Exploring *VaKaranga* cosmological ethics of *kubata makuku* as a panacea for conflict management and resolution in Post-colonial Zimbabwe

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Abstract— *The political landscape of Zimbabwe shows that the country is battling to contain feuding conflicts in the society. It has become so obvious that any election in Zimbabwe is a contested terrain due to conflicts associated with the electoral process. Moreover, unsolved past conflicts continues to hinder the country's socio economic stability. It is clear from the state of affair that the Church and the State have failed to resolve conflicts in Zimbabwe. The church continues to preach from its pulpit unconditional forgiveness while state continues to sweep critical issues under the carpet. It is within this context that a tap into how the VaKaranga people resolve their conflicts through the ethical theory of kubata makuku can be a panacea in conflict resolutions. Moreover, the failure by the church to take sides with the oppressed during the struggle for justice in post-colonial Zimbabwe always present a challenge to the relevance of the church.*

Keywords— *Kubata makuku, conflict, reconciliation, forgiveness, violence.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is inevitable in any society where people interact. Zimbabwe like any other country has its own share of conflicts which impacts negatively on its socio economic and political trajectory. Conflicts exist in many forms and this article traces post-colonial conflicts such as *Gukurahundi, Murambatsvina* and pre and post-election violence in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Efforts to resolve conflicts have been utilised by the church and the organ of Peace and Reconciliation Commission without much success. The church`s teaching of unconditional forgiveness will be put under heavy scrutiny in this article. The results of the research will help the church and the nation to rethink its approach to conflict resolution. *Kubata makuku* concept of resolving conflicts among the *VaKaranga* people will be utilised as the criterion of conflict resolution.

II. METHODOLOGY

The article will utilise the Praxis cycle or pastoral cycle. Praxis cycle refers to the on-going dance between theory and practice or reflective practice action and activist reflection. It is reflection aimed at liberatory actions. Praxis suggests the bringing together of action and reflection, transformation and understanding. This new marriage of action and reflection depends on accepting human life as fundamentally practical (Chopp 1986:37). It is within the realm of social analysis. One of the most powerful tools for change is called social analysis. Social analysis will help us to see why we have problems. It also helps us to work together in tackling these problems. The methodology will utilize a community-based praxis-approach (De Beer 2014) as developed in the pastoral cycle (Holland & Henriot 1983), as an expression of participatory action research.

The pastoral circle as proposed by Holland and Henriot (1983) involves five movements of immersion, social analysis, theological reflection, pastoral planning and spirituality.

2.1 Immersion

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This involves the description of the conflicts which Zimbabwe is facing which requires a solution or to be resolved. Zimbabwe is experiencing a lot of unresolved conflicts which some predates the colonial era, colonial era and post-colonial era. It seems all efforts exhibited by the church and government fails to bring peace and reconciliation in a conflict ravaged society.

2.2 Analysis

The church has continued to teach unconditional forgiveness which has become an oppressive tool for the victims of injustice. The perpetrators of injustice continue to busk in the protection of the church's missionary theology of forgiveness. Most church programmes indicate that the issue of forgiveness is central to church but how forgiveness is interpreted leaves a lot to be desired. The missionary was convinced that the aspects of native life had to be wiped out and replaced by the Christian gospel (Samkange 1978:4).

On the other hand, the government continue to sweep under the carpet the negative impacts of conflict in the name of Peace and Reconciliation Commission. Every election in Zimbabwe is potentially a conflict year and sometimes with deadly effects of life losses.

2.3 Reflection

From the documentary evidence of the conflicts in Zimbabwe it is clear that the poor and the marginalised suffer most in times of conflicts and are the biggest losers. The voices from the people on the margins are very critical in coming up with the solution to the conflict. Centrally for the *VaKaranga* people is the dare which is a council used to resolve conflicts and bring transformation. How does the church interpret the scriptures in light of forgiveness and conflict management?

