

## UGANDAN CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON PEACE AND PEACE-BUILDING

A Study of Ugandan Children's Perspectives on Peace, Conflict, and Peace-Building: A Liberation Psychology Approach

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### Abstract

Bulhan (1985, 2015) urged psychologists to advance their research and practice by attending to *meta-colonialism*, a structural phenomenon built on a history of violence and oppression that assaults all manner of individual, community, and societal well-being. In line with this urging, a primarily Ugandan team of researchers conducted a study of primary school children's perspectives on conflict, peace, and peace-building. At each stage of the research process, the team members sought to recognize and resist the reproduction of meta-colonialism while move toward more emancipatory practices. In this theoretical paper, we explain how we applied a liberation psychological approach to the design, conduct and analysis of the study. We also show how the findings of the study contribute to our ongoing work in fostering structural changes in one of the schools, its surrounding region, and to the nation as a whole.

*Keywords:* Uganda, peace-building, liberation psychology

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Childhood is the morning of life. What seeds are sown in this time of great sensitivity, what sunlight those seeds receive, what soil surrounds those seeds --- these determine the future of each child. These determine the direction society as a whole will move when these children grow up to be agents of social change.

Boulding & Ikeda, 2010, p. 69

Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it in relative opacity.

Fanon, 1961, p. 59

Over the past two centuries, formidable, violent forces have affected the sociopolitical and economic structures of Uganda and, by inference, the survival and well-being of Ugandans. These forces include a history of British colonialism and militarized leadership that exacted human rights violations to the citizenry and most recently, the killings and abductions of Acholi men, women, and children by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) who raged against the government for its economic and political disenfranchisement of the Acholi people (Odongo, as cited in Bamidee, 2016). In full acknowledgment of these and other forces shaping the sociopolitical and economic landscape of Uganda, in 2006, the members of the UNIVERSITY psychology department in Kampala hosted a series of workshops where lecturers and professors from various UNIVERSITY departments convened to deliberate on the peace and justice needs of Ugandan students. Key to the goals of the organizers was the plan to help root substantive solutions to these problems at the classroom and community levels throughout the nation. At the end of the workshop series, the team decided consensually that the university staff needed to educate Ugandan students of all ages on peace. Our main charge was to "enable students to acquire knowledge and skills in prevention, resolving conflict and promoting peace amongst themselves and the

family and the community” (Uganda Peace Team, 2006, p. 1). Intriguingly, this conclusion echoed the findings of Ali Mazrui’s (1967) foundational work *Towards a Pax Africana*, and a 3-year research project by the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE) organization in 1994. The AALAE also concluded that it would be essential not merely to use African methods, techniques, and processes of conflict prevention management and resolutions, but also, importantly, to conduct research that drew on African concepts and terms of peace and conflict to guide the work of building peace in African schools (AALAE, 1994, p. 186). Dersso (2011), in a review of the developments of the Organization of African Union (OAU, later named African Union [AU]), re-affirmed the need to anchor knowledge on the peace and security challenges in Africa based on African worldviews. Dersso (2011) too contended that it is crucial for Africans to exercise power over the definition of the peace and security challenges facing the continent.

Our intent as a subset of the Ugandan Peace Team was to pose serious questions about the short-term and long-term psychological needs of Ugandans and establish a theoretical base from which to direct our research. How do we embark on a program of research and practice that can optimally meet the liberation and peace needs of Ugandans and that recognizes our nation’s strengths and setbacks? How do we build a formal program of psychology that educates future scholars and practitioners in concepts of peace and liberation? The purpose of this paper is to show how we responded to these questions when we engaged in a study on the perspectives of peace by Ugandan schoolchildren. We, the Ugandans of this research team, constitute the academic staff of the psychology department and share responsibility with our Faculty of Education colleagues in providing instruction to all pre-service teachers in Uganda. With our non-psychology colleagues in education, we also co-develop education curriculum and help oversee the administration of examinations each term. Our positions as academic staff members in the nation’s education program allows us the opportunity to

have impact on teaching in Uganda and likewise, opportunities to help future teachers infuse psychological concepts into their pedagogical practices.

