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# STORIES AND LITERATURE IN CULTURE AS SOURCES OF INDIGENOUS INSIGHTS IN PEACEBUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

*This paper asserts that stories as a cultural heritage contribute to the promotion of the universal values of a culture of peace: respect for life, liberty and justice, solidarity, tolerance, and gender equality. One of the ways in which literature in general contributes to the creation of a culture of peace is found in how stories become repositories of indigenous insights and wisdom about the root causes of conflict and about how to address them in peacebuilding that includes economic and social dimensions. The paper presents three stories and reads them as artefacts of African cultural heritage. In the context of a vibrant literary culture they not only yield indigenous insights into peacebuilding, but could also be the basis of a reading and discussion culture that would promote awareness-raising, intercultural dialogue and understanding. Since literary texts, including stories, are the means by which society imagines itself, the cultivation of a dynamic literature must be fostered as a valuable peacebuilding action tool.*

## Introduction

This paper addresses the issue of the role that literature as a cultural production can play in the transition from a culture of war to a culture of peace. The point of departure of the paper is the recognition at the core of the UNESCO's Declaration on a Culture of Peace that

Peace is not only the absence of conflict, but requires a positive, dynamic, participatory process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are solved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation (UN Resolution 52/13).

The declaration is itself underpinned by the statement in the constitution of UNESCO that 'since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed' (UNESCO 2000). The premise of this paper is that a culture of war is not innate to human beings, but is both imagined and learnt, so it can be imaginatively transformed into its opposite, a culture of peace, which can also be learnt.

As conceived in the UNESCO declaration, a culture of peace is 'a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations' (UN Resolutions A/Res 52/13). The paper argues that this conception makes literature one of the most important means through which that transformation can be pursued. Literature is the means by which society conceives itself (Sollers 1968:228; Culler 1975:189). In fact, it is difficult to imagine a more powerful way that people could re-imagine themselves other than as a community of characters in a story. Ada Aharoni

may well speak for many when she asserts that 'The stories people hear, read and watch, as children and as adults, become an integral part of the core of their identity and personalities' (Aharoni 2007).

## Methodology

Methodologically, the discussion considers three stories from the standpoint that literary texts are both tangible and intangible aspects of a society's heritage and can be read in ways that make them valuable awareness-raising and action tools for the promotion of a culture of peace. They can also be read in ways that bring out the relationship between peacebuilding and development. In this regard, the paper argues, stories not only contain a people's images of itself (for example, a society can project an image of itself as a nation of men of war) which are crucial in cross-cultural dialogue and understanding, but they can also contain a people's own indigenous insights into the root causes of war and how to address them. The paper provides an overview of why it is necessary to promote literature as part of a society's cultural activities in order to nurture a culture of peace. We do not, as most utilitarian readers of literature are wont to do, limit ourselves to a view of literature as mimetic representation. Images in literary texts are representational, but not exclusively in a mimetic way as direct mirrors on life. The danger to guard against, as Sollers cautions, is that of reducing literature to communication. As he explains

Everybody speaks and produces literature unawares. Everybody could describe him- or herself as a writer and, why not, become one ... But literature is not communication, it is an art (cited in Binde 1991:1).

Literature also signifies at more complex levels such as the symbolic, the aesthetic and the abstract. Grasped as a complex and diversified signifying cultural practice, literature is one of the most powerful means through which a culture of peace can be imagined and

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inculcated. Furthermore, we believe a vibrant literary culture is an important index of the level of peace and development enjoyed by a society. We do not, therefore, subscribe to the idea that a culture of peace should be pursued by means of prescriptions of what kind of literature should be promoted (Aharoni 2007:4). Rather, we suggest, it requires the

cultivation of an educated and discerning critical taste that will enable people to make artistic judgments and engage in critical discussions about what they see and read. To do otherwise would be to tread in the dangerous direction of censorship and intolerance that leads, for example, to *fatwas* and bannings.

