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Towards an African peace epistemology: teacher  
autobiography and *uMunthu* in Malawian education

## Abstract

Few studies in peace scholarship have used autobiography to allow subjects to define peace and social justice from their lived experience. Little is known on how autobiography interacts with curriculum and pedagogy to create a contextualized understanding of peace in education. This paper argues for a new peace and social justice curriculum and pedagogical approach that uses the African endogenous institution of *uMunthu/uBuntu* (personhood, or humanness; Mazrui, 1986; Musopole, 1994; Sindima, 1995), to create epistemological space in which lived experience and life writing enable teachers to enact a peace praxis in their classrooms and communities. The paper draws on a 2004 study conducted with Malawian teachers who wrote autobiographies and taught peace lessons in their classrooms. The paper concludes that the concept of *uMunthu/uBuntu* offers an endogenous African peace framework that connects life experience with curriculum, pedagogy and a broader understanding of social problems in contemporary Africa.

## **Introduction**

When the tall windows were opened to let in the cool dry wind of April, the sound of the Domasi River could clearly be heard coursing down its way to Lake Chirwa. If one stood up and looked outside through

the tall windows, one could see the tall blue gum trees standing erect along the grassy banks of the fresh water river. A group made up of curriculum specialists, teacher educators, education administrators and one primary classroom teacher was meeting in the Humanities Laboratory of the National Curriculum Center. They sat around tables that had been rearranged to form a large, square-shaped working area.

Since 2001, Malawi has embarked on a new educational reform program, known as the Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform program, (PCAR). The program has gone through several stages, including a national conference to lay out the process, an extensive needs analysis process which involved consulting Malawian stakeholders and a literature review of the primary school curricula of countries in the Southern African Development Commission (SADC) region. In March 2004 the program entered a new phase, the development of a national curriculum and assessment framework. Following from that phase was the conceptualization of the new curriculum, which included designing the curriculum and assessment framework, called scope and sequence. During the scope and sequence development process, held at the Malawi Institute of Education, one of the curriculum writers, Nduluzi, a primary school teacher, was assigned to one of the newly renamed learning areas, Literacy and Learning.

The group was now working on the scope and sequence for a unit on literacy around the home. The group decided to use fictional stories that conveyed messages about health and nutrition, as a way of integrating various disciplines into language and literacy. On one particular story, the consensus was that Malawian students needed to learn about the three dietary groups of food needed for a balanced nutrition. Nduluzi raised his hand and said he had an observation to make. He had recently read in a science journal that nutritionists were now suggesting that rather than the conventional understanding that there were three dietary groups of food, there were in fact six. He went ahead to list them. There was a silence in the room, before one of the members in the group raised an objection to Nduluzi's suggestion. Nduluzi was asked to provide a credible source for his information, and he did. Before very long everyone else in the group refused to accommodate Nduluzi's suggestion. They said they were not aware of these changes in the scientific community, and therefore they did not trust the suggestion. Someone pointed out that Nduluzi was a "mere" primary school teacher, how could he know such details? Another one wondered, slyly, when Nduluzi was going to get the chance to go to university and study for a first degree. "He is uneducated, yet he wants to dominate," was another remark.

In addition to being a curriculum writer on the PCAR program, Nduluzi also participated in the study that this paper is centered around. The study focused on twenty-one teachers, but this paper examines narratives produced by eight Malawian teachers who wrote autobiographies as part of the study. The study investigated teacher autobiography and its enabling role in defining and enacting peace and social justice curricula and pedagogy in classrooms and schools. I interviewed nearly all the twenty-one teachers before and after observing them teach a lesson. In addition to the teachers I observed teaching, I also interviewed three teachers whom I did not observe teach, but who were recommended to me because of their participation in the Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform program. Two of these teachers also wrote autobiographies.