As a transnational research team, we have established a commitment to an ongoing program of research that would be meaningful to Ugandans and inform curricular changes at the university level. Our focus is to integrate research, university teaching, and community-level praxis that takes into account, rather than excludes, the realities of sociopolitical forces on the well-being of Ugandans. The proclivity to omit, downplay, or distort the impacts of these forces on psychological well-being has been characteristic of traditional, Western psychology (e.g., Bulhan, 1985, 2015; Cooper & Ratele, 2014; Nobles, 2015). Somali scholar Hussein Bulhan (2015) applies the label *meta-colonialism* to describe the social, economic, legal, and political systems that assault all manner of well-being among individuals in formerly colonized nations throughout the world. In contrast to classical colonialism --- with the use of violence and exploitation to take over indigenous lands and natural and human resources, and neo-colonialism --- the continuation of land and human exploitation after colonial masters have mostly departed from these regions, Bulhan described meta-colonialism as a phenomenon that continues to wreak havoc in the lives of formerly colonized people. It manifests pervasively in every day attitudes and practices, interpersonal relationships, laws and practices that concern the welfare and survival of formerly colonized people, and notably, in decisions over what is taught in schools, how content is taught, and even in what language (see also Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Meta-colonialism does not occur statically but fluidly, and interacts with other hegemonic influences like sexism and class exploitation.

Uganda is a country ripe in cultural traditions. These African traditions include a high regard for elders and for the collective tribal unit, a celebration of storytelling, folktales and lore that are passed on from generation to generation, and a belief in oneness with ancestors and God or Allah. These traditions include indigenous practices that heal the afflicted and provide relief to people who seek an end to their emotional problems (e.g., Mpofu, Peltzer, & Bojuwoye, 2011). With an appreciation of these traditions,

we research team members sought to devise a “Ugandan psychology” to discern the assorted forces that both influence and improve Ugandan people’s lives.

Motivated to help shape student learning early on and therefore at young ages, we decided to conduct a study that focused on the perspectives of peace and war as expressed by students at the primary levels. A central point of our approach was to make use of our data to help inform an ongoing collaboration with students, teachers, and school leaders that would unfold into peace practices capable of disrupting meta-colonialism in both the school and surrounding community settings. Details of this study are presented in AUTHORS’ (2017) which we summarize below. In this article, we dedicate attention to the relevance of the findings to the integration of liberationist and Africanist traditions to inform an emerging Ugandan psychology.

Our focus on uprooting meta-colonialism is an outgrowth of liberation psychology, defined here as the study and practice of healing societies and individuals influenced by structural oppression and violence (see Adams, Dobles, Gomez, Kurtis, & Molina, 2015, Montero & Sonn, 2009; Thompson & Alfred, 2003). Montero and Sonn (2009) describe liberation psychology further as

a process entailing a social rupture in the sense of transforming both the conditions of inequality and oppression and the institutions and policies producing them. It has a collective nature, but its effects also transform the individuals participating who, while carrying out material changes, are empowered and develop new forms of social identity. It is also a political process in the sense that its point of departure is the conscientization of the participants, who become aware of their rights and duties within their society, developing their citizenship and critical capacity, while strengthening democracy and civil society. (p. 2).

We present an abbreviated description of the study but concentrate in this paper on highlighting the liberation psychology approaches to this work. In line with Dersso (2012) who amplified the call for

Africans to define peace solution for African problems, we believe that Montero and Sonn's definition captures much of the spirit of our view on peace-building. To us, the concepts of liberation and peace-building practices are suggestive of similar goals. Therefore, we add to the definition to address the relationship between the practices of liberation and peace-building. To us, violence in all forms diminishes the capacity to live together harmoniously. Because violence diminishes the need to join people together in combating injustice in all segments in the society, we assert that attention to rooting peace is akin to reversing these destructive and often reeling trends are essential to the quest of emancipation.

### **Abbreviated Description of the Study**

#### **Participants and Procedure**

We developed an instrument based on a set of questions about students' views about peace, conflict, and peace-building which was piloted in two primary schools in the central region of Uganda with different clientele. After these pilot analyses, we revised our protocol and obtained permission and consent from the school administrators of the schools targeted for the current study. We considered two primary schools that were located far apart in space, culture, and organizational goals. One school, Pere Pere, is located in northern region – with children drawn from the entire war area where all children were selected as students because they had direct experience in conflicts former abducted children, war orphans, child soldiers or children of rebel soldiers. The second study school was located in the central region, Mirembe, in an urban setting where the school leadership was particularly interested in peace promotion among the children. Both school names are pseudonyms.

The researchers segregated the school into three research clusters; lower primary from primary one to three, middle primary comprised of primary four and five, and upper primary representing primary six and seven. From each level, three girls and three boys were picked to participate. Equal

numbers of boys and girls were included for a total of 36 pupils. Teachers at the schools helped in inviting students to participate under the guidance of research team. We asked teachers to include students from different ethnic groups, children of different levels of ability and age. The researchers also asked the teachers to select children participants of different ability levels rather than selecting only the brightest students. Consistent with a liberation approach, we were intent on resisting any 'practices as usual' that may reproduce hierarchies among students that are vestiges from a colonialist past (see Smith, 2012). In other words, we did not want to encourage notions about 'select' students based on qualities the teachers might unwittingly deem superior relative to the qualities of other students.