The stories chosen to illustrate the argument in this paper are, like most choices in literary discourses, fortuitous in the sense that familiarity with literary texts is like one's familiarity with people. In both cases one can only choose which to know well from among those one has had the good fortune to meet in the first place. There are undoubtedly countless other texts out there that could be used to make the point even more readily than the ones we use. The fact is that any story can be discussed from the point of view that seeks to link literature with issues of development and peacebuilding. However, these particular stories have the merit of being fairly transparent and require little sophisticated theorisation to bring out the connection. Furthermore, as oral narratives they have the convenience of being ready examples of indigenous resources that can be examined to yield indigenous knowledge and insights into conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The cautionary remark

against historical denigration of oral traditions by the former Director-General of UNESCO, Fredric Mayor, is inspirational in this respect. He asserts:

We Westerners were wrong when we believed we could teach lessons to others. Wisdom would have had us listening to civilisations which, for centuries, had the time to think about, albeit without books, but with oral traditions, their sensitivity and memory (1996:4).

Literature in this paper means both the written as well as the oral and performance traditions. Oral traditions, unfortunately, are often thought of as belonging to the past and are revived occasionally merely for ideological purposes. However, they exist side by side with the written and may even be the more powerful tools by which dominant social institutions and discourses can be subverted or repositioned (Ashcroft *et al* 1989:1-13).

Attempts to harness cultural resources to the search for peace must necessarily entail supporting the growth of a robust and relatively autonomous culture that will permit the arts to flourish. Such assistance should principally consist of infrastructural supports such as printing presses, distribution outlets (bookshops, libraries and book clubs), affordable pricing and the nurturing of authors and a reading public. At its most basic, the logic behind such support would be that the more that books are produced, the more people

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are going to spend their time reading, and while they are reading they will not be fomenting conflict or fighting. By simply being there, literature becomes not only a force for peace but also an improvement in

the quality of human life. Mazisi Kunene, a tireless collector and translator of Zulu oral literature and traditions, attests to the importance of literature in Africa when he says, 'Since I began travelling extensively in the African continent, I have learnt how greatly valued are the traditions of story-telling' (1979:xiii). We should seek to find a place in modern societies for writing and reading in much the same way, and for the same reason, that indigenous traditional cultures in Africa nurtured story tellers and story telling. We are arguing by analogy here and saying that modern societies need books as much as oral societies needed oral narratives.

## **Literature as a Repository of Indigenous Insights into Peacebuilding and Development**

In addition to the infrastructural or institutional role that literature can play in peacebuilding and development, there is also the crucial issue of the subject matter of specific texts. Beginning with an incident from Chinua Achebe's famous novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), we move on to two variations of a widely known traditional tale. Our aim is to show how interpretation of the content can not only lead to discussion and dialogue, but also reveal texts as repositories of valuable insights about people's understanding of the role of conflict and how to address it.

### **Achebe's *Things Fall Apart***

It may seem gratuitous to consider *Things Fall Apart* in a discussion of oral narratives, but the novel is generally acclaimed as one of the most powerful evocations of a pre-colonial African society and as such it is quite legitimate to infer from it the workings of an oral literary culture.

At one point in the novel, a man from a neighbouring village kills a woman from Umuofia (the village of Okonkwo, the main character). A looming war, however, is averted when the people of Umuofia are presented with a young woman and a small boy, as they had demanded, in compensation for the loss of their dead relative. The young woman is given to the widowed husband to replace his lost wife. The small boy, Ikemefuna, is eventually killed in a sacrificial ritual to placate the ancestral spirits to whom, as ultimate custodians of all human life in Umuofia, an account of, and amends for, any loss of human life have to be made. Embedded in the incident are two principles which seem fundamental to conflict resolution in the African cultural traditions depicted in the story. The first is the necessity to grasp clearly and deal with the economic interests of the parties engaged in a given conflict. Indigenous African cultural traditions seem to recognise that the basis of all human

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conflict is, in the final analysis, the economic interests at stake, and that unless these are dealt with, peace will remain elusive. Giving the widower a new wife, notwithstanding the gender issues it may raise, is also, crucially, a restoration of the completeness of his family as an economic unit, a price her own people agreed to pay rather than risk a war at the

end of which both villages would be economically worse off than before. The second principle of indigenous African traditional approaches to conflict resolution seems to be that whatever economic interests are at stake in a conflict, they must be weighed against the gravity of loss of human life. The killing of Ikemefuna, cruel as it is, is a ritual, a socially endorsed act of cruelty that has to be performed in order to underscore the ethos of respect for human life. It is necessary for him to be killed in order to prevent further cheapening of human life in a mutually destructive war. It is also a reminder to all concerned that human life is sacred and should not be taken lightly, for when it is taken, even by accident, it leaves a wound that demands the sacrifice of another human life to heal. Indeed, the deep revulsion that the story may evoke – with its apparent intimation that in traditional Igbo culture, women and children were used as pawns in order to forestall war between patriarchal armies, and that children were ritually murdered to satisfy a society's hunger for retribution – is legitimate too for the same reason.

