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Liberating Africa's Future Generations from the Myth of Redemptive Violence through Peace Education

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Abstract

This paper explores how Africa's future generations can be liberated from the myth of redemptive violence through peace education. It critiques the myth perpetuated through Hollywood movies that violence redeems and brings peace and stability. In its place, it calls for a liberating education that emphasises non-violent methods of conflict resolution and engenders a culture of peace, reconciliation, tolerance and mutual respect. It argues that without a deliberate attempt to incorporate peace education into the school curriculum, the current cycles of violence which characterize the post-colonial era in Africa will continue unabated. Possible approaches to peace education are suggested. These include learner-centred, participatory, cooperative and interactive methodologies. It is through peace education that Africa can re-orient itself towards its own humane philosophy of hunhu/ubuntu.

Introduction

Conflicts in post-colonial Africa have too often degenerated to unprecedented levels of violence. Heroes of anti-colonial struggles have appeared to find it difficult to tolerate each other in the post-colonial era despite having fought gallantly on the same side to free their nations from structural and direct violence of colonialism. Indeed, they have been known to turn against each other resulting in deadly civil wars that have marred the post-colonial history of many African states. A prevailing myth has been the belief that violence is redeeming and can bring about peace.

The myth of redemptive violence is a term that was coined by Walter Wink to explain the basis of violence in society. The term encapsulates 'the belief that violence saves; that war brings peace; that mighty power makes right' (Wink, 1998, p. 42). This belief is so widespread that it does not seem to be mythic at all but actually the natural order of things - the inevitable, the last and, often the first resort in conflicts. In short: it is what works. As Wink (1999) puts it, the dominant religion in our society today is neither Christianity nor Islam but the myth of redemptive violence.

The historical origins of the myth of redemptive violence

The myth of redemptive violence is based on an ancient Babylonian creation story (the *Enuma Elish*) from around 1250 BCE. According to Wink (1998, p. 45):

> In this myth, creation is an act of violence. Marduk (the all-powerful god of Babylon) murders and dismembers Tiamat (the goddess and dragon of chaos) and from her cadaver creates the world. ... order is established by means of disorder. Chaos is prior to order. Evil precedes good. The gods themselves are violent.

Wink attempts to present the biblical creation story in Genesis as diametrically opposed to the Babylonian creation story in that it shows a good God creating the world without using violence. However, violence later enters with sin. As pointed out by Wolfe (2007), the recourse to violence so as to bring about change occurs in several biblical stories in ways that are not fundamentally different from the Babylonian myth. To cite some pertinent examples: an angry God violently destroys Sodom and Gomorrah using fire and brimstone; the same God destroys the whole world using unprecedented floods during the days of

Noah; he kills all first born sons of Egyptian mothers to convince Pharaoh to free the Israelites from slavery and bondage; Christ is violently crucified to save humanity; and a final battle between good and evil is expected at Armageddon where good will finally triumph over evil just before Christ's triumphant return. The Bible taken as a whole is thus not free from the myth of redemptive violence. Wink (1998, 1999) is however correct when he argues that Christ's central message as portrayed in the four gospels is one of love, peace, tolerance, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence: the very *antithesis* of redemptive violence.

Redemptive violence today

The Babylonian myth is alive and well in contemporary society. It is as universally present and fervently believed today as it ever was in its long and violent history. It embodies the ritual practice of violence at the very centre of public life, and even those who oppose violence believe they should do so violently. It is part of our folklore. It is what characterizes our heroes in war stories, comics, movies and even news reports. It is present in sport, nationalist rhetoric, military and foreign policies. As Wolfe (2007, p. 2) puts it:

> The myth of redemptive violence is an archetypal story where a superhero, representing Good, is pitted against an evil and equally powerful villain representing Evil. The superhero, after much struggle and suffering, finally through violence, vanquishes the villain restoring order and re-establishing Good over Evil.

