



The Conflict Prevention Newsletter and Conflict Trends, the magazine of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, have agreed upon a regular exchange of articles.

ACCORD will thus provide a special focus on Africa to this Newsletter.

For this occasion, Alison Lazarus, reflects on meeting points of African and feminist epistemology and considers what it has to offer for training in conflict resolution and peace education. Being on the margin has had its advantages, she argues. It is here, outside of the maelstrom/malestream of Western epistemology, that women and indigenous people have sought to nurture alternative approaches to what constitutes knowledge and how this knowledge may be known. The indigenous and feminist approach to epistemology seeks to discuss, theorise and suggest ways of acquiring knowledge that enables living in a more intellectually, spiritually alert and sensitive way by adding other processes of validating knowledge to those of reason and logic.

African and Feminist Approaches to Peace Education

Meeting on the Margins

By ALISON LAZARUS*

Feminist and African perspectives on ways of knowing is a serious attempt to gain personal insight, analyse and understand the world and encourage innovative thinking about ways to solve the world's challenges. These twin perspectives of African and feminist epistemology offer a serious and sustained challenge to reality as defined by *realpolitik* ideology.

Realpolitik proffers a world of states, people and systems in constant competition making for a world that is basically anarchic. It is only through the threat of, or use of, force and the amassing of arms that political aims can be achieved. This amassing of arms is made in an attempt to balance power¹.

Realpolitik is currently being de-centred and the epistemological centre is being remoulded in the 21st Century by alternative ideologies of the way the world works. The defining feature of the alternative knowledge of the world is that the world is essentially interconnected and interdependent rather than competitive and anarchic. This alternative understanding of the world, offers additional and relevant methodologies.

A feminist approach

Feminists and peace activists challenge *realpolitik* in their method of *Intentionally Imaging Peace*. Betty Reardon describes how it works: 'When women's vision for global peace takes the form of intentional imaging, actual steps, events and policies are articulated that could bring the vision into being. Such histories of the future are sometimes called transition scenarios.'²

This is a systematic and strategic planning for change that starts in the freeing of the mind through consciousness-raising. Consciousness-raising leads to identifying how violence is utilised, by whom, to what effect and with what consequences. More importantly consciousness-raising leads to the rejection of violence. For feminists, *intentionally imaging peace* usually starts with the rejection of the brutal impact of violence on women and moves into radical social action against armament and war. Realism and positivism will go only so far as to identify, describe and analyse how violence works but not make a value judgement on it.

Positivism merely describes and predicts. Feminist epistemology is

honestly and distinctly value-laden. It is reflexive, clearly stating where it positions itself and asks that that position be analysed as part of the issue. It makes no false claims to objectivity operating without a subject. Rather it takes subjectivity as its starting point. Thus feminist approaches to research and development of the body of knowledge brings to epistemology a strong focus on subjectivity, recognising the researcher as subject and integral to the subject of study. In doing so it asks questions about who is doing the research, who is absent in the study and who is present and what consequences this has for validity of interpretation. The rejection of war is possible through the intentional imaging of the other not as enemy but as another human being, a mother, a son. *Intentionally Imaging* is a powerful liberating tool that enables one to understand that while war is a choice of action, peace is a better choice.

Feminists like Carol Gilligan (1984) argue that given the general experience of women as created by patriarchy and exclusion, women have come to learn in a specific way that can be called a

female mode of reasoning, a women's way, a female way. This way is characterised by an ethics of caring, a web of networks rather than hierarchical understandings of what is right and wrong based on abstract principles.³

Betty Reardon characterises the feminine mode of knowing as follows: *'The feminine mode of thinking, which emphasises such linkages as those among disarmament and peace, demonstrates a preference for problem solving comprised of open communication, free access to information, and honest discussion of differences and dialogue among all concerned. Women, whose experience of conflict has been long and varied, particularly as peacemakers in the family, see the best ways to resolve conflict as those that help to meet at least some of the concerns of all conflicting parties, what has come to be called "win-win solutions". This familial or kinship model of conflict resolution, in which maintaining constructive human relationships is a primary concern, seeks fairness and reconciliation rather than victory or retribution.'*⁴

Feminist epistemology validates that knowledge which is formed in dialogue with and inter-relationships between people. Eco-feminists also highlight the dialogue that must take place with nature. Learning from and through nature is more than the control and subjugation of nature through the manipulation of its laws. They suggest that it will take a faculty such as intuition additional to reason as well as an ethics of deep caring born of interdependence, if we are to dialogue with and achieve knowledge of nature. This centering of the inter-relationships between people and between people and nature is also the emphasis of African knowledge systems.