2.4 Planning for action

The issue of conflicts in Zimbabwe calls for deeper reflection of the meaning of forgiveness. A lot has been said about issues of reconciliation in Zimbabwe by churches and the Peace and Reconciliation Commission with very little success. The method of dialogue and conflict resolution continues to fall in the line of part politics and church teachings thereby discrediting or undermining the efforts of social structures in the society. It is in this context that the *kubata makuku* concept can be the ideal plan of action to bring lasting solution to conflicts in Zimbabwe and other countries.

The church must gear itself to address issues of conflict in a very practical way by making a deliberate effort to interpret the Biblical texts on forgiveness in the manner which takes care of the feelings, emotions and expectations of the victims.

2.5 Spirituality of liberation

The church and the State must explore African philosophy to solve conflict. Vellem (2014) asserts that African religiosity is the site of African liberation spirituality. It offers the methodological sources for the search of this spirituality of liberation. African religiosity is an important assert for a life-giving spirituality amidst the secularised eschatology of the global market. A conflict resolution strategy guided by African philosophy of Ubuntu which emphasises human dignity, sanctity of human life and egalitarian communities must be developed by states to resolve conflicts.

A new imagination that would unlock the power of African ways of resolving conflicts such as *kubata makuku* should be explored. If we long for peace in our communities, it is therefore high time that we must explore African ways of resolving conflicts. It is the responsibility of the church to reconstruct the spirituality of the people which have been violated by colonialism and missionary theology.

III.   THE VAKARANGA PEOPLE

Nelson (1983:28) provides the history of the coming of the Shona people to Zimbabwe where the *VaKaranga* people belong. They came during a wave of Bantu-speaking migration originating in the Shaba region of modern Zaire which broke up in the tenth and eleventh century. This is associated with the coming of the Shona people to Zimbabwe. It was not until the nineteenth century when the name Shona was applied to cover several dialect clusters into which the Shona speaking people had traditionally been divided. These clusters had well-defined territorial bases and these include the *Kalanga, Karanga, Zezuru, Korekore, Manyika* and *Ndau (Nelson 1983:45).*

The centre of the royal clan's influence was at Great Zimbabwe, the ruins which lie near present day city of Masvingo. The ruins remain an impressive monument to the technical capabilities of an indigenous African Culture. Although by far the most spectacular of them, Great Zimbabwe is but one of the hundred and fifty *Madzimbabwes.* It housed a large population, the royal court, markets, warehouses and religious shrines (Nelson 1983:45).

Asante and Mazama (2009:616) asserts that the *VaKaranga* religion is monotheistic in nature, and they have a firm belief in the one God called *Musikavanhu (Creator) or Mwari* which has roots in the Bantu *Mu-ari* which literally means that which is self-existent. The same *Musikavanhu* can also be expressed as *Nyadenga* which means one who owns the skies or heavens and *Musiki* meaning one who creates or the Creator.

IV.   CONFLICT ANALYSIS

Mudamburi (2019:92) asserts that conflict is disagreement between two or more people. It is difficult to avoid conflict in life. There are different sources and effects of conflict. Whenever there is conflict, people should learn to manage conflict peacefully. Conflict refers to some form of friction, disagreements or discord arising between individuals or within group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted or unacceptable to one or more members of the group (Tschannen-Moram 2001). Jeong (2010:3) asserts that conflict is manifested through adversarial social action, involving two or more actors with the expression of difference often accompanied by intense hostilities. Most significantly, protracted conflict arises from failure to manage antagonistic relationships.

There are several ways of dealing with conflicts and in this article I discuss the Thomas-Kilmann model which emphasizes on accommodating, avoiding, compromising, competing and collaboration. I will briefly discuss these ways in order to dissect through my argument.