We see it enacted in the action adventures of superheroes such as *Superman, Spiderman, Batman, the Terminator* and *the Specialist. The Specialist* (www.imdb.com/title/tt0111255), a 1994 movie starring Sylvester Stallone and Sharon Stone, can be taken as an example. In the movie, a former CIA agent Ray Quick (played by Sylvester Stallone) is a freelance hit man (the film's

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euphemism for a hired assassin) who specializes in developing and using bombs that blow up intended targets without harming unintended targets. Ray is hired by May Munro (played by Sharon Stone) to use his sophisticated bomb-making and detonation skills to kill the entire membership of a criminal gang that shot and killed her parents in cold blood. He blows up people, vehicles and buildings, kills several law enforcement agents and at least one civilian bystander in the process. He is a hero, and is allowed to take the law into his own hands including blowing up his enemies. After all, the end justifies the means. At the end of the film, the triumphant duo of Ray and May smile and feel good.

Such stories create in impressionable people, particularly young children, an unhealthy fixation with violence. They have far reaching consequences and end up perpetuating a culture in which violence is seen as the ultimate solution to social problems. They are a gift to both 'forces' of 'Good' and 'Evil' and can be used to justify the use of violence such as bomb assassinations by a country's army as well as by terrorists. Both sides, who may carry the labels of the 'Good' and 'Bad' guys, will glorify use of violence against their perceived enemies. However, as one critically looks at it, they are all criminals (Hooker, 2004). Apparently, even innocent children's entertainment such as cartoons, computer and video games based on superheroes often feature explicitly violent content and, for the greater part, perpetuate the myth of redemptive violence in all its brutality. Examples of this type of children's entertainment are *Popeye* and *Bluto*, *Lord of the Rings* and *Iron Man*.

This paper explores how Africa's future generations can be liberated from the myth of redemptive violence through peace education. It calls for a liberating education that emphasizes non-violent methods of conflict resolution and engenders a culture of peace, reconciliation, tolerance and mutual respect.

The fundamental cause of violence in post-colonial societies

The fundamental cause of violence in society is, according to Paulo Freire (1972), lack of genuine freedom. However, the outward manifestations of lack of freedom are often mistaken for the causes of violence. This is why struggles for cessation, devolution, unification or even regime change have not brought an end to the cycles of violence that continue to characterize post-colonial societies. Freire (1972) sees freedom as an indispensable condition in humankind's quest for self-fulfilment and actualization and not simply an abstract idea. Without freedom one is alienated and cannot exist authentically. The oppressed, although desirous of an authentic life, fear it because of self-depreciation. Freire notes the paradox in the aspirations of the oppressed for whom '*to be* is *to be like* and *to be like* is *to be like the oppressor*' (1972, p. 24). Throughout one's period of oppression one often hears that one is good for nothing, knows nothing and is incapable of learning anything and that one is thick, lazy and unproductive. In the end one feels inferior to the oppressor or boss who seems to be the only one who is knowledgeable and is able to run things. Naturally, the oppressed distrust themselves. In their alienation, they desire at all costs to resemble the oppressor. This is why during the early stages of the struggle for national independence the oppressed find in the oppressor their model of 'manhood'. Despite participating in revolutions, many remain conditioned by the myths of the old order and fear freedom. It is rare to find someone who, despite having suffered at the hands of the oppressor, does not perpetuate the tyranny of oppression towards his/her former comrades when the opportunity presents itself.

Participants in struggles for national independence have tended to forget that their fight was not merely for freedom from the oppressor but also for the freedom to create and to construct a life that affirms their humanity. The liberation struggle was not a fight for personal possessions and positions. It was

also not about populist manifestations and sloganeering. Its aim was to restore humanity to both the oppressor and the oppressed.

