Analysis in the Use of Socratic Method in Teaching History and Government for Peace building in Kenya

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Abstract

After 2007 post-election violence in Kenya, concerted efforts have been made to build peace in Kenyan multi-ethnic society where the general public is targeted yet learners in secondary schools have been left out. This paper uses philosophical method of analysis and shows how Socratic Method (SM) of question and answer technique is applicable in teaching History and Government in Kenyan secondary schools to stem ethnic animosity and build peace in the country. Ethnic animosity is rooted in politics, economics and social domains tinged with ethnic chauvinism and following the utterances of the political elites who are informally regarded as "tribal kings". Through the use of SM, learners, especially those in the first two years of secondary education where topics such national integration, citizenship, democracy and human rights are taught, are posited to reason and realise the fallacies of ethnic chauvinism and illogical obedience to the dictates of politicians. Organisations that target the general public in peace building efforts can liaise with schools in nurturing peace builders. The paper proposes that peace building as an integral part of secondary education curriculum in Kenya should be approached from the comprehensive vantage point of rigorous methodology that incorporates actors within and without school system. Research in methodology to establish peace still needed.

Key Words: Analysis, Ethnic Chauvinism, Tribal King, Socratic Method

Introduction

This paper has five parts numbered 1-5. Part 1 gives the background information that contains literature on conflicts that debase peace. It shows the genesis of ethnic conflict in Kenya. The real issue at stake is given in part 2 as the problem of the philosophical study. The problem is posited to lie in methods applied in teaching peace. The methodology for peace building is stipulated and described in part 3. The methodology is analysis, which is done within the Socratic Method (SM). In part 4, the subject of analysis, in question and answer form, to address the causes of ethnic conflict in Kenya is presented. Discussion of issues raised through analysis is accomplished in part 4 and lastly a conclusion is made.

1. Background Information

The world often experiences conflicts. Different communities also face conflicts. The two world Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945 were as a result of conflicts that do not allow human beings to live peacefully with one another. The formation of UN has enabled the world to experience peace and the UN is involved in peace building initiatives in various parts of the world despite the fact that conflicts are difficult to eliminate completely (Sandole, 2011).

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Peace building is a concept that has been with mankind since time immemorial but the context in which it is currently used is traceable to the former US Secretary of State (1947-49) George Catlett Marshall (1880-1959) who initiated a plan, technically known as Marshall Plan, to reconstruct Europe after World War II (Peace building initiative, nd). In 1975, the term "peace building" was coined by a Norwegian sociologist, John Galtung. Later, an American sociologist by name John Paul Lederach further expounded on the concept to embrace peace that individuals and communities is to build among themselves for better and sustainable living.

Kenya started experiencing ethnic instigated conflicts in 1992 with the introduction of multiparty politics (Ombati, 2014). In 2007 general election, a serious violence erupted in Kenya after the announcement of presidential results. As a result of the violence, over 1000 people were killed and about 300000 were displaced (Lunn, 2012). Peace was restored in Kenya through the efforts of the international community led by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan who saved the situation through a power sharing deal.

Lessons from 2007 election violence have prompted efforts in which the Government of Kenya and other bodies work for sustainable peace in the country (Nebe, 2012). For example, National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) was established under the National Dialogue and Integration Act (Act No. 12 of 2008) after 2007/2008 post-election violence and it is concerned with facilitation and promotion of equality of opportunity, good relations, harmony and peaceful coexistence between persons of different ethnic and racial communities of Kenya, and to advise the government on issues of peace building (NCIC & UNDP, 2013). The Swiss Embassy in Kenya supports peace building efforts through programmes dealing with human rights, democracy and access to justice (Lunn, 2012).

When Kenyan eight national goals of education are analysed, the idea of peace building is not left out. Four of the goals directly focus on peace. Goal 1 states that education to foster nationalism, patriotism and to promote national unity; goal 5 states that education to promote social equality and responsibility; goal 6 states that education to promote respect for and development of Kenyan rich and varied culture and goal 7 states that education to promote international consciousness and to foster positive attitude towards other nations. This shows that peace building is incorporated in Kenyan education system and the issue may lie with the methodology.

