

## AFRICAN PARADIGMS FOR AFRICAN PEACE: KNOWLEDGE, RESEARCH AND CONTEXTS

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Twenty-first century problems of conflict and violence have a complexity and sophistication that require a rigorous intellectual approach that takes into account historical factors, global contexts and advances in knowledge. The United Nations' University for Peace Africa Programme has brought together African peace researchers who have produced a wide-ranging exploration of peace research practices on the continent of Africa. The product is a book titled *Peace Research for Africa: Critical Essays on Methodology*.

This review essay gives an overview of the important intellectual, research and policy contributions the book makes to peace research. The essay discusses the way in which key theoretical terms used in peace research and studies are explored in the book, and it examines how the term 'development' is used in the field of peacebuilding and development. The essay traces the connections between peace, development and education, and inquires about the African peace paradigms developed in the scholarship and the epistemological issues raised. It ends by bringing attention to two other recent works also concerned with the development of African perspectives on the global peace movement and the application of African knowledge to Africa's problems in a historical and global context.

*Peace Research for Africa* starts with functional definitions used in the scholarship with particular reference to Africa. It ends with research methodologies and an appendix of resources from peacebuilding workshops conducted by the University for Peace Africa Programme. The book's aim is to address shortcomings in the production of knowledge relevant to problems of peace and development in Africa. The contributors advance the idea, not common in peace research, that peace and development go hand in hand. When it comes to analysing the need for a research paradigm developed from African contexts and speaking to African issues, therefore, the contributors aim to provide

a comprehensive research perspective that arises from and speaks to the particularities, needs, aspirations, and insights of persons working in Africa, bypassing the military-industrial power centres of North American and European universities and think-tanks (McCandless & Bangura 2007:14).

An important aspect of knowledge production for the promotion of peace deals with media comment on issues of conflict and violence. Almost without exception, the global mainstream media routinely solicit the views of military analysts, army generals and war reporters on contemporary conflicts. There are known peace activists and scholars who provide alternative analyses, but the mainstream media fail to regard them as analysts with important perspectives on issues of conflict and violence. For African problems, the mainstream media 'search out warlords and armed militia leaders yet rarely if ever approach an instructor of peace and conflict studies' (McCandless & Bangura 2007:27).

The editors and authors have taken care to produce a text that not only develops an African paradigm for peace research, but also serves as a thorough introduction to the

wider peace research field. Erin McCandless, a peace researcher who has taught and worked in African countries, including Zimbabwe, and who contributed to all but one chapter, frames the book's theoretical premise in what she calls 'a new sub-field of peace and conflict studies'. This sub-field, she writes, is rooted in African contexts, but with far-reaching 'implications for the production of policy- and practice-relevant research'. She challenges a common criticism of peace studies – that it falls short of the intellectual structures required in a recognised field or discipline (McCandless & Bangura 2007:47). She cites Fuller (1992:100) asserting that 'an interdisciplinary endeavour cannot constitute a coherent field in the same way that a more traditional discipline can', and adds that

Scholarly scepticism and rigidity should not deter scholars who wish to apply themselves to fields that critically embrace more than one discipline if their aim is to address complex, multifaceted problems that are, frankly, the norm in international politics and development. Those who choose this field have natural partners in policy and practice who demand that scholarship support their endeavours to respond to integrated peacebuilding and development challenges with suitably sophisticated and thoughtful analyses (McCandless & Bangura 2007:52).

There is an unstated risk in linking peace to 'development' given the broad definition of the term and the competing understandings of what development ought to look like. Is 'development' the practice of merely following in the footsteps of industrialised countries of the global North? Are there endogenous models that reflect African contexts and are not mere copies of the global North?

In the second chapter, McCandless relates human development to the provision of education. The focus on human development in the book is one of the strengths in the peace

and development sub-field, but which also comes with a need for a critical appraisal. The definition of 'development' is taken from the United Nations in its human development index reports, in which Africa is ranked last in its human development indicators. While the index offers a broad overview of what people's livelihoods look like, this framework measures human development in econometric terms that are not designed to capture other aspects of human wellbeing, such as communal responsibility and cohesion, at the individual and community level. But it does make it possible to focus on the condition of the developing world, and it does compel researchers to deal with the root causes of the problems. This is an important function of a social justice perspective in peace studies and research.

For many African countries, the adoption of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s has led to the social and economic decline of today, one major root cause of the structural violence that is visited upon and impoverishes communities. McCandless observes that at least 29 African countries have so far 'spent more on debt service than on health' (McCandless & Bangura 2007:58). Nine countries paid back debts to their debtors in the global North in amounts that exceeded health and education spending combined. Thirteen African countries spent more money on their militaries than on health, which is also true of several developed countries, McCandless observes.

The problems of development are related to problems of educational provision, and in Africa, the colonial inheritance of schooling makes this a peculiar problem. McCandless cites Fantu Cheru (2002) to point out how academic education in Africa has promoted an elite class, while vocational education has kept the larger population impoverished. McCandless argues that development in Africa will be possible only when a culture of peace is promoted as a deliberate part of policy and implementation:

The success of Africa's educational future lies in its relevancy in terms of its ability to address the continent's developmental needs and in facilitating continent-wide cultures of peace. Among those thinking about and working on education in Africa, a convergence can be discerned that educational curricula should cater to Africa's developmental needs. This involves content, skills, and general orientation – meaning, analytical and vocational – at all levels. (McCandless & Bangura 2007:61).