However, realism is only one mode of representation and it is not always the most relevant to unlocking the power of literary texts. It must be remembered that literature is basically an abstraction which is intended to speak to a variety of situations, and it would be foolhardy for any critic to try to tie it down exclusively to any one developmental or conflict situation. Furthermore, it is important to understand that literary texts are realised in genres and genres have peculiar conventions which the critic must be aware of in order to derive valid interpretations of the text. So while it is possible to see death in a story as a representation of death in real life, it is also possible to see it as a formulaic requirement of a genre that may convey other things than death. For example, the death of Okonkwo himself at the end of the novel may be read not only as the representation of the death of a man, but as a symbolic representation of the passing away of a way of life.

From a positive culture of peace perspective, the important point seems to be that literature must be a practice of reading that allows texts to communicate multiple significations. A story cannot have one authoritative interpretation that must be insisted upon *ex cathedra*, so to speak, in a way that precludes diversity and dialogue. On the contrary, it must be seen as a pretext for dialogue and a platform from which different perspectives are explored. Achebe underscores this point when he invokes an Igbo proverb which states

Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it. Nothing is absolute. 'I am the truth, the way and the life' would be called blasphemous or simply absurd, for is it not well known that a man may worship Ogwugwu to perfection and yet be killed by Udo? (1975: 94)

The interpretation of the part of *Things Fall Apart* above is based on the aesthetics of naive realism, that is to say the assumption that stories can be read only as reflecting reality in a simple and direct way. But *Things Fall Apart* is a work of imagination, not an anthropological report. Next to the interpretation alluded to above, another can be adduced which allows for a view of society's symbolic elaboration of ideas on the causes of conflict. The woman who is pawned in the peace deal and the child who is sacrificed are not necessarily representations of real people, but symbolic representations of concepts in a traditional peacebuilding ideology.

Although the story repays a mimetic reading that sees it as a representation of women as pawns in negotiations among men, it equally lends itself to an interpretation that suggests that the reader's revulsion at the idea that a dead spouse can be replaced by another woman by arrangement between regimes is in fact artistically instigated in order to deter war by suggesting that the suffering of the innocent is one of its dreadful consequences. It is a

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rhetoical strategy whereby horror is instigated in order to suggest that the root causes of conflict are economic, and that if not addressed, they can lead to the dire consequences evoked. Similarly, the death of the boy in a ritual sacrifice to the gods must be seen as a semiotic means through which the novel deploys our horror of ritual

murder to draw attention to the fact that life is sacred and the consequence of treating it cheaply is akin to a vicious cycle of killings and revenge killings. Ikemefuna's ritual murder in the novel is a metaphor of all the dreadful horrors of what happens when respect for human life is not upheld. War and death are depicted not only as the likely consequences in reality, but also as metaphors of the depth of the dire consequences of failure to address economic root causes of conflict fairly.

### *The youths and the serpent*

The second example is a well-known oral narrative that tells of how the youth of a certain village arrive at the astonishing conclusion that all the old people who are past their prime economically (or 'deadwood') are an intolerable economic burden. It is agreed that they should all be killed. Each person in the village accordingly proceeds to dispatch his or her own parents to a premature rendezvous with the ancestors. After several years of living well on the huge surplus created by the elimination of so many extra mouths to feed, one of the young men is attacked by a python. The serpent winds itself around the man in coils that squeeze him more tightly, threatening to asphyxiate him and crush his bones the more he runs around and flails his arms as he struggles to free himself. There seems to be no way of attacking the snake without endangering the young man's life. Eventually, a mysterious old man appears in the middle of the panic and confusion and instructs that copious amounts of a slimy sludge from crushed okra be poured over man and snake. When this is done, to everybody's amazement, the man is able to slide out of the grip of the snake's coils. The identity of the old man who saves the day is quickly established. He turns out to be the father whom, unbeknown to the others, one of the young men had not killed but had instead hidden in a nearby cave. The old man is rehabilitated into the village

and the village from then on retains a wholesome veneration of all human life, even of those who seem to be a burden on the community.

