

When Democracy is not Enough: Educating for a Culture of Peace and Human Development

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“Peace is never a perfect achievement, because it follows war, suffering, and hatred. It follows the worst that man can do.”

“To restore humanity from such hell requires the patience of ages, the will to see light when all is dark and hope when all is bleak. It is truly the work of those who shall run and not be weary ...of those who shall walk and not faint.” *Kofi Annan*

Human Rights as a work-in-progress

“Rights” is an especially valuable concept because it is more than a concept that almost everybody finds meaningful. It is a concept that almost everybody respects as having moral authority. It makes an inward appeal to conscience, in the respect that most people inwardly guide their own conduct to avoid infringing on other people’s rights.

It has moral authority in the sense that one is considered justified while acting within one's rights, and also in the sense that one is considered to be justified in becoming indignant when one's rights are violated. The concept of “rights” thus complies with the **“internal aspect”** and **“socially obligatory”** (Hart 1961, Richards 2004).

But the concept of rights still belongs within what can be called the “ideal culture” -- a set of meanings recognized as correct, but which may have little or no effect on actual conduct.

So the creation of a cultural context where it is acknowledged that the rights of others are supposed to be respected **provides a framework for meaningful dialogue.**

Conversely, where there is **no shared moral culture**, the listening aspect so crucial to the realization of the “other” may fall flat. Without listening, dialogue and mutuality and in the case of existing conflicts, peacemaking cannot even begin, because where one side does not understand the other's intentions, **it cannot possibly agree with, appreciate, or respect them.**

But without respect for rights, or some other precepts drawn from moral culture, the outcome after listening may be like the outcome of the Melian Dialogue recounted by Thucydides in his “History of the Peloponnesian War”.

In that dialogue, the Athenians said, in effect, to the Melians, “We have listened to you, and we understand you perfectly well, but we are going to kill you anyway, because it is to our interest to do so”.

In the attempt to find tools to help us manage diversity therefore, it is absolutely essential that we go beyond reciting the text of the covenant itself, in this case, the Constitution, or the instruments of the UDHR, or for that matter, those of the SAHRC.

We need to examine and invest more purposively, on the base culture as make-or-break sites of human activity upon which these Instruments are to be grounded and realized in a sustainable manner.

In peace studies and in peace action, we work both pre-emptively and pro-actively, because we recognize that the importance of investing in understanding the **many different motives that lead people to break the peace** (Galtung 1996)

Secondly, we recognize that **tendencies toward violence are deeply rooted in the human body**, and that the institutions that culture has created **have not as a general rule brought out the best in human nature**.

Thirdly, that contrary to what we wish to believe, **war, overt violence, and structural violence have been more readily institutionalized than peace, cultures of co-existence, of sharing, and of reciprocity**.

Fourthly, we recognize that peace, when it happens, happens because, in spite of drives toward war and, generally, toward violence, there are many **peaceful institutions and practices that exist in different cultures of different societies**. These practices build on tendencies toward peace which are, like those toward violence, also deeply rooted in the human body.

These positive institutions, **the labours of love**, strive to make sure that all of the many things that might go wrong **don't happen**. Thus when peace succeeds, when humans do not kill other humans, it is a multi-faceted accomplishment (Richards 2004).

It is to the proactive development and promotion of these default drives of peace, of co-existence, of dialogue among people and between cultures, of futures that are co-created that I have personally committed my intellectual energy in the past, at present, and into the future.

It is the insights flowing from this approach to working for peace that has unveiled several blind spots, and thus alibi nooks within which peace, human rights and the drives towards co-creation and co-existence that I would like to share with you in this presentation.

According to Richards, what we need is something more than respect for the rights of others for three reasons.

Firstly, citing Hegel, Richards argues that there are too many rights. And **where there is a surplus of rights, force decides**.

Commonly in a war, or in a bar room brawl, both sides can paint with the language of rights to give their cause the colour of moral superiority, and to give themselves the colour of 'knights errant' fighting for a righteous cause.

And where culturally recognized precepts of right gives both sides good moral arguments, there is a moral stalemate in which both sides are rhetorically armed with good reasons for declaring the other evil.

It is at this point that force becomes the final arbiter.

The second argument he makes drawing from Karl Marx, is that **the stubborn persistence of poverty, the instability of capitalist systems, and the exploitation of labour are all consistent with recognizing the rights of humanity embodied in the laws of commerce.**

Where everything is sold at its market price, in a free market, with property rights respected, it is often the case that labour is sold for little or nothing. This is a NORM which is also endorsed by the very same societies that harp on human rights.