We used a focus group methodology to encourage an active discussion of peace and conflict amongst the children. As a method of qualitative inquiry, focus group discussions were used to provide us with opportunities to gain greater insights into how the students experience their contexts within designated communities and peripheral socio-cultural practices (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). To address our question, "How do we approach the research to meet the liberation and peace needs of Ugandans and draw on the strengths of Ugandans?" we decided that the small group interviews would help us examine the pupils' detailed knowledge of local and contextual factors of what peace is to them. We also asked students to talk about what conditions destabilize peace and how best to identify and demonstrate peace in their communities, homes, and schools. We asked these questions in part to help the pupils simply share their perspectives and stories, and partly to help them recognize the importance of addressing the full scope of their daily lives as concerning peace and conflict.

The focus groups were conducted in separate spaces from students' classrooms but still on the premises of the school grounds and typically outdoors. An effort to establish rapport with the students was facilitated by the research team visiting the schools prior to the interviews as we researchers were well aware that these sorts of interactions (i.e., focus group interviews between adults and children) are rare and because the adults were strangers, students may experience reluctance in disclosing their

perspectives. Interviews were conducted in small groups with no more than two interviewers, a teacher, and 6 students. Each focus group interview lasted for about 1 hour. Teachers sat in on the focus groups to contribute to the trust building as Ugandan children have strong trust attachments with their teachers. Although the interviews were conducted mostly in English, local languages (Luganda in the Kampala region and Acholi in Gulu) were used to explain and supplement questions or support the engagement of the children with the multi-ethnic research team. Children sometimes responded in their local language. Among the team, all spoke English and Luganda, the language spoken in the central region, 2 spoke Acholi, the language spoken in the northern region, and 4 spoke Runyakitara and 1 spoke Lusoga, languages also spoken in the central region. There were follow-up visits with the central region school where researchers talked with the children about the findings and invited the children to draw pictures. As explained more fully in the study, the team was not able to make requests of students from the northern region because of the closure of this school months following the data gathering.

The focus group interviews were audio-recorded on digital recorders and then transcribed by the team. Questions asked of the students included: What would a peaceful home look like? What would a peaceful village look like? What can disturb the peace at home? What have you been taught about peace? What stories do you know about righting? What do people do to promote peace? What do you do to promote peace? In addition to questions about home and village, we asked students parallel questions about the school environment. We believed the focus group option was conducive to the children because it allowed them to share their stories with the other children and therefore potentially offering comfort and reassurance about these shared experiences.

## **Analysis**

We conducted the study based on the traditions of critical qualitative methodology (see e.g., Carspecken, 1996; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Dennis, 2009). This research epistemological

tradition was chosen because its democratic and emancipative philosophical grounding is reminiscent of the fundamental worldview of individual lives as intimately tied to others (as Mbiti [1970] wrote in explaining an important aspect of African philosophy, “I am because we are”). Significantly, critical methodology is based on approaches that do not merely recognize the reproduction of oppression and its intersectional qualities (that is, the intertwining of racism, sexism, socio-economic exploitation, and other oppressive forces), but also acknowledges the researcher’s responsibility in resisting the reproduction. The team drew from writings in critical theory to determine its relevance to our objectives and to fundamental values toward communalism. Although commonly attributed to the writings by European philosophers, there is ample evidence that this epistemological framework and emancipatory grounding has overlap with the research of Pan-African scholar and activist W. E. B. Du Bois, as well as other writers and practitioners from the Global South (see Smith, 2012; Torre, 2012).

The research team collaboratively analyzed all of the data. Data were entered into QDA Miner Lite software by Provalis Research for coding. The team met 16 times, each at least 2.5 hours long, to read through the data and co-analyze it. QDA Miner Lite was chosen because it was accessible to the entire team. Furthermore, it had the functionality to create coding levels the team found useful in its analysis. The coding involved a process of determining ‘meaning fields,’ that is, understanding of how different stories and passages from the pupil interviews sparked different interpretations by the researchers (see Carspecken, 1996). These reconstructions were then reviewed and refined through subsequent conversations. As meaning is complicated and nuanced, some utterances were assigned multiple codes (Freeman, 2013). Additionally, the coding process, described fully in the manuscript, entailed examinations according to gender, school/region, and school level of the child.

Analyses took place through dialogues about the meaning of the children’s responses to the research questions. Rich discussion amongst the inter-ethnic, male/female, international team of researchers opened the door for deeper dialogue about cultural meanings and assumptions. We knew

that among Ugandans there are both similarities and differences across ethnic, gender, religious, and regional lines, to name a few, that had to be articulated and engaged. The Ugandan researchers gathered all of the data and conducted most of the analysis. The two U.S. researchers --- one African-American female and the other a White-American female (the last two authors) --- provided financial resources, consultation as needed on methodological issues, and assistance in manuscript preparation. When the U.S. members took part in analytic discussions, their input centered on similarities and differences in our respective interpretations from the standpoint of U.S. versus Ugandan perspectives. These transnational dialogues served to illuminate our respective cultural and sociopolitical socializations and enrich our understanding of how these socializations influence our lives and our life work.