Post-liberation struggle societies need to reorganize themselves so that they start believing in themselves through serious reflection and critical liberating dialogue. They need an education that deepens their consciousness of their situation and a desire to do something about it. A problem-posing education, in which they fight for their emancipation and for transforming their reality, is what Paulo Freire called for back in the 60s and 70s. It is still relevant today. Without it, post-colonial African societies will be heading for cycles of violence. Old faces will simply be replaced by new faces but the oppressed will continue to exist under the same conditions set by the colonial oppressor.

Countering redemptive violence through peace education

To build enduring peace one has to learn peace concepts and skills, and use them in peace-making, peace-building and conflict resolution strategies at personal and community levels. Peace education can be a firm building block for peace and should thus be part of lifelong learning. The Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (CIET) also known as the Nziramasanga Commission called for a holistic approach to education anchored in *ubuntu/hunhu* (Zimbabwe: Report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training, 1999). Had the call been heeded, a secure basis for peace education would have been laid for Zimbabwe and violent and anti-social behaviour could have been countered within the school system from an early age (Namasasu, 2013). Even the seemingly intractable pre- and post-election violence in Zimbabwe could have easily been avoided if *ubuntu/hunhu* had been the guiding philosophy during elections. Incidents of xenophobic violence that have sporadically appeared on the African continent, most notably in South

Africa in 2008 and 2015, could also have been avoided had peace education been taken seriously in schools. As far back as 1998, Human Rights Watch compiled a report on the abuses of 'undocumented foreigners' in South Africa (http://www.hrw.org/reports98/sareport). This report was apparently largely ignored by the public and the perception that foreign migrants were not entitled to the same human rights as South Africans was allowed to grow.

Components of peace education

In the present education curricula, once a learner acquires the prescribed cognitive skills, one is expected to be able to function optimally as a useful member of one's community. However, history has taught us that peace-related skills such as the ability to accept and accommodate differences among people are also needed. Peace education seeks to add value to the existing systems of education in order to make them relevant to real life experiences of learners and the creation of a just and peaceful society. Construction of peace through education should therefore include the harnessing of relevant cultural and traditional perspectives to complement western methods of conflict resolution, prevention and management.

Children are, in many ways, aware of their environment and of the social, economic and political issues that affect their daily lives. Peace education intervenes in an ongoing educational process whereby they learn attitudes, skills and knowledge which they will require to function as responsible members of their societies yet most African governments are scared of introducing peace education. The disorder of the world around us is reflected in school in many ways. In fact, the very skills that are needed to address conflicts and wider crises at community and global levels are often the very same qualities children require to live peacefully in school settings. The school is a microcosm of the

wider society and also requires tolerance, non-violence, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace-making skills. Through peace education, schools can effectively become social arenas which model how the ideal world ought to be. In order to achieve this, the schools will need a curriculum which has peace education content and methodology to free children from relying on violence to solve problems among themselves and with school authorities.

UNICEF (www.unicef.org/education/files/PeaceEducation.pdf) sees peace education as an essential component of quality basic education. It defines it as a process of promoting knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behaviour changes that will enable children, youth and adults to:

1)   prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural;
2)   resolve conflict peacefully; and
3)   create conditions conducive to peace at intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level

All issues are considered from the perspective of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All of 1999 (), and other educational initiatives such as children's rights/human rights education, citizenship education, sustainable development education, gender education, global education, life skills education, multi-cultural education, governance and leadership education, education for non-violent conflict transformation, landmine awareness, and psychosocial rehabilitation. Peace education is thus not a single subject but a multi-facetted field that can be learnt through various subjects which may not necessarily carry the label *peace education.*

Tyler's model as a guide to a peace education curriculum
Tyler's 1949 curriculum model is a four part model that consists of objectives, instructional strategies and content, organization of learning experiences, and

assessment and evaluation. It can be applied to peace education in Africa as follows:

1) What educational purposes should institutions seek to attain in relation to peace and *hunhu/ubuntu* education? (objectives)

2) What educational experiences are likely to attain these objectives? (instructional strategies and content)

3) How can these educational experiences be organised effectively? (organisation of learning experiences)

4) How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (assessment and evaluation)