The third argument drawn from Solzhenitsyn and Mahatma Gandhi, is that in principle, **rights without duties are unworkable.** Emphasizing rights at the expense of duties is similar to adopting Denis Diderot's 18th century definition of liberty: 'whatever the law does not forbid is allowed'.

Like liberty, rights-talk can easily lend itself to an irresponsible ethic. It authorizes everyone to say what they are supposed to be ALLOWED TO DO, and ARE SUPPOSED TO HAVE and SUPPOSED TO GET.

But it does not make anyone responsible for contributing to the welfare of others, or to the common good (Richards 2004)

Democracy as a work-in-progress

Democracy can be thought of as a system of government with four key elements. A political system for choosing and replacing governments through free and fair elections, the active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life; protection of the human rights of all citizens; and a rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.

Democracy is a **key means by which people to choose their leaders** and to **hold them accountable for both their policies and their conduct** while in office.

It enables citizens to **choose between competing parties** in regular, free and fair elections.

Central to the idea of democracy is the aspiration that **government** is based on the **consent of those who are governed.** Sovereignty of the people is a precondition, in that the **real power flows from the people to the leaders who hold power only temporarily.**

The creation of laws and policies require majority support in parliament, but the rights of minorities are protected in various ways.

If one were to do a text analysis on a written piece on democracy, the registers that show up would consist of concepts like: **citizen, participation, choice, government, party or parties, rule of law, accountability, governance, majority, votes, right to vote, power, free and fair elections, consent, power etc.**

It is clear that the pillar in the thinking about democracy is the **citizen**, with the process being played out in a **nation state**.

The **non-citizen's presence is not a factor**, neither is democracy clear about events **outside of the nation-state** i.e. beyond the “familiar”, the “community”. It does not have propositions as to **how citizens should relate to one another outside of electoral processes, or in the private spheres of lived world** (Sartwell 2002).

In the United States, it can be said that democracy began to move towards a semblance of “substantive” following the **gains from the civil rights movement**.

It is these “democratic revolutions” which **increased citizen involvement** in the affairs of government, that **expanded the concept of citizenship itself to cover economic, social, as well as political entitlements** (Luckham et al. *ibid* 6-9; Odora Hoppers 2007).

The solution to this is usually posited through greater democratic politics: i.e. the development of a culture of **informed participation**, which, in turn depends of the capacity of citizens to hold powerful private and state agents to account. It is hoped that by deepening the **politics of society** one can better influence the **high politics of the state**.

Thus, democratic politics would pay great attention to **democratic deficits** which can occur when democracy is:

- is narrowed down to **elections** as the arbiter of political succession,
- when **formal equality** does not say much about the social, cultural or economic structure within which this equality is embedded,
- when **running for office** at any level of government becomes a **very expensive affair**, which ends up leaving the masses with a **narrow pool of people** (elite of means) to choose from – **legitimizing perfectly the social and economic status quo**, and,
- when **popular sector challenge is repressed**, and **redistributive policies are blocked** (Bello 2005).

It is about **the citizen and their interaction with the state** within the framework of the nation state as the marker of identity.

Conclusion: taking the cue from peace work

Peace, like war, is a disposition, or a set of dispositions and acts of human will – i.e. conscious activity. On the road to attaining moral change and cultural transformation, we need to study more closely intentionality in human conduct. We also need to pay

attention to both aggressive impulses AND calculated self interest as both lead to violence.

The building of a culture of peace **begins with respect for the rights of persons because it is a cornerstone of the global civic culture that exists.** But as leaders, we clearly **need to reach further than respect for the rights of others, or regular elections** into concepts that have the power to employ and enhance other ethics.

Trust, solidarity, love, caring, respect for nature, integrity, honesty, character, forgiveness, non-violence, generosity, sacrifice for the common good can all be found embedded in **cultural norms of one group of people or another.**

Peace building for instance, works to **draw from the diverse cultures these positive norms** and seeks to **develop ethical growth points above and beyond the ethic of respect for the rights of others.**

Education for a culture of peace would infuse the living and coming generations with a **profound aversion against violence.** It also means **understanding conflict as part of human existence, and learning the skills for transformation of those conflicts without resorting to violence.**

It builds on the **good and the best from different cultures, traditions and faiths, to create a new ethics for human existence.**

This is both my bias, and my vocation.

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