Validity of the study was determined by the Ugandan team members' cultural familiarity with the children (e.g., Mauthner & Doucet, 2003), and by subsequent visits to the schools where the Ugandan researchers asked children to draw pictures using crayons about peace, conflict, and peace-building. These pictures mostly corroborated the findings from the initial analysis based on the interview transcripts and the researchers' field notes. The data derived from subsequent visits to the Mirembe School served as member checks. Unfortunately and as mentioned earlier, the USAID-funded Pere Pere school closed down soon after the data were gathered. Consequently, the team was unable to make follow-up visits with the students, but is our hope that we can eventually reach these participants in the future.

## **Results**

The research findings were extensive so we highlight only the most prevalent findings based on the frequency of the passages coded. . One notable, initial finding from the research was the difference between the students at the two schools in terms of their engagement in the research and the amount

of interview responses produced from the interviews. Overall, students from the northern school (Pere Pere School) were more reticent about participating in the research in comparison to the students from the central region school (Mirembe School). Some students at Pere Pere initially declined to participate even after initially agreeing to do so, whereas no students from Mirembe exhibited these behaviors. In response to this experience, the researchers dedicated more time to establish rapport with the Pere Pere students and to convey their desire as researchers to listen intently to their stories and pose no harm to them. One of the research team members, name here, revealed to the students his own experiences of the violence in the region (he himself was from Gulu and had been abducted) to bridge potential gaps in the research relationship. (Researcher's name) revelations, in addition to the additional time for rapport-building, appeared to help most of the students overcome their silence. These students became more expressive after these revelations. Furthermore, the researchers who interviewed the Pere Pere students found themselves having to explain how the audio recorder works and its purpose. Based on observations of the children's non-verbal reactions, it was speculated by the team that the students believed that the recorders may cause some harm to them. In contrast, the children at Mirembe School showed less reticence and fear and asked fewer questions about these devices. Mirembe School students were also more prolific than their northern region counterparts in their responses to researcher prompts. Indeed, sixty-seven percent of the coded segments in the data were attributed to the children at Mirembe School compared to 33% of these data attributed to the children from Pere Pere School.

From our analysis, two categories emerged: (1) Conceptualizations on Peace and (2) Peace-Building (including Hindrance to Peace-Building).

**Conceptualizations on Peace.** Children's perspectives were overwhelmingly centered on how meeting people's basic needs, such as food and safety, and having good health and hygiene, was important to peace. The children would talk about quarrels between peers, between adults, and

between adults and children that would center on a lack of food, and even on the anger exhibited by family members that resulted in food being wasted purposely. In regards to wasted food as an outcome of anger, the children spoke of the 'pouring,' when their mothers would experience anger toward the father for a range of issues, including violence against the mothers, by discarding or pouring out the family meal. As AUTHORS' NAMES (in press) related:

The way it [peace] was expressed by the children, indicates an awareness in social justice and equity as a primary aspect of peace. For example a girl said from Pere Pere said that a peaceful village is one where "*there is always food*" enough for everyone. A boy from Mirembe Primary School described a peaceful village as one where "*people share food with those who don't have any.*" Children referred to homes where they were able to offer food to visitors as peaceful.

The youngest child interviewed from the Pere Pere school recounted a folk story that evinces the theme of food waste. In the story, a child goes to pick berries but is tricked by a bird who tells the girl to listen to him sing, then he scatters the wild berries and eats them. The story continues:

When the girl went home she explained to her mother and the mother started quarreling. The mother went to pick the wild fruits herself and found that same bird which tricked her, also. The father went, also, to pick some fruits and still found that same bird. It tricked him [too, but this time] when it flew down to scatter the fruits, [the father] grabbed it and took it home. He put it in a box and told the children that they {now} had a radio. Each time they want to listen to music, the bird would sing and [he] asked them not to take out the bird when he was away.

The tale continues with the girl inviting a neighbor to the home and the bird tricks the neighbor into releasing him from his cage. When the father returns home, he quarrels with everyone in the family and warns that children should obey their elders. The conclusion of the story is in keeping with the cultural tradition in which adults should and will ensure the survival and guidance of the children in their village.