This paper explores autobiography as a life-writing genre that these teachers produced. Their autobiographies address ideas and assumptions about Malawi's history and contemporary society, offering ways of understanding injustice and inequality in Malawi and how to make this understanding part of curriculum deliberation and pedagogical practice. Particularly, this paper examines the patterns that emerge from the narratives in the autobiographies and in the interviews with Likhaya, Mwalawo, Sakina, Mwandida, Mfuwo, Wembayi, Katchikolo, and Nduluzi, and from three separate interviews with Mwandida, Pinde and Nduluzi (all names have been changed). First is a brief background to the conditions that warrant a peace and social justice framework for education in Malawi. This is followed by a description of the methodology used in the study. Next I provide a background and definition of the

concept of uMunthu as an endogenous epistemology that can inform curriculum and pedagogy. The section on uMunthu is followed by brief profiles of the teachers who took part in the study, and a discussion of the autobiographical, curricular and pedagogical implications for a peace and social justice education framework rooted in this particular endogenous African epistemology. The paper ends with an outline of suggestions for new policy and research possibilities.

### **Why the need for a peace and social justice framework for education**

The main proposition framing the study was that problems confronting contemporary Malawi and Africa can be viewed through two lenses: a structural violence lens, as defined in peace scholarship, and an ontological lens defining a human being in terms of dignity founded in communal existence and responsibility, also known as *uMunthu* in Malawian society, or *uBuntu* in South African society. Structural violence is not easy to identify because it is woven into the structure of daily existence, becoming, as Barash and Webel (2002) say, “more indirect and insidious than observable physical violence” (p.7). Barash and Webel point out that the insidiousness of structural violence is “built into the very structure of social, cultural and economic institutions,” creating the absence of peace. Positive peace “refers to a condition in which exploitation is minimized or eliminated, and in which there is neither overt violence nor the more subtle phenomenon of underlying *structural violence*” (p.6, italics in original). Barash and Webel frame their work as peace and conflict studies, hence bringing problems of social justice and human security under that framework. It is necessary to reproduce a long paragraph from Barash and Webel that articulates structural violence:

Structural violence usually has the effect of denying people important rights, such as economic well-being; social, political and sexual equality; a sense of personal fulfillment self-worth; and so on. When people starve to death, or even go hungry, a kind of violence is taking place. Similarly, when humans suffer from diseases that are preventable, when they are denied decent education, affordable housing, opportunities to work, play, raise a family, and freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, a kind of violence is occurring, even if no bullets are shot or clubs wielded. A society commits violence against its members when it forcibly stunts their development and undermines their well-being, whether because of religion, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual preference, or some other social reason. Structural violence is a serious form of social injustice. And it is regrettably widespread and often unacknowledged (p.7)

### **Methodology and data sources**

This study aimed to investigate how teachers’ life story or autobiographical writing opens up space for the awareness of contexts of structural violence, social justice and human security, as defined in the fields of peace and conflict studies (Barash & Webel, 2002) and African epistemology (Musopole, 1994; Sindima, 1995). My main quest was to investigate how autobiographical writing by teachers creates in the teachers an awareness of what constitutes problems of social justice and human security in their lived experiences. The main assumption was that an awareness of peace and social justice would motivate the teachers to use classroom pedagogy to investigate the contexts of injustice and insecurity. The awareness would therefore be a process of committing their teaching to peace activism using curriculum content, classroom practices and school activities.

I collected my data in my home country, Malawi, between February and August 2004. The project combined several approaches within the tradition of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 1994). My theoretical framework was informed from three qualitative and ethnographic sources: first, my own intellectual orientation as a Malawian studying peace education in Malawi; second, my thoughts on the extent to which social and political realities are constructed in historical and global contexts, and their effects on community peace; and, third, paradigms of knowledge production and their role in the construction of contexts of injustice and insecurity in Africa.

I identified three groups of teachers from seven different schools, totaling 50 teachers. For twenty-one of these teachers, their participation in the study was based on their availability to attend one of two consecutive workshops. The first group came from two nearby schools in southern Malawi, and was available during the two-week Easter break in April 2004. The second group came from a third school in central Malawi, and was available during the school term, in the afternoons, after their morning teaching. I invited the twenty-one teachers to the first workshop, and 11 teachers to the second, making a total of 32 teachers. A total of twenty-one teachers responded to the invitation, and became participants in the research. We read materials I had selected, watched videos, and held discussions. The teachers wrote their life histories (Goodson, 1991; Chanfrault-Duchet, 2004), highlighting events in their student lives and in their work as teachers. After the two-week workshop I visited the teachers in their classrooms to observe them teach. We had interviews after each observation in which I asked them to evaluate their lessons in terms of peace education. Thus data collected comprised audio and videotapes of workshop discussions, classroom lessons and interviews with teachers; lesson plans; teacher autobiographies; field notes from my classroom observations and a reflection journal that I kept throughout the period of the study.