The diagram below illustrates a possible sequence that can be followed in planning a peace education curriculum.
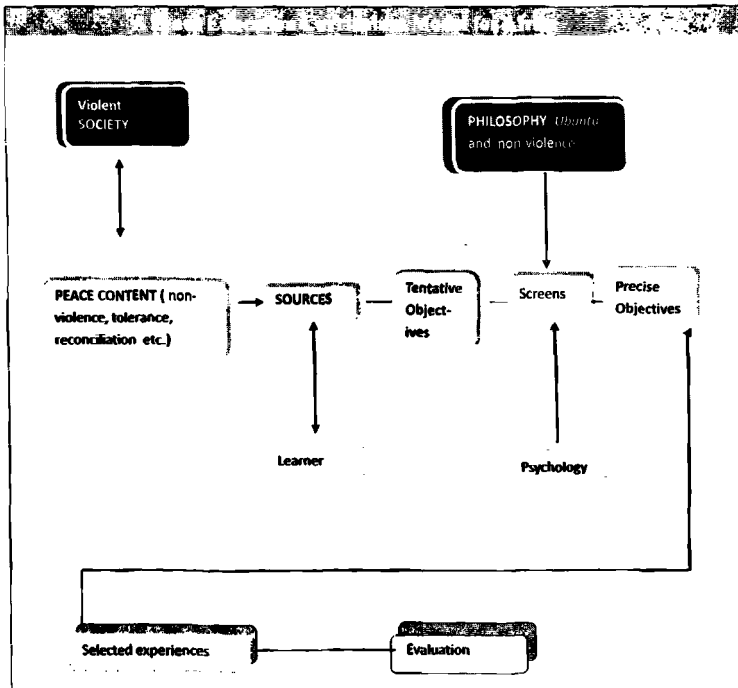

Figure 1. Peace Education Curriculum Model for Africa. (Adapted from Tyler (1949) and Ornstein & Hunkins (2004))

The starting point is a violent society which requires peace content emphasizing non-violence and conflict resolution strategies. This, together with the interests, age, background, gender and culture of the learner, provide the basis for selecting sources of teaching materials and formulating tentative learning objectives. The philosophy of *hunhu/ubuntu* and theories of learning from psychology provide further inputs before precise objectives are formulated to design and evaluate selected learning experiences.

The objectives model (Tyler, 1949) has stood the test of time and can be used to construct a peace education curriculum for Africa. Tyler (1949) noted that children's interests must be identified so that they can serve as the focus of educational attention which then forms the basis for selecting objectives. Children are already immersed in the myth of redemptive violence and hence the desire to become heroes through cartoons, video games and computer games as well as wrestling and action movies. Tyler's focus was on how objectives can serve as a basis for devising elements for teaching and evaluation of education, and reflecting on the degree of achievement of the objectives (Tyler, 1949; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Veness, 2010). Developing a culture of peace, instilling *hunhu/ubuntu* values, mastering peace and conflict concepts, implementing the principles of non-violence, denouncing redemptive violence, redeeming each other, mastering conflict resolution skills and devising early warning systems for future conflicts require that we design behavioural objectives to that effect borrowing heavily on the children's conditioned desire to rely on violence in solving problems or in establishing order.

Planners must identify what students need to learn in order to be non-violent and productive citizens in society. Society's conflict issues and peace needs can be used to come up with the justification and objectives of the curriculum. It is

from these that content of the curriculum will be formulated. To achieve the objectives of peace education, an education system must go through major changes such as setting new educational objectives, preparing new curricula, writing school textbooks, developing instructional materials, educating teachers, and creating a school climate that is conducive to peace education. Peace education, if successful, socializes young generations in such a way that it facilitates the process of reconciliation and eventually the construction of a culture of peace.