Other responses, often told as stories of actual events, reveal the children's accounts when the children feel at peace in the different settings --- at home, at school, and in their community or village --- and the sharing that occurs between friends. Overwhelmingly, a prevailing theme throughout the data was children's beliefs that peace emerges from a social process, one that entails exchanges of cooperation and bringing order to a village, school, or family between others. For example, children spoke frequently of peace as showing obedience toward parents and offering forgiveness in the event of fighting and having quarrels with peace. Rarely was peace seen as an internal process, as in 'being' at peace, except in instances which feeling happy was couched in expressions about familial or peer relationships. For example, the children would speak of a peaceful home as being happy when mum and dad were showing love toward them. Several stories were told about the problems that arose when there was no peace, especially among peers and instances in which conflict was sparked by selfishness, stealing, and parent and teacher disobedience. There also were stories about the absence of peace occurring with instances where the father takes money for food to spend it instead on drinking and therefore, the family is without food.

The students perceived safety as important to peace, as in the need for them to be protected from any adult who would harm them. The code category Guarding Against Danger refers to the importance expressed by the children on ensuring safety in the community by adults, mainly neighbors, who looked out for the people who might bring harm to the children. The respondents believed that these adult watchers played a vital role in a providing safe community to both children and adults. The pupils in the study also shared that peace occurred when there was maintenance of proper health and hygiene. By 'avoiding walking to the toilet barefoot" and "keeping the body bathed and clean," the students reported that it is less likely that disease would be spread in one's home, school, and community. This element of peace appeared to be linked to removing threats of danger to people's health and lives.

**Peace-Building (and its Hindrances).** Our analysis revealed that students perceived peace-building principally as actions that created harmony between people, whereas hindrances to peace included an array of incidences both locally and in the larger world that consisted of fighting and disobedience. Moreover, AUTHORS' article (2017) concluded that "understanding peace-building as it was expressed in this study is based on understanding the conceptualizations of peace as previously described – for it is toward these ideas of peace that peace-building and hindrances to peace-building are oriented." In essence, building peace in the family, one's school, and one's community entailed *sharing (with the implication of mutual exchanges among equals, i.e., between adults or between children), communicating (referring mostly to non-directive expressions by parents or other adults, and to children's communications with adults), and obeying (directive expressions by parents and other adults to children)*. From the students' perspectives, these activities entailed helping others meet basic needs within safe, cooperative, and orderly settings.

An example of how the children viewed communication as integral to peace-building is from one student who stated that *"People should share food [with you] when you don't have any."* More girls than boys expressed sharing responses, and more Mirembe students talked about sharing than students from Pere Pere school. Communication as an aspect of peace-building often related to lessons children were told by their parents either as warnings to protect them from harm. Communication also entailed students seeking the help of adults to help resolve conflict with peers and siblings, as well as seeking forgiveness and resolution to conflict using religious beliefs associated with forgiveness. Several students spoke of the need to "listen to the elders and parents" as an effort to be obedient and build peace in their family and community.

The stories related to hindrances to peace-building were quite plentiful and widely descriptive, much more so than stories on peace-building. Students frequently told stories about the quarrels that erupted between peers and siblings and the fighting that often followed. Although the majority of these

stories were peer-related, the students also spoke about strife that occurred between their parents, and in two rare instances, that which occurred on the international platform (one involving Gaddafi and Obama). More children from Pere Pere talked about fighting than Mireembe. Most of the fighting among peers were attributed to the stealing or destruction of material goods, as in the taking of pencils, rulers, and food or destruction of toys. Stories about disobedience were less frequent than those about fighting, but were the second most popular category emerging from the coding process. These stories of disobedience were sometimes concluded with the students' claim that they were 'selfish' in their disobedience, that is, they failed to do what a parent or elder asked them to do because they wanted to play.

#### **Discussion of Findings: Analyses Relevant to Peace and Liberation Research and Practice**

In the following, we divide the discussion of the study analyses into three categories: (1) Critical Consciousness and Cultural Traditions; (2) Connections Between School, Home, and Community; and (3) Trauma. These discussions include an integration of our analyses with the practices we are currently executing or intending to implement as peace- and liberation-focused scholars.

##### *Critical Consciousness and Cultural Traditions*

The children in this study showed conscientization or critical consciousness (Friere, 1970) in their revelations about the disruptions to peace. They frequently expressed associations between the lack of food and other basic needs with increased conflict and violence. Therefore, their narratives were not merely a 'reporting out' of conflictual episodes like verbal disputes and fighting, but rather, stories in which the episodes of conflicts were frequently linked to the conditions they experienced daily in their lives. In many respects, the findings from our study overlapped with other studies in which children from impoverished and conflict-ridden regions presented perspectives of peace that were tied

to these conditions (.g., Bamidele, 2016; de Souza, Sperb, McCarthy, & Biaggio, 2006 and Oppenheimer et al., 1999 for reviews).

