Education, mobility and conflict in Africa

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Host Institute: The Open University, UK

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Project Highlights:
- Investigate the implications of conflict induced migration and mobility on education in Africa
- Explore how education can respond to the needs of displaced populations
- Supervised by an interdisciplinary team of scholars with expertise in migration and mobility, conflict and peace, education and Africa
- Participate in an international network of knowledge producers on education and conflict in Africa

Overview:
Several African countries have been marred by decades of war, violence and conflict. Despite concerted peacebuilding efforts they have struggled to find stable and durable pathways to peaceful societies. Education can help “recovery, normalcy, hope and the inculcation of values and skills for building a peaceful future” (Cin, 2017; Lopes Cardozo & Shah, 2015) (Sommers 2002, 18). This is particularly important in Africa, where the demographic dividend means that groups in conflict recognise the importance of recruiting young people to their cause (Sommers 2019). In this context, the restorative and reconstructive role of education in ‘promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels’ (SDG16) is crucial. Education can be conflict-sensitive and transformative when it provides content and methods for intercultural sharing and democratisation of the relationships between groups. Yet, education does not always have emancipatory outcomes. It can perpetuate existing inequalities, prejudices, and conflict (Cin, 2017; Lopes Cardozo & Shah, 2015) as both education quality, equitable education and conflict due to lack of recognition, redistribution and representation operate in contingent ways (Dwyer, 2015). Moreover, conflict can also reduce access to education. Both refugees and those who have suffered internal displacement have limited and interrupted access to education, itself leading to conflict as their long-term opportunities are limited due to these educational trajectories. Besides, the context and content of education can lead to conflict as educational structures and institutions themselves become targets of violence.

For education to contribute to conflict-management and to overcome direct and
indirect violence due to cultural, linguistic, political and gendered inequalities, it must also incorporate local knowledge and values and decentre Eurocentric norms and practices. This demand to decolonise education – to overturn Eurocentric concepts and methodologies and to validate and utilise local knowledges - has led to significant initiatives in HE, especially in Africa (Msla & Gumbo, 2016) but also across the world (Zembylas, 2017). Decolonising education requires decolonising content so that it is better attuned to local knowledges and values. Recognising the importance of colonial heritages in education (Madge et al., 2015; Raghuram, 2013) and aiming to address this through adjusting content and pedagogical practice (Mittelmeier et al., 2018) can enable improved teaching outcomes.

This Project
This project seeks to explore the diverse factors influencing the relationship between education, mobility and conflict. We encourage applications from students interested in these issues, especially those that address these through a decolonial lens.

The studentship is linked to a project with participants in multiple countries including Uganda, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Nigeria with further partners envisaged in coming years.

The student will be located in the Department of Geography at The Open University. The department Geography at the OU has a strong postgraduate research programme. With a growing cohort of Masters and PhD students, we offer a diverse and enriching research environment for postgraduate students both face to face, and online. For more information on research degrees in Geography please visit http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/research-areas/geography

The student will be required to live in and around the site of the University in Milton Keynes.

Further details:
Students should have a background in some combination of geography, international development, migration and refugee studies, education and pedagogy and theories of decolonisation, and training at masters level in social research methods.

The studentship is for 3 years full-time (fully funded).

International students are welcome to apply.

For further information about the post, or to discuss your eligibility, please contact Parvati.Raghuram@open.ac.uk.

Applications must include:
• A cover letter proposing a project which aligns with the interests of this project, an outline of proposed methodology and timelines and how your skills are well suited to the project. Students are encouraged to identify a focused project that is achievable and advances current work at an appropriate doctoral level.
• An academic CV
• A completed application form available from http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/mphil-and-phd-application-process
• Contact details of two academic references
Selected References


Msila, P. V., & Gumbo, P. M. T. (2016). *Africanising the Curriculum: Indigenous Perspectives and Theories*. AFRICAN SUN MeDIA.


This project is linked to the AHRC funded project Decolonising Peace Education in Africa

This project concerns peace education in Africa, a continent marred by increasing numbers of conflicts in the last three decades. Young people are often recruited into conflicts by those wanting to perpetuate them. Schools and universities are therefore important sites where peace can be inculcated. However, peace can sometimes be seen as a Euro-Centric project with the underlying knowledge and methods for peace arising from the West. There are, nevertheless, local meanings and mechanisms for peace but they are often not incorporated into peace education. In recognition of the limits of Euro-centric peace interventions and its’ influence in peace education there have been increasing demands for greater incorporation of local meanings and mechanisms of peace making into the curriculum, part of a wider trend to use African concepts and knowledge in teaching there, and thus to decolonise the curriculum. However, there has been no attempt to systematically collate, compare, evaluate and draw out lessons from these existing peace practices or to see how these can be incorporated into peace education. This project addresses that gap. The overall aim of the proposed research is to understand: What are the different meanings and mechanisms, i.e. the practices of peace in our 4 case study countries - Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe - and how can these practices be connected and compared across countries to create curriculum content and mode of delivery in secondary and Higher Education in order to decolonise peace education?

Building on previous funded projects, this network will be the first large interdisciplinary, international study of local meanings and mechanisms of peace exploring how to embed this into peace education in the secondary and tertiary sectors. We will begin by critically reviewing current local peace and intervention practices in the 4 partner countries through creative arts practices and then use this evidence to produce resources that can be used in secondary and higher education. These 4 'proof of concept' projects will be connected across the network and compared to identify best practice that recognises and responds to complex conflict dynamics producing more effective and sustainable peace education curricula that can support transitions from conflict to peace. In Strand 2 a further 15 case studies will be commissioned to broaden knowledge about local peace building and to strengthen teaching materials. Reflexive pedagogy will be embedded into the education. The project will deliver at least 7 journal articles in academic journals. In addition, it will develop a series of outputs that will be useful to students, educators, researchers and peace workers. These include an Open Education Resource, an E-book incorporating short videos and creative elements from Strands 1 and 2. The African researchers will teach at two summer schools, thus reversing the global north-south pattern of education. These resources will widen access to quality materials useful for teaching peace in areas with conflict and for peace workers globally.

The different practices of peace across the countries will be connected and compared through regular networking meetings enabling. The project focuses on developing capacity and fostering partnership and knowledge exchange between civil society organisation (NGOs, INGOs, Research Centres, arts organisations), local communities, government bodies and schools, including higher education; between local, national and international peace workers and educators and across countries to identify best practice in peace education. In doing so, it will highlight the importance of context in conflict and peace, highlight community based practices of peace that are inherited
generationally and created, and will use cross-sectoral collaboration to produce digitally mediated educational resources for peace education. It will thus improve access to quality resources.