Peace education content will be broken down by age, interests and real life situations and needs of each group of members of the society and according to the context in which specific concepts will be imparted as one moves from tentative objectives to precise objectives. The methodologies will be guided by *hunhu/ubuntu*, other similar peace philosophies, and modern principles of child and adult education. It is only after these considerations that planners can move to the first of the bottom two boxes: educational experiences that fulfill the planned objectives. These are the lesson plans for children, students, youths and adults - both as classroom and home experiences as well as extracurricular activities within school settings and in the community. All experiences need to be subjected to formative and summative evaluation. Results of these two types of evaluation will form the basis for making decisions on how to strengthen the curriculum during and after the course. Specific *hunhu/ubuntu* bodies of knowledge need separate consideration during planning, implementation and evaluation to see whether the spirals of benefits expected to accrue have indeed taken place as planned and incidentally through both vicarious and planned learning.

The direct and indirect conflicts in children's lives are the contexts within which

this content should be imparted in relation to the reality of specific countries in which peace education is being introduced. Relevant content on conflict situation will be derived from the concrete reality of day-to-day life. After objectives and principles of peace education have been accepted, schools can develop their own detailed curricula and instruction strategies to suit their specific circumstances.

Elements of effective peace education programmes

Effective school-based, skill-oriented peace education programmes should have the following elements:

- Designing programmes, and planning for monitoring and evaluation prior to beginning any intervention after a comprehensive situation analysis of conflict-prone, conflict or post conflict states;
- Adequately preparing staff and teachers so that they can internalise concepts and skills of peace education themselves before conveying them to others;
- Allowing active student participation and practice through cooperative and interactive methods;
- Use of real-life situations for teaching generic problem-solving skills;
- Educating parents and community groups in the same skills taught in school in non-school contexts to reinforce in the homes conflict resolution skills learned at school;
- Designing and implementing of gender sensitive, culturally sensitive, ethnic sensitive, racially sensitive and age group appropriate programmes;
- Designing programmes in such a way that conflicts in interpersonal relationships, local community and the wider society are analysed;
- Ensuring that young people get opportunities to gain practical experiences in peace-building activities at individual and community

levels;

- Enlisting from the outset, broad-based community support for the programme among politicians, educators, community leaders, public health professionals, religious groups and business leaders.

Approaches to peace education

Learning methodology is an important component of peace education. Unlike the traditional approach where not much thought was given to this component, peace education proponents stresses a type of methodology that reinforces and models non-violent skills and attitudes being targeted. To fully integrate these skills and attitudes, it is necessary to attach importance to both *what* is learnt and *how* it is learnt. In this way school settings become authentic social contexts for experiential learning. The methodology for peace education should be learner-centred, participatory and interactive. It is also important to use the traditional methods of value education like story-telling and modelling.

Violence is an intentional act of aggression with the intention of causing pain or discomforting to others, either directly (bullying, fighting, use of aggressive and abusive tone, name calling, etc.) or indirectly (as in theft, vandalism, use of graffiti, joining violent strikes, disrupting learning environment, etc.) Schools themselves can be made unsafe places. Children displaying violent behaviour during elementary school are likely to get involved with juvenile justice systems and tend to display violence later in life. It is therefore the responsibility of the educator to be attuned to both direct and indirect forms of violent behaviour noted in elementary schools that later escalate into more severe violence in high schools. A peaceful lifestyle needs to be taught and practised overtime for violent students to change. Research by Lipsey, Wilson and Cothern (1998) has shown that multimodal and structured social skills training programs have a very positive effect on youth behaviour.

There is need to focus on what can be done and not what is wrong so as to develop positive self-esteem in youths. Resilience, the ability for bounce back from life's inevitable stresses, should be fostered in the youth. It contributes to the development of social attributes such as empathy, communication skills, problem solving, the capacity to think reflectively and flexibly and a sense of identity and purpose.