Among the recommendations for a type of education that would also promote a culture of peace, McCandless suggests 'transforming education for national and regional development goals with specific reference to social, cultural, economic, and technological development'. Added to this is 'transforming curriculum content and improving relevance, quality, and teaching method-ologies with the needs of the learners foremost in focus' (McCandless & Bangura 2007:63).

There is a lot to be said for practical measures that would move the discourse on education from the realm of abstraction to curriculum guidelines and pedagogical methods. Another branch of peace studies, peace education, would have more to offer in this area. The peace education perspective could have made much bolder statements in this particular section of the book. Bringing peace education approaches to teacher education and development, both pre-service and in-service, would transform the school curricula and pedagogical practices in practical ways that would also offer real advances in tying education to development and to peace. Scholars, activists, policy makers and practitioners interested in promoting peace through development have a real chance to use educational research and practice to achieve this. In this way, it will not be enough for development theory and

practice merely to analyse development without tying it to peace in a way that draws on peace studies and research.

Chapter 3 of *Peace Research for Africa* continues with the task of developing a peace research paradigm that benefits from Africa's experiences. It gets across to the reader pertinent points about existing trends and prescriptions of what is needed in the epistemology of African peace paradigms, methodologies, research and suggestions for ethical conduct of peace research. Among them is that many scholars who write about African peace and conflict problems are not African, and thus do not make conscious decisions to involve their African colleagues in their research. Where African intellectuals do engage with peace research, many of them are based in the global North, a situation that makes it difficult for them to engage with problems of rural Africa, where the majority of Africans reside.

Among the recommendations presented by the author of this section, Abdul Karim Bangura, is the exhortation that 'African intellectuals should not be neutral in political matters, with abstract academic identities determined solely by the dictates of formal academic training; the critical need for them to contribute to peace requires that their research be oriented towards this goal' (McCandless & Bangura 2007:74).

Bangura, who teaches peace studies at American University, and is the holder of four doctoral degrees, addresses an aspect of the knowledge-making discourse in Africa, that of language, which demands broader debate and extra effort from scholars to build a truly African alternative to the educational paradigm. Bangura states that

African languages must be significantly employed as media of communication in the work of peace researchers if they are to comprehend the language attitudes

that can lead to or reinforce conflictual social behaviour (McCandless & Bangura 2007:75).

It is inconceivable that a society can develop its knowledge production and dissemination capacity and involve the participation of most of its people without using the languages common to that society. But that is exactly what happens in Africa – an upholding of the colonial inheritance made more complicated by the global importance of the English language. This choice is fiercely defended by African elites to the detriment of African languages, which are regarded as anachronistic, incapable of modernising, and therefore irrelevant.

As an effect of the absence of key, grassroots players in the discourse on peace in Africa, Bangura identifies a trend in which few women participate and in which no endogenous methods are available. He also notes that except for Kenya and Uganda, governments in Africa (and elsewhere in the world for that matter), have not developed policies for achieving peace (McCandless & Bangura 2007: 81).

In Chapter 4, McCandless observes that Africa has made a strong case for human development as a component of peace research, even though the bulk of peace research comes from scholars in the North. That case, she argues, creates 'a critical link to and perhaps a starting point for new African peace research and practice'. She singles out *ubuntu* (or *umunthu*) as a concept of peace that is recognised widely across southern, central and eastern Africa. It refers to how humanness is defined, and is a term that enlists Africans in a collective sense of responsibility for their fellow human beings. *uBuntu* offers a maxim that overturns the 'I think, therefore I am' dictum of Descartes and declares: 'I am because we are' (McCandless & Bangura 2007:93).

*Peace Research for Africa* makes a major contribution to the field of peace studies and

research, particularly as it relates to peacebuilding and development in Africa. It helps address a glaring shortcoming in the canon of peace scholarship, complementing two other books that also focus on African perspectives in the discipline.

The first of these books came out in 2000, authored by two scholar-activists of long standing who have sought to emphasise Africa's relevance in peace studies. *Guns and Gandhi in Africa: Pan-African Insights on Non-violence, Armed Struggle and Liberation in Africa* (Sutherland & Meyer 2000) makes a connection, hitherto unexplored, between Gandhian non-violence and African independence movements. In the preface, Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu observes that the book demonstrates how Gandhi developed his philosophy of non-violence in South Africa, drawing on South Africa's contexts of struggle. Examining Africa's independence movements in relation to Pan-Africanism, the book shows how the civil rights movement in the United States brought together scholars and activists who shared an African heritage and a history of resistance to racial oppression to create a synergy that helped to bring independence from colonialism to the continent of Africa, and civil and voting rights to African Americans.

The second book, *Seeds of New Hope: Pan-African Peace Studies for the Twenty-First Century* (Meyer & Ndura-Ouédraogo 2009), introduces a theoretical perspective that confirms and complements the work presented in *Peace Research for Africa*. It looks forward to a future when the knowledge that African peace paradigms brings is harnessed and presented as a source for a sustained vision for peace in Africa and elsewhere.

One need only observe the ongoing crises in Zimbabwe, the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and Darfur to expose the bankruptcy of methodologies and epistemologies that repeatedly fail to solve African problems arising from conflict and violence. Moving beyond the

laying of the intellectual, research and policy foundations for African paradigms of knowledge for peace, the development aspect should be implemented, taking a grassroots approach that works with African teacher education and development programmes through curriculum integration. Such an approach would make a start on closing the glaring gap between advances in African knowledge and their adoption by the majority of Africa's people (Zezeza 1997). It is within this framework of authentic knowledge-making processes for the solving of Africa's real problems that *Peace Research for Africa* is poised to make a significant, policy and practice altering contribution.

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