

## Chapter 64

# Reconceptualisation of Democratic Citizenship Education Against Social Inequalities and Electoral Violence in Zimbabwe

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### ABSTRACT

*This article analyses the implications of a reconceptualised democratic citizenship education on universities in Africa with special emphasis on Zimbabwe. This is a qualitative research where data has been gathered through interviews and observation. Democratic citizenship education theory is used as a theory speaking to the argument. The arguments proffered in the research are that the concepts of DCE, education, and democracy that are rooted in liberal ideas of education have the potential to develop critical thinking necessary for political participation, justice, and political tolerance. The findings are that an African university education can teach students to become human with others, meaning students are taught to respect and value human dignity as dictated by Ubuntu.*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses a reconceptualised idea of Democratic Citizenship Education (DCE) and its tenets as an extension of the liberal idea. This is done to explain how reconceptualised notions of DCE can assist in helping us to think differently the higher education policy in Africa and specifically with special emphasis on Zimbabwe. The implications for the reconceptualised DCE on the universities in Africa will be analysed. With regard to the African university, constant reference will be made to the writings of Nyerere 1981; Wiredu; and Gyekye (1997) on how a reconceptualised DCE can respond positively

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to the challenges confronting the continent. The pertinent challenges outlined by Nyerere in Wiredu are poverty, underdevelopment, ethnic violence, environmental degradation, illegitimate governments, electoral and political violence and the HIV and Aids pandemic, (Nyerere in Wiredu 2010). This paper focuses on ethnic and electoral violence.

The argument advanced in this paper is that ethnic motivated violence and political violence in Africa are a result of exclusionary form of citizenship education. This implores me to consider in the research a DCE that extends the liberal conceptions of higher education. Notions of Ubuntu/humanness, equality and justice will be referred to in order to come up with a rethinking/ reimagined conception of a university in Zimbabwe that will help to bridge the social inequalities characteristic of Zimbabwean society as well as helping to curb the political and ethnic conflicts in the country. It is my contention that both DCE in becoming and conceptions of liberal DCE can contribute towards initiating social transformation through the achievement of equality, equal access, accountability, relevance and equity in university education in Zimbabwe. The question that will be answered in this write up is: how does a reconceptualised notion of DCE assist Zimbabwe's higher education system to address problems associated with social inequalities and electoral violence in the country?

## **INTERROGATING THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND THE DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN BECOMING**

Liberal democratic citizenship education is used in the research to conceptualise Zimbabwe's higher education so that it can transform the socio-economic and political situation that has triggered inequalities and conflicts in the country. The history of Zimbabwe is characterised by a series of challenges which at different turning points manifested themselves through violent conflicts (Mandaza 2009; Ndhlela 2012:16). In this regard, the use of a liberal DCE is envisioned as crucial to the understanding of the social ills that have driven the society into conflicts and violence.

Liberal DCE is a regime where citizens make collective decisions on the basis of reasons they can all accept, not so as to further their own individual preferences, but so as to promote the common good (Rawls 1971; Dryzek 2013:169). In this regime, citizen responsibilities are the duties that citizens need to carry out such as joining the army, tolerating differences, voting and legitimising political authority, making decisions through public engagement and exercising individual power and making judgement as a way of life. However, if citizens' rights are curtailed so much that they fail to exercise them, conflicts will ensue. What this implies for DCE is that all citizens have the rights to belong and participate as equal citizens in their political communities. This has been the missing link in the higher education in Zimbabwe as the country encountered challenges emanating from ethnic and electoral violence. The majority of conflicts in Africa emanate from the way minority societies are sometimes mistreated (Waghid 2009).

On the other hand, ethnically motivated conflicts have been witnessed in Teacher training colleges, Polytechnic colleges and universities across the country (Muchemwa, 2016:91). This is an indication that the liberal perspectives have failed to solve the problems confronting Zimbabwean citizens. For instance, the education system failed to transform the deep rooted racial and ethnic prejudices that were inherited from the colonial education system (Kariwo 2011: 25). This means that the liberal conceptions propounded by (Rawls 1971), Habermas (1987), and Benhabib (2011a) are inadequate to counter ethnic and electoral violence. Although DCE respects equality, deliberations, human rights and freedoms, all these rights are already actualised in the Zimbabwe education system and have ceased to exist, they

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