The students disclosed how food shortage was associated with desperate actions in times of scarcity. The shortages disrupted peace in their schools, communities, and homes. Observations of incidents in which peace is disrupted consisted of physical acts, as well as in their recounting of how verbal conflicts would later lead to the use of physical force or other problems. For example, many shared how the violence they observed between adults --- namely from fathers who committed acts of violence on their mothers, resulted in an expression of anger and desperation on the part of the mothers and that would have a palpable impact --- the pouring. In the thread of these disclosures, the students were able to convey the course of conflict over time. An non-peaceful home, for example, began with anguishing disagreements and violence and spread into problems that affected entire families.

The students also observed the need for watchful adults to guard against wrong-doers. Relatedly, they spoke of the relative constancy of violence in their lives. On their part in addressing situations that were not peaceful, they forgave, maintained good hygiene in order not to spread disease, and listened obediently to their parents and other adults. These traditional role expectations of children would seem vital to the goal of creating peace. They also reported that they were agents of change who occasionally stepped in to deter further conflicts and violence.

We return to the question we cited earlier, “How do we establish on a program of research and practice that can optimally meet the liberation and peace needs of Ugandans and that recognizes our nation’s strengths and setbacks?” We do so firstly by acknowledging that the students demonstrated that they already possessed the capacity to learn more about systemic realities. Consequently, as we continue our collaboration with Mirembe, we will further cultivate students’ critical consciousness

through classroom instruction, play, and visual images of the artifacts and resources that are constants in their lives. As regarding this latter aspect, we want to feature resources like books, posters, and art supplies with visual images that reflect Africa and Africans. These are in contrast to the images of Western nations like alphabet charts where “A is for apple,” a symbol that is embedded in Western lifestyles and traditions (see Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2017). We can draw from other liberation practitioners who have employed multiple strategies to stop physical violence in its path and raise future generations to act against meta-colonialism (see examples around the world in Montero & Sonn, 2009). One notable strategy in line with education is the creation of formal and informal schooling that restores the history of these settings prior to the violence, whereby children at young ages learn about, rather than being kept from learning about, the colonizing aspects that shape their lives.

Our findings also suggest that the students we interviewed saw value in social interactions --- that is, the need for them and others to act on behalf of the group. This finding is important as it identifies the tradition of “we-ness.” Mazrui (1980) wrote that the impacts of colonialism has meant that cultural structures are affected, but not necessarily cultural *traditions*. In other words, people affected by colonialism and its spurious outcomes can find it more difficult to live with traditions in view of, for example, internal displacement camps and the deteriorating presence of adults in some communities due to premature deaths from killings, illness, poor living conditions. Yet, the traditions remain intact in multiple ways, like when families adopt the children as their own and when people practice the rituals that make up daily life despite obstructions. These prevailing traditions were gleaned from the study’s findings and as a topic of further research, we are interested in learning more about students experiences in becoming ‘artists of design’ (Bekerman, 2009) as they resist the impacts of structural oppression and re-shape practices of culture transmission. This design refers to the unveiling of new ways of interacting with the people in their lives in the re-shaping and especially how issues of power, such as obedience with adults, remains within the cultural bounds of respect as

students also experience affordances for empowerment (Bulhan,2015). Our intent is to approach curriculum changes with developmental knowledge about children’s capacities for learning based on the differences we gleaned from our study based students’ ages.

### *Connections Between School, Home, and Community*

The students in our study revealed that good communication was important to peace-building, as in communicating with and between adults and between themselves and their peers. This communication was clearly important in all three settings --- at school, home and in the community. The stories and tales passed through the generations is a tribute to peace-building, yet may not be expressed formally in the classroom setting; meanwhile, the strengths the children exhibit in creating peace in their homes and communities may go unnoticed at school where such characteristics can reinforce student learning and classroom cohesion. Efforts to share our findings with members of the community, and with teachers, which we have already done, has helped bridge connections between the three settings and strengthen efforts to further cultivate peace-building in the lives of the children. Further reinforcement, in collaboration with both adults and children within these settings, is important to peace-building and liberation praxis. For example, the traditions of storytelling and regard for adults can capitalize on ancestral wisdom, an integral part of liberation psychology. These traditions can also add to peace-building by shoring up the broader ecology of care that occurs across ethnic groups and generations.

As liberation scholars, we want to help convene the adults in the community and the teachers and administrators at Mirembe to reinforce the use of cultural traditions like storytelling and sharing the rituals of students from different ethnic groups. The blending of these traditions is not absent of a movement toward liberation, but rather, closely intertwined with it. As Fanon (1959) recounted, “It is not alone the success of the struggle which afterwards gives validity and vigour to culture. . . The

struggle itself in its development and its international progression sends culture along different paths and traces out entirely new ones for it" (p. 10). With the struggle for liberation comes the metamorphosis of culture, as well as strategic efforts to end all forms of violence to ensure the survival of a people.