African approaches

Ptika Ntuli, characterising African approaches to epistemology explains that an understanding of inter-connectedness and simultaneous states of being characterises African philosophy of being in the world and the relationship between people: *'We need to end the dualism set up by Western thought. The process of actually building this? I am using the theory of quantum physics and quantum mechanics in order to explain this. You say for instance, when you talk about the wave-particle dualism. The wave-particle duality simply tells us that if you study the particles velocity, you loose its place and time. When you study it*

*in terms of its place, you loose its velocity. One is actually interdependent on each other. The particle alone cannot constitute the flow. A flow without the particles cannot be a wave in itself. When you say a person is a person because of other people you are talking about seeing the interconnectedness not the wave-particle duality.'*⁵

Interdependence is captured in the concept of Ubuntu. African epistemology bases its challenge to *realpolitik* on the philosophy of *ubuntu*. This philosophy recognises that individual identity is possible only in community with others and nature. 'I am because you are'. Without relationship with the other and without reference to the other, the individual can not be. One can not have a sense of 'me' without a sense of 'we'. Ntuli explains: *'In Africa and India a human being "exists because I belong and I belong therefore I exists". It is a "be-ing with somebody", so being with somebody else kind of structures us. In a more practical way, our cultures insist that when the child is born for instance, the umbilical cord is buried into the ground and a tree is planted. In other words, making a link between human being and plant life.'*

This philosophy creates a mindfulness of the other that is so necessary, relevant and significant to any conflict resolution process and joint generation of long term solutions. It challenges us to find resolution that meets the needs of the other and nature.

Towards synergy

Feminists and those writing and uncovering African knowledge systems within the African Renaissance Movement meet in the Ecofeminist Movement. In stressing the interconnection between humans and nature feminists teach of and act to defend the planet against ecological and environmental degradation. Feminists challenge the ideology of militarisation. They believe non-violent action for change is possible. We have seen such non-violent action by women in the peace movements across the world and in the eco-feminist actions of 'Third World women' in fighting nuclear waste dumping, ill advised dam building and deforestation by logging companies.

The interconnection between human and nature in African cultural practice is described by Ntuli: 'Usually people don't call me Ntuli they call me "Sompisi" which means father of the hyena. Hyena is our family totem. It is ugly, it

has the strongest jaws, it is nasty but for eco-viability, it needs to exist therefore my family is entrusted with a task of making sure that it exists. These interrelationships then underpin our subconscious mind and they underpin the culture in which we live in. It is therefore not difficult to see that the maintenance of peace and conflict resolution has got a springboard in the African philosophy that stresses harmonious relationships.⁶

Some examples of methodology

Learning sessions designed and devised from a feminist and African perspective would include interactive small group work, role plays, simulations, reflection time, interfaith meditations, team building, art based methodologies such as art workshops, body sculpture, song, storytelling and journal writing. It will also draw on cultural practices such as drum circles, ritual, and encouraging accessing knowledge through music, dance and trance/altered states and healing processes. These methodologies enable the values identified by Belenky such as sharing, respect, affirmation, tolerance and connection to become not only the objectives of the learning sessions but the process by which learning takes place.

Belenky et al characterise the methodology most in tune and effective with women thus: *'Educators can help women develop their minds and authentic voices if they emphasise connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, collaboration over competition and discussion over debate and if they accord respect to and time for the knowledge that emerges from first hand experience.'*⁷

In the learning space, this may take the form of women engaging in rituals using stones which they bring to the circle, place in a basket, encircle in a dance, then retrieve when they tell a story of their life's experience. These stones become symbols of shared knowledge for building on and into a collective understanding. Stories are not debated nor interpretations argued. Participants listen without framing a counter response in their minds while stories are told. Rather, all stories are listened to for patterns and threads. There is no attempt to arrive at a correct answer, rather all stories are considered to carry a part of the solution or truth.

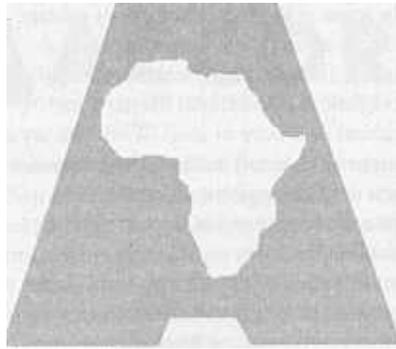
Another method to understand the nature of conflict, its impact on people and ways to heal from conflict may take

the form of writing down the conflict issues and its personal effects on a sheet of paper. This is then torn into pieces and used as papier mache to build a vessel. This vessel carrying ones pain is exchanged. These vessels remind one of another's pain and makes one mindful of ones actions towards others. What this does is create the threshold for generating options that take the other into account. One can articulate through words the need for win-win solutions but the physical experience of it goes a longer way towards attitude change. So the bowl of pain becomes the vessel that carries the positive demonstration of the ability to turn conflict into something creative. It is more difficult for retribution and revenge to become entrenched, thus allowing healing to take place and balance to be created.