The story is, of course, a cautionary tale relating to the ever-present conflict over vital interests between generations. Younger generations in most societies are generally wont to feel that they deserve the lion's share of the resources because they do the work, and they begrudge the older generations their share, dismissing them as hangers-on who are not doing enough to earn their keep. In times of severe scarcity, such attitudes harden into a pitiless logic which makes the elimination of a surplus part of the population seem natural. However, the tale shows that human life should not be measured purely in economic terms because it is inherently valuable and should not be wantonly disposed of for the sake of short-term expediency. The moral of the story from the perspective of a culture of peace and peacebuilding is that the economic gain in few mouthfuls of food is not worth the loss of even a single human life and that any conflict that leads to loss of human life is an abomination.

### ***The girl and the boulders***

Lastly, there is an oral narrative from the Matopo region near the city of Bulawayo in Zimbabwe that gives a gender slant to the story discussed above. In the story a little girl gets trapped between two massive boulders while trying to retrieve a knitting needle that she had inadvertently let drop from her perch on one of the boulders in the rocky hills of the Matopo. All efforts to free the child fail and succeed only in cruelly bruising her. After five days during which the men of the village take turns to guard her against attacks from wild animals, it is suggested that the girl should be speared to death to put her out of her misery for, hungry and tired, she has become a pitiful, wretched sight. At that point, an old woman, who has been ostracised as a witch and driven to live on her own outside the village, ventures to suggest to the desperate villagers that they might try pouring large quantities of sludge from crushed okra on the girl. As in the story about the serpent attack, the villagers here too are amazed at how easily the boulders relinquish their grip and let the girl go. The old lady is jubilantly restored to favour in the village. Although whispers about her being a witch persist, they are few and muted. There are enough people who believe in her innocence to assure her of a comfortable end to her days on earth.

This, too, is a cautionary tale dealing with an issue that was a perennial source of conflict in most indigenous traditions. A woman who survived her husband often chose to remain at the village of her matrimonial home and was taken care of by her own children. Even then, the rest of the village may resent her good fortune, but the situation becomes intolerable when such a woman outlives her children. In such an eventuality, she becomes the charge of the extended family and a burden to relatives who may have many other mouths to feed. She could easily be stigmatised as a parasite and in some extreme cases ostracised as a witch and put to death. The ostracism of old people as witches is a way of denying them access to the produce of the community to which it is felt they have contributed little or nothing. This story is a reminder of the economic basis of most conflicts and of the importance of not treating human life lightly in resolving conflicts.

The stories, it should be pointed out, are also subversive of male domination and patriarchy as they counterpoise the violent solutions of a patriarchal order at its wit's end and the creative, pro-life solution of a hitherto marginalised or ostracised sector of the community. In both stories, there is a message that consultation with elders and rational and calm problem-solving can be a core strategy to deal with stress and violence (LeBaron 2003:5). For conflict to be resolved, one needs to be calm, experienced, and resourceful.

### ***Inferences from the stories: regulation of competition and respect for human life***

There are two insights that can be gleaned from these stories about how in general an indigenous African culture understands and addresses the root causes of war. The first one is the recognition that fundamental to any conflict is competition for access to vital economic resources and that this needs to be addressed boldly and honestly. The second insight, which is about peacebuilding and development, is that no resolution and regulation of the competition for vital economic resources will be fair if it is not predicated on the recognition of the sanctity of human life.

Admittedly, it is rather rich to talk about the value of human life on a continent whose history seems to attest only to the contrary, namely that human life is a cheap, disposable convenience in the pursuit of economic interests. In fairness, it would be wrong to blame the impression of widespread disregard for human life in Africa on traditional African attitudes to human life. Even a perfunctory overview of African history over the past five

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centuries shows that much of this wanton destruction of human life was the result of external forces. The slave trade, the imposition of colonial rule and the subsequent exploitation of the colonies led to losses of human life on a mind-boggling scale, as

Hochschild (2000) reminds us in *King Leopold's Ghost*. Similarly, the intransigence of settler regimes which resisted African demands for decolonisation in gruesome wars led to disproportionately high numbers of deaths among Africans compared to deaths among whites. Africa's former colonial rulers and outside imperial powers are still at work in fomenting conflicts which result in the wanton loss of human life in Africa. The post-colonial civil and international wars among Africans themselves in Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Sudan are examples that come to mind immediately (Arnold 2001:177-207).