The focus of this paper is restricted to the examination of data from autobiographical narratives produced by ten of the participants in the study.

### **Significance of life writing in peace and social justice education**

In his narratives written for this study, Nduluzi explains how he has had to put up with put-downs and demeaning attitudes by his superiors in the education system. In most cases he has been the only primary school teacher in a group of experts mostly boasting university degrees and high government offices. The attitude by many of these experts has been that they deserve to be there by virtue of their higher education, and that people like Nduluzi, mere primary school teachers without any university degrees, do not know much, and therefore do not deserve to be included in such important activities. Nduluzi writes in one of his narratives:

In Malawi, especially those that assume a reality of responsibility because of position or education, more often assume that those not in similar position are chaff. It is usually very difficult in certain circumstances to be believed or be taken seriously. If you, the less educated, are placed to have access to latest information for public consumption and benefit, you are gagged not because what you are saying is not true but simply, "who is he or who is trying to be?"

Nduluzi writes about having had to persevere against an onslaught of ridicule and disdain, but his narratives also celebrate the encouragement and positive attitudes of some of his superiors, who have recognized his hard work, and have promoted his endeavors.

The teachers' narratives and interviews reveal lived experiences that create a social justice and human security perspective not because they are peculiar to Malawi, but rather because they create what has been described as a "peace problematic" in the African scholarship on peace (Hansen, 1988, p. 2). In fact they are the same problems encountered by teachers in other parts of the world: political control and repression, socio-economic deprivation, injustice, psychological violence, low socio-economic status, being sidelined in policy discussions, etc (see Ninnes and Mehta, 2004; Chanfrault-Duchet, 2004; Foster, 1997; Norris, 2002). However the fact that these problems are known to be experienced by teachers elsewhere does not diminish the importance of the need to address them. Social injustice and human insecurity are known to occur all over the world, including in countries considered 'developed' and 'industrialized.' Social injustice and human insecurity therefore need to be addressed in Malawi as well as in all societies where

they are known to occur. Seeing teachers' lived experiences from this perspective provided a practical significance and rationale for the project.

When the participants were invited to take part in the study, the key terms that were used in introducing the project to them were teaching, writing and peace education. Even then, it was not clear in my own mind how to scaffold a writing process with a focus on peace issues, for teachers who did not see themselves as writers. I was guided by my intuition that writing has been an important motivation in my own intellectual orientation and, and that the problems I felt the project needed to focus on were related to peace and social justice and *uMunthu*. The invitation to the teachers to write about their lives was made under the assumption that some of the problems that they encountered in their lives could be interpreted from a peace and social justice perspective, given our definition of structural violence and human insecurity. To make the connection between peace and social justice, there was a need to investigate the contexts of the problems we were talking about. This was done in a presentation I made on the first day of the writing workshop, where I introduced the definitions of violence, taken from Barash and Webel's (2002), as discussed above.

It was the teachers' shared stories of injustices that provided a connection between writing and peace education. The definition of structural violence by Barash and Webel (2002), provided a practical rationale for the need for peace education in Malawi, as one teacher explained on the first day of the workshop, April 12, 2004. The teacher was responding to another teacher's question as to whether Malawi really needed peace education, given that most of the African countries adopting peace education, as was reported in an article I quoted and which we subsequently read (Ardizzone, 2001), were recovering from direct violent conflict. Despite the fact that Malawi had never experienced anything close to civil war, issues of social injustice, exploitation and human insecurity were prevalent enough to constitute structural violence, explained the teacher offering the response. This understanding of the meaning of social injustice and human insecurity underscores the need for a pro-active sense of peace: "creating material conditions which provide for the mass of the people a certain minimum condition of security, economic welfare, economic efficacy, and psychic well-being" (Hansen, 1988). This proactive sense of peace merges with cultural concepts of who a human being is, leading to another practical significance and rationale for the project.