Accessing and honouring first hand experience and healing in conflict situations is an important feature of African ways of knowing. Ntuli explains the way in which African cultural practice enables an individual experiencing conflict to experience knowledge formation: *'If someone is disturbed and is not actually harmonised. What do you do? You go to the "sangoma" and the sangoma plays drums. The act of playing these drums is to play a monotonous tune that becomes pure sound. It is through this level of a pure sound that the subconscious is now being engaged. And there will be shouting like mantras. This song goes on and on and the person starts dancing and actually moving. And when the person starts dancing and moving he starts shouting words. These words that are disjointed form the string of your wish. The sangoma collects all of these words and forms sentences with a positive sense and feeds them back while your mind can still receive them. By the time you stop, your subconscious mind has been re-armed.'*⁸

These examples are not the stuff of traditional Western cognitive approaches to training in conflict resolution but they are relevant to peace education in an African context and the context of women's learning. If peace education programmes have the objective of building a peace culture, then it must enculturate. It must bring into the learning space and methodologies the culture of ordinary women and ordinary Africans.

Belenky et al explain: *'In the masculine myth, confirmation comes not at the beginning of education but at the end...having proved beyond reasonable*



'Stories are not debated nor interpretations argued. Participants listen without framing a counter response in their minds.'

doubt that he has learned to think in complex, contextual ways, the young man is admitted into the fraternity of powerful knowers. Certified a thinker he becomes one of them. This scenario may capture the 'natural' course of men's development in traditional, hierarchical institutions, but it does not work for women. For women confirmation and community are prerequisites rather than consequences of development.'

Challenges

Given the traditional approach to learning, an African feminist peace educator is faced with the challenge of taking feminist methodology into traditional male domains of peace keeping and international negotiation. The challenge is to get men to learn in new ways.

The terms learning of the 'heart and spirit' is the colloquial collective phrase for learning through intuition, visioning and faculties of understanding which are now under the scrutiny of western scientists working in the fields of quantum physics, meditation and alternative healing.

These alternative methodologies are not a mish mash of yearnings of remnants of a Sixties peace movement. Nor is it the 'new age romanticism' of the barefooted sisterhood. It is not an anti-science counter-culture that romanticises the past or the future. It is more than the dabbling of disaffected

Western youth in Eastern and indigenous philosophies.

Realpolitik cynically upholds the view that force or the threat of force is the way to attain political ends. The alternative way challenges this ideology and upholds the view of a world capable of co-operation and at practice in alternative ways of thinking about the world.

A win-lose option is no resolution. Victory of one over the other is not resolution, it is in essence subjugation until balance is achieved. In African philosophical thought it indicates the responsibility of the 'victor' to find resolution not exact the greatest spoils. It means calling up the resolve to reconcile and maintain balance and harmony with people and nature.

Both feminist and African epistemology understand the fundamental interaction in the world to be one of interdependence, both emphasise co-operative relationship building as the cornerstone of peace making and both centre people as primary to peace making and states as secondary actors. All these of course run counter to *realpolitik* analysis.

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Notes

- 1 See writings of Hans Morgenthau, Hedley Bull and others.
- 2 Betty Reardon: *Women's Vision for Global Peace*. In: Lorentzen and Turpin (ed.)1996: *A Gendered New World Order*. (212-229)
- 3 Gilligan C. (1984): *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge
- 4 Betty Reardon: *Women's Vision for Global Peace*. In: Lorentzen and Turpin (ed.)1996: *A Gendered New World Order*.
- 5 Ptika Ntuli. is a professor of fine arts at the University of Durban Westville, Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa and director of Sankofa Centre for African Renaissance, poet and writer and has been researching African approaches to conflict resolution. Interview conducted by Alison Lazarus, February 1999.
- 6 Ptika Ntuli in an interview conducted by Alison Lazarus, February 1999
- 7 Belenky, M. B. Clinchy, N. Goldberger and J. Tarule: *Implications for Human Development*. In: *Breakthrough*, Summer,7(4):24-24,1986
- 8 Ptika Ntuli Interview conducted by Alison Lazarus, February 1999.