level. It is a field deserving of further exploration. The research is commended.

In the second article, Schepen and Graness (2019) write on Kimmerle's intercultural philosophy and the quest for epistemic justice. There is a call for greater awareness on (in) justice. Not only African but also feminist and gender voices have to be added to philosophical discourses. There is a rich African field ready to be harvested, if only adventurous philosophers would take up the challenge.

The remaining articles are sound, peer-reviewed, empirical studies, reporting on matters of real life. They are innovative

and they explore spaces of thinking we have yet to ponder. These contributions are valuable. They add to our existing knowledge. Most praiseworthy is the growing contribution of articles in the field of education. We need more, also from other disciplinary fields.

However, we need more ground-breaking knowledge. We also need a pronounced inter-, multi- and transdisciplinary methodological discourse in TD articles. The sooner we start sharing methodologies with our peers on the how and why of research beyond conventional disciplines, the better it is for all. We need to become more sensitive and embrace methods and theories in a variety of disciplines, as well as the special empirical circumstances under which we conduct research, especially in Africa.

Only by reporting on a research-finding platform such as TD, will it be possible for us to make a contribution towards knowledge and grassroots savvy. We take pride in the offerings of our authors in this edition of the journal.

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