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IDEAL SOCIO- POLITICAL EDUCATION FOR NATION BUILDING IN A MULTI-RACIAL AND MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETY

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Abstract

The paper examines the crucial role of an ideal socio-political education in nation building in multi-racial and multi-ethnic societies, particularly with regards to the 'politics of the nation'. In particular, it argues that education is the nucleus of society and a perfect education builds a perfect society. The work among other things, argues for a proper education on the meaning of a 'nation'. Rather than being used as an instrument of exclusion and discrimination, the concept of nation can be used positively to integrate and unite people regardless of cultural, ethnic, or racial differences. Nation building is only possible through a correct education, an education that is selfless, that overrides challenges brought about by racial and tribal differences by preaching the gospel of oneness of all people sharing a common territory they all call home.

Key words: ideal education, nation building, citizenship, integration, peace, multi-racial, multi-ethnic

Introduction and background of study

'Politics of the nation' refers to the politics of inclusion and exclusion; the politics of 'who belongs? Another aspect of the 'politics of the nation' is the politics of 'Who has got rights to what and who does not have?' The 'politics of the nation' particularly in a multi-racial and multi-ethnic society becomes exclusionary when it alienates, marginalizes, disengages and peripherizes certain members of society. Such kind of politics precipitates conflict because it denies some members both nationality and citizenship rights. Sustained conflicts of that nature usually shatter the social and political fabric of an organized society leading to a 'failed state'. The resultant 'failed state' is characterized by political instability, economic stagnation, and lack of a clear sense of national identity by some members of that society.

General objective

The main task of this paper is to advocate for an ideal type of education; an education that builds a peaceful and prosperous nation. It is inspired by the understanding that an ideal education is the nucleus of an ideal society. A country is weak or powerful, disintegrated or united depending on its educational system. The important role of education in society thus must not be overlooked. Education can be used wrongly to destroy society but correct education is a vehicle to a prosperous and united society. Education, either formal, or informal must be structured in such a way that it fosters the right and desirable attitudes into its recipients. The curriculum at all levels of education must make this endeavor a reality. Children in particular must be trained young. They must grow up knowing how to love their fellow human beings regardless of differences in tribe or race. The term 'ideal' in this work conceives something in its perfection. Something is ideal if it is a standard of perfection or excellence; when it is a model for imitation. Perfect education leads to a perfect society. The concept of nation building in this work is used within the context of a society that was previously or is currently fragmented on racial and ethnic identities, but that aspires to build a nation. The paper proceeds by unpacking the concept of nation because to understand the concept of nation building, one needs to have thorough understanding of what a nation is. The paper then moves on to discuss nation building after which it discusses in detail, the concept of ideal socio-political education in terms of its nature, and how it meets the needs of nation building.

Statement of the problem

The traditional concept of nation, whatever its attractions, is philosophically obscured and muddled and therefore necessarily requires serious unpacking. Wrongly conceived, the term can be very dangerous and can become a source of discrimination, tribalism regionalism and outright conflict. A few examples in the African region can illustrate this view. According to Georges Nzongola Ntalaja (2004), during the current wave of democratization, incumbents bent on prolonging their stay in power have used exclusionary notions of nationality to bar their most challenging rivals from the electoral process. The best-known examples of this practice are the disqualification of former president Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and former prime minister Alassane Dramane Ouattara of Cote d'Ivoire from presidential elections in 1996 and 2000, respectively. In the Zambian case, that Kaunda's parents had migrated from Malawi when both countries were British colonies was held against him. Because his parents were not

indigenous to Zambia, he was prohibited from running for a presidential seat that he had occupied for twenty-seven years (1964-1991). The Ivorians were more sophisticated in their legal arguments. Conscious of the legal complexities of indigeneity in a territorial entity whose political boundaries had shifted and that was home to millions of immigrants, they excluded Ouattara from the presidential race not because he was not a citizen or had dual nationality, but on the grounds that he had in the past “availed himself of another nationality” by carrying a diplomatic passport from Burkina Faso. Ntalaja further narrates that the violent repercussions of these politically motivated acts of exclusion are well known. State repression of Kaunda's supporters and the general climate of violence resulted in numerous deaths, including that of the son of a former president. In Cote d'Ivoire, Ouattara's exclusion led to the boycott of presidential elections by his political party and to acts of ethnic cleansing on both sides of the political/religious divide between southerners and northerners and between Christians and Muslims. The crisis has escalated to full-scale civil war, whose solution is being sought through the involvement of peacekeeping forces from France, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the United Nations. The sad developments narrated above suggest the need for a reconceptualisation of the term nation. What constitutes a nation and what exactly determines nationality? Correct answers to these questions can only come from correct and proper education.