In Africa's first flush of post-independence cultural idealism in the 1960s, Franz Fanon recognised that development requires a culture that, while pursuing economic interests, nevertheless upholds the sanctity of human life as an inseparable part of that pursuit. Peacebuilding is inextricably linked to development, because both entail the regulation of competition for vital resources and due regard for the sanctity of human life. In the conclusion of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon recognises as much when he extends to all Africans a call which we in turn might extend to all humanity, decrying erstwhile pursuits of economic interests by world superpowers:

Come, then, comrades; it would be as well to decide all at once to change our ways ... let us waste no time in sterile and nauseating imitation of Europe where they are never done talking of man, yet murder men everywhere they find them ... When I search for man in the techniques and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders (1965:251-252).

### **Literature as a Peacebuilding Action Tool**

As a corollary to the argument advanced in this paper, we argue that the promotion of literature is a most urgent challenge that must be addressed if literature is to play a role in peacebuilding and development. It is a decisive challenge in the conditions of Africa, not least of all because

of the prevalence of armed conflict, that makes the writing, production and distribution of books, as well as the reading and discussing of them, daunting tasks. And yet it is probably in Africa that the urgency to provide future generations with what Jerome Binde has called 'the four keys to the palace of dreams that is literature' is most compelling:

the most decisive challenge ... is to provide future generations with the four keys to the palace of dreams that is literature: education, without which there can be neither writer nor reader; books, whose development is a priority for UNESCO; language, without which literature would lose its sap; and the new technologies, which give access to new perspectives, but which are not available to all (Binde 1999:2).

It now remains for us to set out what we think ought to be done to enhance the role of literature in peacebuilding and development.

UNESCO's 'Transdisciplinary Project Towards a Culture of Peace' is a programme of action that lays down a clear framework under which the promotion of literature as a cultural practice can be implemented. The Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace is equally a supportive document regarding the promotion of literature as a cultural practice. However, in terms of responses to these supportive frameworks, little has been achieved in the promotion of literary cultural traditions in countries most in need of the values of a culture of peace, i.e. developing countries with fragile states too weak to prevent outbreaks of violent conflict. As Tschirgi notes, 'While there has been some progress both at the international and the country levels to operationalise peacebuilding, the results are ad hoc, tentative and uneven' (2003:1). Literature is simply not prioritised in the development agenda either by the states

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themselves or the developed countries with which bilateral development programmes are arranged. Peacebuilding consists of three mutually reinforcing dimensions: security, political development and social and economic development. Not only is social and economic development ranked lowest, but within it literature is invisible in comparison to issues

that are regarded as either immediate products, or threats, of violent conflict, such as ceasefires, peacekeeping, rehabilitation of refugees, shelter for displaced people and landmine clearance. Literature clearly suffers from the distorted international priorities in resource allocation that favours military interventions. Sadly, the interventions are seldom able to address the root causes that fuel conflict in the first place or to inculcate values that would be likely to lead to non-violent forms of conflict resolution.

The UNESCO 'Programme of Action for a Culture of Peace' adopted by the General Assembly in 1999 lists eight programme areas. The programme areas may have played an indirect part in the distortions of priorities in the allocation of resources under peacebuilding and development programmes (Tschirgi 2003:13). Literature and culture are not specifically listed and have to be insinuated to possibly sceptical bureaucrats under funding for either education or 'free flow of information and knowledge'. It is not surprising, therefore, that among the more than 20 international organisations that reported at the midpoint of the UN Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence Against the Children of the World in 2005 were some, such as the Soroptimists, that were narrowly specialist in little-known subjects, and none was concerned with literature and culture (Civil Society Report on the Culture of Peace 2005). This omission is also clearly manifest in the reports of peacebuilding progress from most post-conflict areas such as Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Mozambique.



Progress is judged in terms of people returning to their homes, resumption of economic activities and reversion of funds to peacetime socio-economic development activities.