4.1 Accommodating

This style of conflict resolution is about simply putting the other party`s needs before one's own needs. In this style one allow the other party win and get away with it. Accommodation is for situations where one does not care much on the outcome of the issue as the other person, if prolonging the conflict is not worth the time, or if one thinks he/she might be wrong (Thomas and Kilmann 2007). This option is about keeping the peace, not putting in more effort than the issue is worth, and knowing when to pick battles.

While it might seem somewhat weak, accommodation can be the absolute best choice to resolve a small conflict and move on with more important issues. This style is highly cooperative on the part of the resolver but can lead to resentment.

4.2 Avoiding

Avoiding as a style of resolving conflict aims to reduce conflict by ignoring it, removing the conflicted parties, or evading it in some manner. Team members in conflict can be removed from the project they are in conflict over, deadliness are pushed, or people are even reassigned to other departments. This can be an effective conflict resolution style if there is a chance that a cool-down period would be helpful or if you need more time to consider your stance on the conflict itself (Thomas and Kilmann 2007). Avoidance should not be a substitute for proper resolution, however; pushing back conflict indefinitely can and will lead to more (and bigger) conflicts down the line.

4.3 Compromising

Compromising seeks to find the middle ground by asking both parties to concede some aspects of their desires so that a solution can be agreed upon. This style is sometimes known as lose-lose, in that both parties will have to give up a few things in order to agree on the larger issue. This is used when a solution simply needs to happen, rather than be perfect. Compromise can lead to resentment, especially if overused as a conflict resolution tactic, as such it must be used sparingly (Thomas and Kilmann 2007).

4.4 Competing

This seems to be a stubborn position as it rejects compromise and involves not giving in to others viewpoints or wants. One party stands firm in what they think is the correct handling of a situation, and does not back down until they get their way. This can be in situations where morals dictate that a specific course of action is taken, when there is no time to try and find a different solution or when there is an unpopular decision to be made (Thomas and Kilmann 2007).   The advantage of this style is that it can resolve disputes quickly, but there is a high chance of morale and productivity being lessened.

4.5 Collaboration

Collaboration style of resolving conflict produces the best long-term results, while at the same time it is often the most difficult and time-consuming to reach. The waring party's needs and wants are considered and eventually a win-win solution is found. In this scenario everyone is satisfied by the outcome of the dialogue. This often involves all parties sitting down together, talking through the conflict and negotiating a solution together. This is used when it is vital to preserve the relationship between all parties or when the solution itself will have a significant impact (Thomas and Kilmann 2007).

After looking at these ways of conflict resolution I find it hard to believe that these ways help to resolve conflict. As a *Mukaranga* man who grew up in a society where I have seen conflicts with potential to degenerate into brutal wars solved through *kubata makuku* propose this method as a framework of conflict resolution and management.

V.   KUBATA MAKUKU

For the *VaKaranga,* true forgiveness and reconciliation comes after *Kubata makuku. Kubata makuku* when translated literally means catching hens (Muzenda 2019). This is a concept which is used in most *VaKaranga* villages to settle differences. If a person has wronged another person a council (dare) is called to look into the issue and anyone found guilty must *bata makuku*. So, for the *VaKaranga* forgiveness is not an abstract philosophy but a practical and comprehensive process.

The concept of *Kubata makuku* is universal in dealing with issues of forgiveness and reconciliation in most *VaKaranga* communities (Muzenda 2019). The concept may sometimes be used even when the offence is so huge that the person is requested to pay a goat or a cow, but the goal is to bring reconciliation. Once someone has done the process, the honour is on the community to make sure that there is true reconciliation.

Amnesty International`s work on racism and justice (2000:40) assets that there can be no lasting peace or reconciliation without justice. Those responsible for genocide and other human rights abuses must be brought to account. In many other parts of Africa where States combine an enormous variety of ethnic groups, conflicts and human rights violation frequently have an ethic context. History may explain particular situations of ethnic domination, but all too often governments that should be striving to implement equal rights for all their citizens and prevent discrimination are manipulating ethnic divisions for short-term political ends and thereby contributing to ethnic conflict. They are also failing to combat racial discrimination of justice. This creates a group of second class citizens.