Strategies for building a lasting peace through education in post c societies

David Johnson (2014) cites five essential elements in building a lasting through peace education (http://www.researchgate.net/publi /249901119). Firstly, a public education system must be established t compulsory attendance for all children and youth, integrated in such a w students from previously conflicting groups interact with one another ar the opportunity to build positive relationships with each other. Secc sense of mutuality and common fate needs to be established that hig mutual goals, the just distribution of benefits from achieving the goals common identity. In schools, this is primarily done through the cooperative learning. Thirdly, students must be taught how to make c decisions and engage in political discourse. Fourthly. students must be how to engage in integrative negotiations and mediation by p constructively resolve their conflicts with each other. Finally. civic valu be inculcated that help students to focus on the long-term benefits for so a whole.

Hunhu/ubuntu as a subsumed integral component of peace education in Africa

It is important to make *hunhu/ubuntu*, the African cultural world view, an integral component of peace education in Africa (Murithi, 2009). The *hunhu/ubuntu* approach to building human relationships and peace is a sine qua non to lasting peace. This approach which is rooted in the continent's indigenous knowledge systems is an important contribution to global peace education. According to Murithi (2009), the *hunhu/ubuntu*-based peace-making process is in five stages:

1) acknowledging guilt;
2) showing remorse;
3) repenting, asking for and giving forgiveness;
4) paying compensation or reparations; and
5) finally, seeking reconciliation

Hunhu/ubuntu mainstreaming refers to the systematic assessment of the content, constraints and practice of *hunhu/ubuntu* by sections of the population, like school children, youth, adults, etc. It focuses on the thinking, behaviour and outcomes of good and bad behaviour and their impact on socio-economic status of people as a basis for curriculum development, curriculum objectives and the selection of relevant content. It helps identify the different roles and needs of people in a given context, focusing on traditional/family education inputs/outputs, role modelling of females and males, and different life values such as hard work, honesty and integrity. It incorporates intervention strategies to address those negative elements of contemporary society which work against a culture of peace and reconciliation.

The *hunhu/ubuntu* mainstreaming process has to be continuously monitored

and evaluated. The feedback obtained is used to make adjustments and to design further training programmes where needed. It is important to check if members have benefited from the programme using indicators such as better behaved citizens who promote liberty, good governance and peaceful co-existence, in short: a truly liberated society that does not rely on redemptive violence.

Conclusion

This article has shown how Africa's future generations can be liberated from the myth of redemptive violence through peace education. It has called for an education system that emphasizes non-violent methods of conflict resolution and that engenders a culture of peace, reconciliation, tolerance and mutual respect using the indigenous philosophy of *hunhu/ubuntu*. This will have to be an education system capable of providing future generations with the ideology, ethos, values and goals necessary for building a peaceful and democratic society. However, there is need for more research and evaluation on how peace programmes in Africa, can incorporate *hunhu/ubuntu* as the foundation for peace and how African methods of conflict resolution can be blended with mainstream conflict resolution methodologies for them to contribute to more effective and wider coverage of the range of social and cultural contexts in which peace programmes operate.

Experience in countries such as Libya has shown that contemporary African conflicts require strategies that take into account the incompatible needs and interests that underpin these conflicts. Violent military intervention, even though sanctioned by the UN Security Council, clearly failed to yield the intended peace. Using the benefit of hindsight, it is obvious that the African Union's preferred use of dialogue – a strategy anchored in *hunhu/ubuntu*, would

have prevented the anarchy that is seen in Libya and other parts of North Africa today. Closer home, significant efforts were made by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to bring peace and reconciliation to Zimbabwe's political landscape after inconclusive and controversial polls in 2008. This led to the formation of the inclusive government of 2009 to 2013 that enabled former rivals to work together for the good of the country. Such initiatives need not only to be applauded, but to be extended beyond the political arena to the school through peace education. It is at school that solid foundations for the rejection of violence as the first and natural option to solve conflicts can be laid. Being peaceful, like any other behaviour, can be learnt and be a lifestyle. Without peace education, the next generation will not become propagators of peace. Peace education is an essential element in establishing consensual peace and ensuring that it is sustainable.

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