Post-conflict values seem to be inculcated through official campaigns and broadcasts and not through nuanced ways that encourage critical thinking, judgment and discernment, as might have been the case if infrastructure for the production and distribution of literature had been recommended. Burundi, for example, reports a campaign called 'mine clearance of the spirits', which is a resourceful way of linking a cultural intervention with a military one. Under the campaign, resources were directed not only to the clearing of anti-personnel mines, of which project donors have been readily supportive, but also to something which was new to them – the effort to transform mindsets from the values of a culture of war to those of a culture of peace, by removing the attitudes ('mines of the spirits') that were the root cause of conflict. Sierra Leone reports a similar effort to achieve mental transformation through the use of oaths of commitment to peace by former combatants. Worthy as these initiatives are, we suggest that a culture of peace should go beyond campaigns and slogans that address immediate contexts and should include sustained investment in literary promotion and training in reading to inculcate and sustain self-education and independent commitment to the values of a culture of peace.

Projects like 'mine clearance of the spirits' and oaths of commitment to peace show that peacebuilding can be pursued in ways that go beyond the traditional interventions that address only the direct effects of violent conflict. They are timely reminders of the fact that the proliferation of video games, films and popular music that seem to glorify violence, for example, are part of the obstacles to creating a culture of peace. Part of the main reason for this is that, unlike stories such as the ones we discuss in this paper, these art forms tend to thrive in uncritical consumption. Stories on the other hand encourage reflection and exchange among diverse interpretations. Some campaigners for culture of peace believe the production and distribution of certain kinds of material should be prohibited in preference to forms that comply with prescriptions of a culture of peace (Aharoni 2008). However, such censorship would be tantamount to developing generations of individuals with underdeveloped sensibilities and no critical judgment skills. We argue that such material should not be allowed to induce the effects that its uncritical reception often does. It is precisely because they cultivate the sensibility and encourage reflection and discussion that we would want to see literature and the arts generally prioritised in the Culture of Peace programme of action.

In addition therefore to making literature a specific programme area, we suggest that it should also be infused as an integral part of each of the other programme areas. As a practical step in this direction, we would propose a book project or an international conference under the aegis of UNESCO in which its role is articulated within each of the eight programme areas, such as 'Literature, Culture and the Arts in Education for a Culture of Peace', 'Literature, Arts, Culture and Tolerance and 'Literature, Culture and the Arts

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and Democratic Participation'. Literature is a window of opportunity that development agencies and bilateral development cooperation agreements have not fully opened. Yet if we are to overhaul approaches based on force and imposition, and effect profound changes in cultural

attitudes (Mayor 1998:2), we must give due regard to literature, culture and the arts as the laboratory in which the enabling language, perceptions and discerning judgement are developed and honed.

## Conclusion

The value of literature lies as much in the moral lessons that can be gleaned from specific stories, poems and plays as in the traditions of reflection, discussion and diversity of perspectives that it engenders. If, as it has become axiomatic to say, literature provides imaginary solutions to real problems, then it follows that the function of literature is to engage our imagination in play so that it can imagine the impossible and challenge us to make it real. It helps us to play around with different possible solutions, including violent ones, without actually going to war and killing people. Literature is like the great man's compound which Chinua Achebe describes:

In all great compounds there must be people of all minds – some good, some bad, some fearless and some cowardly; those who bring in wealth and those who scatter it, those who give good advice and those who only speak the words of palm wine. That is why we say that whatever tune you play in the compound of a great man, there is always someone to dance to it (1986: 99).

We acknowledge that cultural processes have been determining social developments for a long time, but as Huntington (1993) suggests, this is the case today more than ever before. Culture must not be taken for granted as though it were a natural phenomenon, but rather grasped as a dynamic process, a learned collective assertion of an imagined identity through

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which a people strategically positions itself and chooses whether to articulate its claim to a vital resource, such as land for a homeland, and to pursue socio-economic development by violent or peaceful means. It is for this reason that we argue that literature and culture should be included as a distinct programme area in the UNESCO Culture of Peace Programme. Literary texts, like people, migrate and need to migrate in order to work. Texts traverse the world and construct trans-

national reading communities and identities of readers. In this sense literature subverts the notion of 'one country, one language, one nation' by which many countries cast the identities of their citizens in granite, so to speak. Literature points towards identities that are fluid, negotiable and forged across many national boundaries. It enacts the ethos of *botho*, which recognises that there exists a common humanity that transcends geographical spaces and socially constructed affiliations such as of race, tribe or nation. Any international conference about an author like Chinua Achebe or Shakespeare is an example of the kind of global imagined community literary texts create.

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