Wiredu (1996:181-182) asserts that "what is central to the process of reconciliation is the re-appraisal of the importance and significance of the initial bones of contention". It therefore, means instead of trying to avoid the causes of the conflict, through reconciliation, there is need for all the parties to the conflict to present their demands and that a proposed settlement should take into account the existence of these various demands. This is more like collaboration style of conflict resolution.

Schreiter (1998:64) asks the question: where does forgiveness come in the reconciliation process? The common sense answer is first comes repentance on the part of the wrongdoer, then the victim forgives and then there is reconciliation. There must be some act of apology or acknowledgement or repentance by the wrongdoer. Guilt must be admitted and then the victim can be summoned up for forgiveness. Unfortunately, this rarely happens in the social arena. The wrongdoers are still too powerful to be coerced to submit to such process. In other cases, an amnesty is extended that protects the wrongdoer from being legally accused of wrongdoing and punished. Social reconciliation must follow fashion common sense process of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a concept that has been appealed to by many countries that have tried to move from a situation of civil war to peace. There is no exception with Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe, the man who led the country into independence appealing to the concept of reconciliation when he tried to set up a new nation and to rebuild the newly independent Zimbabwe. Kaulemu (2008:7) argue that, this reconciliation was called for even before the basic injustices that had caused civil war in the first place were fully addressed. If the concept of kubata makuku was applied soon after Independence I want to argue strongly that *Third Chimurenga* could have been avoided in Zimbabwe. *Third Chimurenga* was a war which Zimbabweans fought to take back their land from White commercial farmers around the year 2000.

Gutierrez (1983:183) averred that the building of a different society and of a new human person will only be authentic if it is undertaken by the oppressed themselves. Hence, the point of departure for this undertaking must be the values of these persons. *Kubata makuku* seeks to integrate human value and gender sensitive. For it is from within the people that the prevailing social order is being so radically questioned. It is from within the people that the culture of oppression is on its way to being abolished. Indeed, this is the only way in which a genuine social and cultural revolution can be carried out.

Cone (1978:219) confirms that it would be the height of stupidity for victims of oppression to expect the oppressor to devise means of liberation for the oppressed. The church and the government on issues of conflict resolution have become the oppressors of victims. *Kubata makuku* is the only way for true reconciliation in which all the aggrieved parties are supposed to agree on the way forward.

Zimbabwe is currently embroiled in quite a number of unresolved conflicts. For instance, the pre-independence tribal tensions between the Shona and Ndebele, aggravated by the *Gukurahundi* killings in 1983, have not been resolved. *Gukurahundi* saw the deployment of the Fifth Brigade to Matebeleland and parts of Midlands which resulted in between 10000 to 30000 Matebele slain by Mugabe`s private Army. *Gukurahundi* ordinarily refers to the wind which blows away the chaff before the rains (Hill 2003:77). It is precisely this meaning ascribed to the operation *Gukurahundi* that is seen by some to mean the wiping out of ZAPU and the *Ndebele* population`s contribution to the liberation history.

The issues of *Gukurahundi* as an example cannot be resolved through a political statement but through serious engagement. A dare must be called of reputable people and come up with a lasting solution where the perpetrators of this violence must bata makuku. One of the most important feature of dare among the *VaKaranga* people is that those of little wisdom cannot be part of the dare. They are usually given other chores and the most common one is *kunovhiya mbudzi* (skinning the goat). When given the task of *kunovhiya mbudzi* it means you lack wisdom and cannot contribute any meaningful insights into the issue before the

dare. A theology of *Kubata makuku* can be a panacea to several conflicts in Zimbabwe and around the world.