The context of peace building as applied in this paper is in line with the definition given to it in 2007 by the UN Secretary General as a system that "involves a range of measures targeted to reduce risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable development" (Peace building initiative, nd). It is supposed to address economic, social and political root causes of violence and fosters reconciliation by changing beliefs and attitudes so as to enable people live peacefully.

There are doubts as to the value of peace building efforts in Kenya because the efforts are post-conflict and organizations spearheading them are urban and Nairobi-centric (Klopp, Githinji and Karuoya, 2010).There might be a false notion that anything done in Nairobi is done in the whole of Kenya. As noted by Ombati (2014) and reported by Mutambo (2015), citizens are incited to ethnic violence by the political elites. These politicians underwent Kenyan education system or are assumed to be aware of what History and Government entails and they should be promoters of peace. Peace building may require a multifaceted approach where no one is left out and learners in institutions of learning are methodologically initiated as peace builders so that after schooling they maintain the momentum of peace building attitude.

2. The Problem

The peace building efforts are directed towards the civil society and the general public but learners who receive education in secondary schools and who could be moulded as peace builders are not the focus. It is assumed that learners may get knowledge of peace building through the subjects such as History and Government where topics dealing with issues related to peace such national integration are stipulated but it is not evident which methodology to use to nurture peace builders. Even the politicians and the elites who spearhead conflicts in Kenya went through the education system but probably the methodology through which they learnt peace building when they were taught History and Government did not make any lasting positive impact. Learners in secondary schools lack a structured teaching method geared towards peace building. There is no connection between schools and organisations spearheading peace building in Kenya. Socratic Method of teaching is considered as an all-embracing methodology that can address the situation.

3. The suggested methodology and literature on its importance

The suggested methodology for the study is analysis. Analysis means to separate into constituent components and critically and rationally determine logical meanings (Blackburn, 1996). As a philosophic method, it aims at making reality obvious (Audi, 1999). It strives to distinguish appearance from reality. The analysis is done within the context of Socratic Method (SM).

Philosophers do agree that SM, as expounded by Socrates (469-399 BCE) is invaluable to knowledge acquisition, although it is subjected to diverse interpretations (Al-Darwish, 2012; Concordia Online Education, 2012; Hawkins-Leon, 1999 and Haroutunian-Gordon, 1990). Batista (2014) explains that Socrates is considered as a great educator to mankind, and that many philosophers and educators across the world see him as an unquestionable icon. His thinking converges with virtue as the ultimate end, hence the constitution of philosophy as the utmost education for virtue (Stalley & Long, 2015). Socrates' teaching, as identified by Hardwig (2007), entails teaching the right intellectual habits, modifying the moral principles of speakers and learners, pursuing the truth about the basic questions, as well as making the speakers to be able to express their doubts. The Socratic method of teaching evaluates the critical thinking of learners, where the teacher begins from the premise of "nothing is known" and seeks to stimulate learners' mind and fill the space with new ideas that make sense in them (Audi, 1999 and McIntyre, 2011, Rud Jr, 2012).

The new ideas that an individual learner gets are not the new ideas per se but recalling knowledge which had been patterned in the mind before birth (Abrams, 2005 and Lam, 2010) and the learned experiences are connected to daily learner's activities (Elzinga, 2012 and Peterson, 2009). Thus, it can be a useful method to use in Africa because there are several instances, as noted by K'Odhiambo, Khanini and Njogu (2015), where promoting the creativity of learners, which is the essential aim of education, is not encouraged. Socratic Method empowers learners, including adults, to learn on their own and assess themselves relegating the role of the teacher to the periphery (Chambliss, 1996, Schwartz, 2012, Paraskevas & Wickens, 2003). It enables learners to develop thinking skills that allow them to handle complex topics (Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2016 and Kihlstrom, 2011).

As pointed out by Garrett (1998) and supported by Orin (1999), Socratic Method is one of the tools that is used to help learners become competent community leaders, because they are offered a foundation to become good public speakers. It instils in the learner the ability to reason and ask questions reflexively and internalise the answers even if they do not initially have that ability (Banning, nd; Paley, 1986; Rud Jr, 1997; Wang, nd and Wirth & Perkins, 2008). Socratic Method is holistic and it is good for adult learners (Ahbel-Rappe & Kamtekar, 2009 and Evans & Wotkosky, 2007; Paraskevas & Wickes, 2003).