For instance, in reflecting on the pupils' disclosures about violence between parents, it would be imperative that we directly confront efforts to implement peace-building in families as the lack of peace clearly has impact on the lives the children. As a model for how to approach these efforts, Gbowee (2011) and Duany (2004) have described the how collective groups, often composed of women, have united to often combat men's violence against women also as crucial to local peace-building efforts in regions in like Liberia and Sudan.

As liberation psychologists, we aim to continue our partnership with these schools and communities by providing them, most immediately, with a set of books that include the words of and drawing from students. This book project represents a target by which the team will engage with administrators, teachers, policy makers, and community members to rally around clear goals of peace-building as articulated by the students. Student assistance will also be tapped, and the use of critical and community-based participatory research methodology (Grills, 2017; Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox (2012) will be used as a guide for developing the books, and with the support of the Mirembe principal, a series of professional development sessions with teachers. Community-based or critical participatory research involves having traditionally-designated 'participants' assume lead and ownership in designing and conducting the research. Rather than research conducted on a particular group, topics worthy of research study are identified and then pursued by and with the group. Decisions on how and where to disseminate findings of the research is also decided by these participant-researchers; academic staff from universities have (greater) expertise in methodology and the financial means to realize these projects throughout the phases and therefore, serve in a supportive and consultative role. Mirembe

School administrators and teachers already have expressed a strong interest in developing books and other resources to make the most of the research findings. With the school leaders and educators as our partners, we will create books and teachers' guides that attend to student narratives, emphasize students' examples of their own and other Africans' acts of agency in bringing about peace locally, and promote critical consciousness in their learning on all subjects. This process ostensibly is the beginning of a long-term project to which each member of the team is committed.

### *Trauma*

The differential experiences and perspectives as gleaned from students from the two schools are likely evidence of the trauma experienced by students in the northern region based on the violence that besieged that region for over 20 years and ending only a little over a decade ago. Most likely, all of these students have never experienced life without violence, its threat, and its aftermath --- such as the challenges in reintegrating into one's village and caring for children borne out of rape. Unlike their central region counterparts whom we assume have not experienced similar traumas, engaging in conversations about conflict provoked memories of heinous crimes and of their direct experiences with them.

We observed the Pere Pere students displaying signs of trauma and depression from the violence they experienced firsthand from Kony rebels. This violence included abductions from their homes for months to years, sexual exploitation, beatings, being forced to kill and witnessing brutal killings. Should we eventually discover the whereabouts of these children, we will institute a similar approach to peace-building at the schools they currently attend and/or in their communities. But we also know that attention to trauma is also essential for this group of students. According to Gerber, Hogan, Maxwell, Callahan, Ruggero, and Sundberg (2014), war and conflict affects mostly notably by exposing people to significant trauma based on actions that are both acute and chronic. Gerber et al.

(2014) also stated that because of widespread devastation of economic, social, and educational systems, children exposed to war and conflict need “newly formed or revitalized structures to provide support and security” (see also United Nations Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, 1996; Roberts, Damundu, Lomoro, & Sondorp, 2009). The authors also conclude that the ability of a child to recover following a traumatic event, even if indirectly experienced, depends on the reactions of parents and role models within his or her social support network. Meanwhile, conflict and societal chaos prolonged over a period of time can cause problems other than trauma, such as identity confusion, depression and grief, and disruptive behavior. These outcomes can affect the individual for many years into adulthood (see Liem, 2007; Morina et al., 2011; Njenga, Nguithi, & Kang’ethe, 2006).

Research also has substantiated that trauma disrupts normal brain development. Following the chronology of children and adults after the trauma has occurred is crucial to assessments of what areas of the brain are affected and the parallel protocol that is needed for treatment. As Perry (2009) found based on his extensive line research, early identification and aggressive early interventions are more effective than reactive services. Yet even in regions of the world with considerable resources for this treatment, like the United States, the majority of children do not receive adequate mental health services and may not even be fully aware that they have experienced trauma (see also Coitre, Stolbach, Herman, van der Kolk, Pynoos, Wang, & Petkova, 2009; D’Andrea, Ford, Stolbach, Spinazzula, & van der Kolk (2012); Kamya, 2012; Pine, Costello, & Masten, 2005). Preparing ourselves to work further with these children will involve acquiring skills in how to distill trauma-informed interventions that address these deterrents to learning and growth.