Attempts have been made at the highest political level to address the animosity that exists between tribes, but with little or no consideration given to grassroots projects focused on reconciling differences and promoting cooperation and dialogue. The highly centralised government and one-party system-constituted since independence in 1980-has been accused marginalising minority ethnic groups in Zimbabwe.

Gukurahundi is not a closed chapter unless and until a proper audit of the life lost and a serious engagement with those who lost their loved ones. For the government of Zimbabwe to simply say 'it was a moment of madness' is not enough to bring peace and reconciliation. The government must bata makuku in order to bring closure to the issue.

There was also violence during operation Murambatsvina where authorities bulldozed, razed and destroyed what was labelled 'illegal structures' that included but not limited to houses with approved plans in residential areas and well established markets (Nyere 2014). The first official launch of Operation Murambatsvina was 19 may 2005. During the launch Ms Makwavarara Chairperson of the Harare Commission emphasized that the program was to enforce the Regional Town and Country Planning Act to stop illegal activities which included among others; vending, trading in foreign currency and illegal dwellings.

Harare residents were ordered to destroy the illegal structures which they had erected themselves before 20 June 2005. However, on 25 May 2005 in complete disregard of the official deadline, a huge military style operation started in Harare spreading to many cities and towns. Many houses, tuck shops, market stalls, flea markets, vegetable markets, hair salons and many residential structures were destroyed in a well-orchestrated paten of repression.

Many people were rendered homeless including those who had local council papers as rightful owners of the properties. The issue of *Murambatsvina* was just swept under the carpet yet the government of Zimbabwe through its local authorities was supposed to bata makuku. The issue of demolition of houses has become a norm in Zimbabwe since every year we continue to witness such ugly scenes. The poor people continue to lose their hard earned money to land barons. *Kubata makuku* could be used as a solution to conflict resolution. I may argue that the issue of Murambatsvina is of the major reasons why ZANU PF is failing to gunner majority votes in towns and cities.

Over the years there have been election-related complaints from political parties and private individuals but these have been ignored. Many crimes have also been committed during election times. Cases of abduction, unlawful arrests, murder, rape, arson, and disappearances have been reported but without state investigation or legal redress. Victims have largely remained uncompensated. The famous Itai Dzamara issue is the case in point who just disappeared without trace and many others.

The 2008 election re-run saw more than 200 MDC activists murdered in State led election violence. While on another note 5000 MDC supporters were tortured and displaced from their homes. Furthermore, the events of the 2008 presidential election still linger in the collective conscious of the electorate because of the violence and destructive nature of election. The period leading to the Presidential run-off was characterized by widespread state violence against and repression of suspected opposition supporters especially in rural areas. Even after the election violence continued and on 2 July 2008 some 200 Zimbabweans sought refuge at the American Embassy in Harare (Kanete, 2019:4). Sachikonye (2011:21) assets that in Zimbabwe there is institutionalized violence during and after election.

In the post-independence era the worst example of politically motivated violence was the massive massacre of thousands of thousands of civilians in Matabeleland in an orgy of killing known as *Gukurahundi*. The main purpose of these deliberate killings, rapes, torture and destruction of property was the elimination of ZAPU`s popular following as a way to force the party leadership to submission. What is striking though is the savagery of the onslaught by the North Korean-trained and Shona recruited Fifth Brigade, the CIO, some other units and the ZANU PF Youth League. This left thousands of people dead and many more maimed and marked for the rest of their lives. Most families were and are still affected one way or the other.

These are just some of the conflicts which Zimbabwe is experiencing and the theology of *kubata makuku* can be utilised to bring restoration. To pretend as if nothing has happened is digging a deep well for the nation. Forgiveness for the VaKaranga is conditional. One has to meet certain conditions for him/her to be forgiven. The Africans were Christians in so far as all was well with them, but as soon as they encountered problems, they reverted to traditional forms of tackling those problems (Banana 1991:65). This assertion by Banana is wake up call to Africans that their traditional ways of dealing with conflict is very effective.