The SM in this paper delves into the ethnic conflict in Kenya by breaking it down into parts and using question and answer to analyse the parts with a view to making the learner's peace builders. The questions used are open and they motivate all the learners to participate (1999). History and Government is taught to all learners in their first two years in all Kenyan secondary schools and it is felt that the greatest number of learners is to benefit.

4. The Subject of Analysis

What to analyse in teaching History and Government in Kenyan secondary schools comprises the relevant contents of the syllabus that directly address peace building initiatives. The contents are to be interpreted according to prevailing circumstances whereby the learners are given leeway to think and reason, although the interpretation cannot be all that exhaustive. It is a fact that the people who incite the citizens to violence are the elite politicians who actually learnt History and Government and they are expected to be peace builders yet they act in the contrary.

Political, economic and social wellbeing of Kenyans is tinged with ethnic chauvinism which is a source of ethnic conflict. Kenya comprises about 42 tribes or ethnic groups. There are also other races from other parts of the world. Each ethnic group or race is distinct with their own political leaning, economic base and distinct culture. How can teachers use SM to teach citizenship and national integration so that people think as Kenyans and not as members of different ethnic groups or races when politics is controlled by tribal kings? The probable starting point is to ask learners to identify the physical attributes of a human being. The physical attributes can be given as head, hands, legs, nose etc. The next question could be, "Can you know a person's tribe or race or name by observing human skeleton?"

In most cases the answer is likely to be "No" but even if "Yes", learners should provide further elaboration. The logic that follows is that, "If, by observing human skeleton, it is not naturally possible to know one's name or ethnic group, then human beings are the same".

If human beings are the same, what do you think may make someone to regard a certain ethnic group as politically correct in the sense that they are to dominate the country's political scene? The answer to this question may be very many and can be discussed at length. The possible answers could be, "My ethnic group should lead in politics because it has produced prominent politicians in Kenya. My ethnic group is superior because it has produced the best leaders in Kenya."

Can the constituents of each ethnic group be reduced to one entity? The answer could be, "They may be superior in different ways but they are all Kenyans." Kenya becomes one entity, or the denominator for all the ethnic groups. Whatever each individual does, the aim is to build one entity that is Kenya.

For Kenyan economic status, some questions for analysis can be advanced. Which areas are more economically developed in Kenya? Why are some areas more developed than others? Some answers could be, "More developed areas had first contact with colonialists. Some areas are more developed because of agriculture which is supported by adequate rainfall and fertile soil. Some areas were or are home to prominent people in the country's leadership structure." The answers can lead to more questions, such as, how can all areas of Kenya be equitably developed? What are the checks and balances put in place for addressing inequality? The social aspect of Kenya can be analysed using questions that discern the cultural practices of ethnic groups. Is there any value for every ethnic group in Kenya having its own distinct culture? What are the merits and demerits of each ethnic group having different cultural heritages? Can Kenya be more united if ethnic languages are abandoned for one common language, let say Kiswahili?

People may assert the following on issues pertaining to culture:"My ethnic group is superior because our cultural practices such as circumcision are not retrogressive. My ethnic group is superior because its language is spoken by many Kenyans." More probing questions on culture could be analysed. For example, "Is there any superior culture in the world? If there is a superior culture, what are its attributes? What factors determine cultural heritage?" The analysis on ethnic superiority, touching on culture, can be subjected to further questions such as, "Can you promote the name of your ethnic group at the expense of Kenya? What are the merits and demerits of promoting ethnicity? Should ethnic groups be commended for any worthwhile achievement or Kenyans?" Whereas the analysis may reveal that being recognised by your own ethnic group is impressive, national recognition might be more fulfilling.

Another issue that may affect peace building efforts in Kenya is obeying the dictates of politicians who are informally called "tribal kings". Different ethnic groups struggle to acquire power and it is not uncommon to play ethnic politics in Kenya when political leaders from various ethnic enclaves convince their people that once they have the political power everything will automatically fall unto them. Whatever a political leader says is likely to sway members of their ethnic group, especially if the person has followers. How can teachers use SM to teach learners not be swayed by words of politicians?