Sample study

In order to determine the content of education required on the concept of nation, a purposive sampling technique in the form of short interviews was adopted where twenty different people of different education levels were asked to define nationality and also show the importance they attach to the concept. The research was carried out on the streets adjacent to the University of Zimbabwe in Mount Pleasant, Harare.

Research findings and analysis

Responses got from the research can be grouped into two. Two thirds of the people interviewed were unsure of what nationality really means but emphasized that it is hinged on birth and ancestry. Since nationality is tied to birth and ancestry people interviewed argued that nationality cannot be changed like citizenship. Seven of the people interviewed insisted that Bruce Grobbelaar and Benjani Mwaruwari were not supposed to play for the Zimbabwean national soccer team since the former was white and the latter a Malawian national meaning both of them were not Zimbabwean nationals.

Three people doubted that the Ndebele are genuine Zimbabwean nationals but viewed them as long-time immigrants from South African therefore not pure nationals. Fourteen people thought that nationality must remain exclusive and must not be diluted, as this is the trend in the whole world. Only three people thought that due to civilization and or globalization nationality was becoming less significant.

The research showed that the concept of nationality has become vague because its parent concept of nation is inherently ambiguous. The ambiguity results from the fact that there is no satisfactory criterion that can be used for deciding which of the many human collectives should be labeled as a nation. Most attempts to explain why certain groups are nations are often based on a combination of criteria such as language, common territory, common history, and common culture. The essence of a nation is therefore elusive. "What is that factor, that if taken out of a collective, the collective ceases to be a nation?" The traditional concept of a nation according to Gellner (1983:3) proposes that two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating. Understood this way, a nation becomes an entity consisting of some objective characteristics such as a common homeland, culture, language and even colour. Such a definition, if adopted, means human collectives that we call nations today are not real nations. Very few villages in Zimbabwe, for example would satisfy the above demands of a nation essentially because no village is composed of people with one culture and a common ancestry. If a common culture and a common ancestry form the essence of a nation, Zimbabwe, or any other country for that matter, ceases to be a nation because virtually all countries are composed of people of diverse cultures and backgrounds. This traditional understanding of a nation therefore does not make practical sense and must thus be treated merely as abstract.

The traditional concept of nation thus, propagates conflict, as it is essentially segregatory, discriminatory and exclusionary. Such a concept perpetuates, nepotism and many other forms of favoritism as one people become split as each member jostles to find his 'own' and ultimately leading to the 'us' and 'them' classifications. There is therefore critical need for a new and pragmatic approach to the concept of the nation. Such a perspective is imperative given the substantial changes in meanings of words over time in addition to the substantial relocation of peoples as a result of globalization, secularization, spread of education, and even the

negatives like imperialism and colonialism. The traditional concept of nation is in essence backward looking and unsuitable for defining contemporary societies. Oomen (1997:5) rejects as unimportant most criteria traditionally used to explain nationhood arguing instead that the minimum conditions for a nation to emerge and exist are only a common homeland and a critical level of communication. This understanding objects to the view that a nation has got some objective characteristics. An example of a viable and selfless definition of a nation comes from Benedict Anderson (1991; 6). The nation according to him is just an 'imagined political community'; imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. People can all imagine themselves as belonging to the same nation irrespective of background thereby creating a nation. Following this view, it therefore means there is nothing natural about a nation. It is however, a concept that is prone to political manipulation. This paper argues for the importance of correct education on issues relating to nationhood. Wrong education on the 'politics of the nation' results in a failed state, while correct education builds a nation.