Mugambi (1997:7) argues that, if Africa is to face the future realistically, African cultural dimensions of life

must be emphasized much more than in the past. There will be no future for the majority of our people without serious appreciation of God's religious cultural gifts to Africa.

Although European missionaries and colonialists brought the Bible with them to Africa, it can be argued that the encounter with Christianity and the encounter with the Bible should be examined separately. The argument is that a careful exploration of the ways in which Africans appropriated the Bible will identify a range of interpretative strategies that enabled converts and colonized Africans to "read" the Bible in an empowering and affirmative manner (Mugambi 1997:236). Unconditional forgiveness is not VaKaranga philosophy of life.

African Christian theology in the twenty-first century," says Mugambi," will be characterized by the themes of social transformation and reconstruction. The shift from liberation to social transformation and reconstruction involves discerning alternative social structures, symbols, rituals, myths and interpretations of Africa's reality by Africans themselves, irrespective of what others have to say about the continent and its peoples. The resources for this re-interpretation are multi-disciplinary analyses involving social scientists, creative writers and artists, biological and physical scientists. Theology, as the systematic articulation of human response to revelation in particular situations and contexts, will be most effective if, and only if, the social and physical reality of the peoples is accurately and comprehensively understood and re-interpreted (Waruta 1995:110).

Tutu pleads for us to remember that in the act of forgiveness we are declaring our faith in the future of a relationship and in the capacity of the wrongdoer to make a new beginning on a course that will be different from the one that caused us the wrong. Unwillingness to forgive keeps us in prison and we should offer forgiveness even before it is asked for. This is where I differ with Tutu especially that the victim must offer forgiveness before it is asked for. This notion has helped the perpetrators of injustice to continue to oppress their victims for they know that forgiveness is on a silver platter. This justifies the theology of kubata makuku where the *VaKaranga* people will say we can only forgive you if you *bata makuku*.

For a nation of Zimbabwe to simply say *Gukurahundi* was a moment of madness is not enough to deal with the trauma encountered during the genocide. To say let bygones be bygones is a travesty of justice. It is however true that communal forgiveness cannot unite a disjointed community until injustices that continue to create the powerful and the powerless are dealt with. There can be no communal forgiveness without a profound realignment of

power which operates in a society. Communal forgiveness can only occur within a relationship based on justice and equality.

Banana (1993) argues that Christianity was the perfect instrument for the subjugation of the people. The white missionary and the white church used the faith and Scriptures to justify oppression. Christianity continued to believe in and practicing a theology that kept the Bible captive to an enslaving hermeneutic. This implies that Christianity has to a larger extent influenced how people react to issues of forgiveness and conflict resolution. Is it not time that African Christianity utilises more of African concepts to resolve conflict such as *kubata makuku*.

In its originality, *kubata makuku* does not discriminate against women. If a husband has wronged his wife, he must *bata makuku*. There is no male dominance in the concept of *Kubata makuku*. It is therefore, quintessential to note that since time immemorial the VaKaranga people have been accommodating women and gender sensitive. Zimbabwe need to make a clean break with its history of violence and resolutely walk the road of peace by creating a constitutional state guaranteeing participatory and prioritizing respect of the rule of law (Mkaronda et al, 2003:96).

VI.   CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to explore the *VaKaranga* cosmological ethics of *kubata makaku* as a solution to conflict management. *Kubata makuku* can be utilised as a model for resolving conflict in Zimbabwe and in Africa. The church must stop the preaching of unconditional forgiveness and become more realistic and practical in as far as conflict resolution is concerned. Without kubata makuku perpetrators of violence will remain on top of the situation. Zimbabwe need to take the ethics of *kubata makuku* seriously for it to deal with conflict situations in the society. *Kubata makuku* places responsibility of actions to those who perpetrate discomfort in the society. *Kubata makuku* for *VaKaranga* people promotes *unhu/Ubuntu*.

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