The starting point may be to ask learners to suggest reasons as to why they need to follow someone's ideas. They can be asked, "Can you go against your ethnic community when they unreasonably obey their tribal king? What are the attributes of unreasonable leader? What do you look for when obeying someone? If your brother is accused of a crime, do you support him or you support the course of the law?" Learners are expected to attempt the questions in many ways which may not be exhaustive but the goal is to offer suggestions with the most appropriate and reasonable answers. The questions can stimulate thought in teaching the topics that deal with democracy and human rights. The questions can be broken down into other questions for further logical discussion.

5. Discussion

Ethnic chauvinism may be important in the same way nationalism is. It cannot be condemned wholesome. Its tenets are captured in Kenyan goal of education No. 2: "Education to promote respect for and development of Kenyan rich and varied cultures." If one of the educational goals is for respect for culture then a number of things, good and bad, can be done under the guise of preservation of cultural heritage. Learners can be made to strike a balance between loyalty to a tribe and that to a nation.

The notion that some cultural practice like circumcision is superior is to be discussed from a wider perspective than narrowing it to a national level. The world comprises different races that do not practice circumcision and it would be quite absurd for an individual to assert superiority because of a cultural practice. It is true that Kenya is a conglomerate of about 42 ethnic groups and each group adheres to different cultural practices but this does not warrant fighting for cultural supremacy. Any derogatory name used by a member of any ethnic group to refer to another needs to be abandoned with the changing world. Words are to change to match the socio-cultural changes. Even in a family, peoples' names change due prevailing circumstances and nothing is static. Changes are effected to enhance cohesion. Learning how to change and to embrace change are important teaching ingredients when using the SM. This requires quality, but not quantity, time to be spent with learners and all who spearhead peace building. When the goal of teaching is for academic purposes, with exam pressure in mind, the application of SM is minimally used and the knowledge may have no impact on the learners.

For what is taught to have impact, more time is required to teach bits of information using SM. Weekends and school holidays can be spared specifically for this whereby non-governmental organisations spearheading peace are invited to interact with school learners through question and answer method to so as to inculcate peace building attitude in the learners. Political elites who incite citizens to violence probably did not internalise peace building attitude during their school days, which might be as a result of the methodology that was used then.

It is true that some prominent people have come from some tribes in Kenya and they deserve national commendation. This is accomplished through presidential awards, naming of institutions and roads in their honours. In case of omissions, then a formal procedure for redress should be sought. The learners are to be made to be aware of how to address such issues. This can be the responsibility of schools and organisations spearheading peace building. When such issues are not addressed to the satisfaction of the citizens they get discontented and may disrupt peace.

For equal economic rights, areas which are less developed in Kenya are assisted through government funds to catch up with the rest and if that is not done then a normal procedure should be followed to address the situation. It is barbaric for any ethnic group to attempt to address any issue through unlawful means. Law has to be obeyed and if the law is bad the procedures to amend it are to be followed. Even Socrates maintains: Law whether bad must be obeyed. Politicians and all leaders have an obligation to show all citizens the right way.

Conclusion

What the paper provides, in question and answer form, is not exhaustive but a reflection that points to a desired direction of peace building initiatives in Kenya. Peace building is an activity that cuts across all people in Kenya, those within and without school. The methodology for peace building should be the driving force.

Most philosophers acknowledge that Socratic Method is invaluable to knowledge acquisition. Through Socrates, philosophy is considered as an ultimate education for virtue. When learners in secondary schools are initiated into peace building through the use of SM during the teaching of History and Government they can be made to internalise the concept of peace building and become ambassadors of peace after graduating from schools. SM enables them to learn the right intellectual habits and modify their moral principles. The syllabus for teaching may contain all the relevant topics for peace building but the impact of producing graduates who are effective peace builders may be very minimal because of lack of methodologically structured approach. Considering the ethnic conflicts that exist in Kenya, Socratic Method can be used to mould peacebuilders by participating in open questions concerning the issue. Teachers can teach students about good citizenship and national integration by incorporating genuine question and answer methodology, which is devoid of hypocrisy. They can analyze ethnic superiority while touching on culture to show that Kenya's culture is rich because it can assist learners to know that different culture is a form of heritage and not a source of conflicts. Efforts towards peace building by both the Government and Non-governmental organisations in Kenya need to focus on the methodology like SM. Law can be applied to deal with inciters to ethnic violence but what has to be done prior is education.

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