Nation Building

A correct concept of nation becomes more important when it comes to nation building. The term nation building is often used simultaneously with state building, democratization, modernization, political development, post-conflict reconstruction, and peace building. But each concept is different, though their evolution is intertwined. The concept of nation building focuses on the expansion of citizenship as well as rights to political participation. It emphasizes on national integration. It includes such notions as civic engagement, political equality, solidarity, trust, and tolerance. The development of social, political, and economic equality is key in any successful strategy for long-term nation building and long-term peace building. The building of an integrated national community is also important in the building of a strong and prosperous state. Nation building is an important concept particularly in countries that emerged from what Smith (1976: 5) identifies as territorial nationalism. Territorial nationalism involves a national movement that arises among heterogeneous populations and based upon the territorial unit in which they are forcibly united and administered, usually by a colonial power. The boundaries of the territory and the administration of the colony form, therefore, the chief referents and focuses of the identification of the nation to be. On taking over the territory, the nationalists' main attention is devoted to integrating a culturally distinct population, a coalition of tribes or a mixture of races that possess neither myths of common origin or shared history, except for the latest, often

relatively, brief period of colonial subjection. The bulk of such nations are previously colonized societies like Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and many other sub-Saharan states. Nations formed this way must be maintained carefully for they are fragile. In Zimbabwe, for example, soon after independence in 1980 a conflict rooted in a failed integration emerged between the political leadership of the Shona and the Ndebele. The conflict, or rather the division, had begun way before independence when two nationalist movements were fighting the same enemy, for the same reasons, but fighting separately. Although the conflict ended in 1987 with the two parties getting into a coalition government, the relationship between the Shona and Ndebele has never been a purely smooth one. The period between 1998 and 2008 in Zimbabwe witnessed a socially and politically unstable multi-racial and multiethnic nation formed in 1980. Many viewed the land reform that was embarked upon by the government in 1998 with the assistance of war veterans as racially exclusive. The white race that had benefited from the 1980 reconciliation and apparently became part of the Zimbabwean nation assumed the new position of being an enemy. The 'we' and 'they' unfortunately resurfaced again. At the heart of these conflicts is the nationality issue. The potentially united and peaceful Zimbabwean nation of 1980 has thus suffered a major setback. A viable route out of this mess is ideal education, the type of education that promotes the oneness of people. Such an education to be detailed below, must first be targeted at the educators themselves, particularly politicians, urban and rural local authorities, traditional leaders like chiefs and headmen, and teachers in youths training centers like the Border Gezi training centers in Zimbabwe. The above-mentioned groups of educators, in a politically polarized society, are critical in that their type of education may be influenced by other selfish motives. If due care is not taken, such education, though largely informal in nature, is essentially indoctrination. A possible outcome from the political gatherings, village meetings, and youth training schools could be such that a substantial number of people become equipped with doctrines of hate, tribalism, racism, xenophobia, and regionalism, among other negatives.

The Nature of an ideal socio-political education

A multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society can become a prosperous nation. A viable socio-political education suggested in this work is multi-cultural in orientation because differences in race and ethnic backgrounds naturally suggest differences in culture.

Briefly defined, culture is the whole way of life of a group. It is a pattern of

traditions that can be transmitted over time and space (M.K Smith; 2009). Three qualities underlie its centrality: it is learnt; much of it exists at a non-or-unconscious level; it helps structure thought, perception and identity. The most important thing is that culture is taught. This therefore means it can be corrected through education, in this case both formal and informal education. The importance of multicultural education is that, in essence, it is conducive to the celebration of common universal values inherent in the behavior of all human beings. According to S. Nieto,(2000;412) agents of change such as schools should be the manufacturers of good citizens who acquire these values for the common good.

The Content of Ideal Socio-political education

An ideal education system must try to carry out the following aims:

Firstly it must train people mentally so that they start seeing each other positively regardless of background. The first and foremost principle that should be emphasized by such an education in this respect is genuine reciprocal reconciliation. Any educator either formal or informal must impart knowledge aimed at mentally preparing people for reconciliation. Refocusing people's mentality towards interpersonal relations is the foundation of real or genuine reconciliation. Reconciliation can only achieve results if it is real. Such reconciliation is the first step towards re-engagement and trust.