Much more aligned with our liberation focus, Helms, Nicolas, & Green (2012) share findings from studies that show that people of color in the U.S. who have had histories of oppression and exploitation show trauma symptoms at greater rates than U.S. Whites and experience traumatic events that focus specifically on their race/ethnicity. The authors point out that despite these factors, common

assessment measures for determining stress do not include information about racism and ethno-violence as trauma. In identifying the needs of the children in northern Uganda, as well as in the central region (where historically, former president Idi Amin situated barracks and reportedly committed many political crimes in the Mirembe school district where the barracks still stand), assessments of trauma that include meta-colonialism as an influence of well-being in the region are essential. It may even be important to equip strategies for teachers in pre- and in-service training sessions, as well as with families and villagers, to address these traumas in the students. The incorporation of counseling and psychology strategies in teacher education and at the community level can cultivate levels of healing that would appear necessary in the unfolding liberation of all people throughout the regions of Uganda.

Legers, May, and Vogel (2011) noted that while modern counseling practices in Africa primarily have been based on Western forms of talk counseling, the past twenty years have witnessed a global and regional trend of increased focus on indigenous approaches to healing. These approaches focus on spiritual beliefs based on African cosmology, attention to the whole person, the inseparableness between person, family, and community, as well as the use of traditional practices like cleansing, libation, dream interpretation, divination, and herbs (see also Atindanbila & Thompson, 2012; Legers, 2006a, 2006b; MacLachlan, 2000; Peltzer, 2001; Vontress, 1999a, 1999b). We intend to make full use of indigenous practices in our ongoing pursuit of change in these and other local communities.

### **Concluding Remarks**

While we cry for peace, the process of achieving it may emphasize conflict resolution at the expense of long term peace which calls for proper contextualization of how peace can be evolved from the children's perspective. Many community conflicts are results of distortions and social-cultural mistakes of long duration, endogenously and exogenously authored and perpetuated. Therefore, a last minute intervention without a

thorough understanding of the situational dynamics and the progression of children understanding of peace is wrong and an impediment to future peace initiatives.

Most of the time, opinion leaders mis-define peace on opportunistic and an irrational basis where the hapless victims of instabilities/civil wars are not listened to. Many of the conflicts in the world are authored, promoted and fueled by ideological disorientation. We cannot only deal with the consequences without helping children develop values and skills that promote peace. A grounded understanding of children's perceptions of peace therefore is paramount in developing/ inculcating these skills and values.

How do we build a formal program of psychology that educates future scholars and practitioners in concepts of peace and liberation? Our aim as a department of psychology is to develop a Ugandan psychology that involves Ugandans in various aspects of the research and to create tangible, usable outcomes in local contexts. As the needs in Uganda are great, these outcomes should bring communities closer to peace and the restoration of order.

We also take pause to acknowledge that education alone cannot bring peace, as Bekerman (2009) has noted. Referring to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in his Israeli homeland, Bekerman stated that peace will come with "the immediate halt of state-practiced systematic discrimination in all areas, including land dispossession and allocation, housing, economics, culture, political participation, *and* education" (his emphasis, p. 74). In Uganda, the road to peace will involve many of the same actions, as well as others (see Bamidele, 2016). As Mpofu, Maree, Kasayira, & Westhuizen (2011) note, for many students "the school is a haven of stability in a sea of deprivation and uncertainty, . . . and the hub for the regeneration of communities and nations through its ability to impart and transform culture, and for the development of a human resource base for the economy" (p. 111).

The children in our study shared openly about their observations of and experiences with violence; we want to encourage this transparency and indeed urge them to continue their sharing in

place of the potential for opacity of which Fanon speaks in his quote at the start of this paper. Sharing the words of the future generations through books and by way of professional development are two crucial actions we believe can strengthen our commitment to liberation and peace.

Essential to the growth of academic psychology around the globe is recognizing the formidable role oppression has played and continues to play in the lives of individuals, groups, and societies. In our study, inviting our teachers and families to be involved in the next phases of the study --- creating books (and other ways) to disseminate the children's stories, helps to effect change in the school settings and with people outside of the school who are interested in teacher education. We also have contacts with people who write and approve curriculum throughout the nation of Uganda.

At the local level, university staff can form partnerships with local communities and organizations to provide scholarly expertise and, as needed, practical resources. We contend that a liberation approach is an important facet to these partnerships. With this approach, we attempt to attend to the meta-colonialism that influences economic, social, and political structures and impose assaults on individuals and communities. Moreover, the inclusion of Global North members on the team to serve principally in the capacity of resource providers can be important to the task of providing support, but not the direction, to the building of a Ugandan Psychology. As Ugandan academic staff that influences teacher education throughout Uganda, we take on this work as researchers, educators, and practitioners. Our goal is to build a liberation-inspired department of psychology that serves Ugandans with the spirit of peace and fortified by practices that honor the cultural traditions that have helped Ugandans and other Africans endure for generations.

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