Secondly the education, either formal or informal must popularize the principle of "unity in diversity." To achieve unity in diversity in society is one of the many possible starting points in nation and peace building. Unity in diversity is possible if people are taught to overcome misconceptions about culture and race thereby dispelling cultural and racial ignorance. They must be taught that both 'race' and ethnicity are empty categories and two of the most destructive and powerful forms of social categorization. 'Race' for example, is now usually placed in inverted commas because it is not based on any biologically valid distinctions between the genetic make-up of differently identified 'races'. Race is perhaps best approached as a social construct - that is to say something made in society. According to Lewis (1998; 97) certain physical features 'are interpreted and used to construct distinct social groups known as races'.

However if all people are taught to treat each other as full and equal members in society and are taught to avoid invoking some imperatives of segregation and discrimination, there are concrete events and experiences that can lead to a sense of common identity and shared history. This is the

basic idea behind the South African 'rainbow nation'. The 'rainbow nation' concept lay in the compelling idea of a multicultural democracy in which previously opposed 'races' were dissolved into mutually reconciled 'cultures' blended together in harmony. This powerful image has persisted in the rhetoric of the "new South Africa" replacing racial categories with apparently plural and democratic notions of "culture."

In addition educators both formal and informal must impart a unifying concept of a nation- a concept that teaches that any willing member can both be a national and a citizen. Nationality cannot and should not be a preserve of a section of people. Nationality must be every human being's basic right as it ensures an individual's full protection by the state. Citizenship on the other hand grants an individual the right to participate in the political life of the state such as voting or standing for elections. The sense of belonging associated with full nationality and citizenship rights on its own brings people closer. This builds a strong foundation for development because every member is psychologically persuaded to patriotically and passionately contributes to the development of the society. So, the second goal of education is a reconceptualization of the nation itself. A viable concept must accommodate rather than alienate.

Third, this work proposes a socio-political education that is hinged on the metaphorical concept of totemism within the African context. A key aspect of a metaphor in this case is a specific transference of a word from one context into another. For example, the term 'mother' in most African cultures does not refer to the biological mother only, but refers also to any middle-aged woman who deserves respect. Totems though largely imaginary have worked quite amazingly in uniting people with different backgrounds. Through totemism every person can be related to one another. Metaphorically, Joshua Nkomo is regarded as the father of every Zimbabwean. It does not mean however that Nkomo biologically fathered every Zimbabwean. His fatherhood is just a symbol of unity. A coloured person in Zimbabwe is usually called '*muzukuru*', meaning nephew because one parent is naturally black. White people can become our friends '*vanasahwira*' and life goes on. The idea is to remove people from their conflict-ridden histories and be able look forward. Through marriages, local tribes are now inseparably related either directly or via totems. This creates unity in diversity and is one good African way of fostering unity.

Education recommended here must be targeted at the political and community developmental leadership at every hierarchical level. The leadership from grassroots level must have the knowledge that prioritizing

unity gives more utility than prioritizing political expediency. Race and tribe are not the essence of humanity. A nation is built on engaging rather than disengaging. Giving full citizenship rights to every member who 'lawfully' resides within a particular territory is to entice his\ her full participation at every level. This is a sure way to positive development. This must be the common forward-looking vision. Exclusionary tendencies based on race and tribes are thus backward looking and unnecessarily conservative.

Conclusion

This work has argued for and has attempted to justify an educational system that promotes unity and development in an ethnically and racially polarized society. The work among other things, attempted to argue for a reconceptualization of the 'nation' in order to come up with a time sensitive concept that factors in practical changes that have taken place over time. Certain discourses influence the way people behave, therefore, any efforts in changing people's behavior must be targeted at their beliefs. Only education can achieve this goal. This work therefore advocated for an ideal education meant to positively transform people's beliefs on the 'nation' with the ultimate objective of practically changing their behavior for the better. There is need to do away with beliefs that lead to the alienation, marginalization, disengagement and peripherization of certain members of society, to ones that bring people together. This becomes a viable way to proper nation building.

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