### **An African concept of peace: *uMunthu* and the human community**

In this paper, I rely on especially four Malawian studies done on the concept of *uMunthu*, three of them in theology, one of them in political science. The first study is a doctoral dissertation by Augustine Musopole, published as a book in 1994. Titled *Being Human in Africa: Toward an African Christian Anthropology*, Musopole's study pursues the question of "how does African Christianity define and understand African peoples in a way that is humanizing, and, how can that view influence the shaping [of] a humane life for the African people in the totality of their existence?" (p.1). In answering that question, Musopole's study analyzes the theological and philosophical work of John Mbiti, who, in Musopole's words, uses a dynamic view of African humanity that "takes into account the changes that have affected and continue to affect African humanity as a result of western Christianity, imperialism, colonialism, modernity and capitalism" (p. 12). While Musopole finds "serious flaws" and inadequacies with Mbiti's concept of time in African thought (p. 14), he sees Mbiti's dictum "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am" as "an excellent summary of what it means to be human in Africa" (p. 13).

The second work this study uses is Harvey Sindima's 1995 work, *Africa's Agenda: The Legacy of Liberalism and Colonialism in the Crisis of African Values* which, in Sindima's words, "examines the impact of liberalism on African thought and values which resulted in a serious identity crisis" for Africans (p. xiv). Sindima's

argument is that an agenda for Africa's recovery lies in the "recapture of traditional values" and the opening of "possibilities for a deeper understanding of self and society" (p. xiv).

The third work on *uMunthu* used in the framework for this study is Gerard Chigona's master's thesis, titled *uMunthu Theology: Path of Integral Human Liberation Rooted in Jesus of Nazareth*, published as a book in 2002. Chigona aims to provide a local context for a theological interpretation of Jesus Christ, observing that "any neglect and sidelining of the African cultural heritage in doing theology is a neglect and negation of oneself in history" (p. 14). Chigona presents a model of Malawian life based on *uMunthu*, embedded within it an "inbuilt critical analysis at both [the] individual and social level" in which individuals and communities can measure themselves (p. 76).

The fourth piece of scholarship informing the *uMunthu* part of the framework is a study done by Tambulasi and Kayuni (2005). In their article titled 'Can African Feet Divorce Western Shoes? The Case of 'Ubuntu' and Democratic Good Governance in Malawi', published in the *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Tambulasi and Kayuni use the concept of *uMunthu* to evaluate Malawi's first two governments since independence in 1964. They analyze the thirty-year dictatorship under Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, and the multiparty government led by Dr. Bakili Muluzi from 1994 to 2004. Tambulasi and Kayuni conclude that based on the common understanding of what *uMunthu* entails, the thirty years of dictatorship failed to live up to the ideals of *uMunthu*, while the ten years under Bakili Muluzi and the United Democratic Front did start out as governance with *uMunthu* ideals but soon deviated by doing away with principles of good governance and democracy.

There have been other studies and discussions on how to use *uMunthu* to understand contemporary conditions in Malawi and in Sub-Saharan Africa, but the ones discussed above are pertinent to peace and education in Malawi. The three theological studies by Musopole, Sindima and Chigona interrogate liberal Christianity and its dehumanizing effect on Africans, without, as Chigona puts it, attempting to romanticize Malawi's religious heritage. Interestingly, Tambulasi and Kayuni make no mention of any of the other Malawians studying the concept. However in being able to use the concept of *uMunthu* in discussing theology, colonialism, history and politics, the four works make a remarkable contribution that marks a turning point in locating intellectual sources for African epistemology in Malawian scholarship. Although none of the studies use the Malawi education system as their central context, Musopole's study addresses the individualism of modern education, brought to Malawi as missionary education, as being responsible for the move away from *uMunthu* as the basis for educating young people. Musopole makes mention of an autobiographical motivation for the origins of his inquiry, starting when he was made principal of one of Malawi's earliest schools, Robert Laws Secondary School. Musopole's experiences as principal caused him to reflect on how the influence of the British school system remained unchanged even after Malawi's independence, with no effort to "radically indigenize the educational philosophy" (p. 2). Musopole wondered what was being left out of the education system by divorcing Malawian education from Malawian values:

As I reflected upon the aim of traditional Malawian education, I realized again that traditional education was centered around the concept of humanness. Humanness is that essential character defined by our culture as the sum of what makes a person essentially human. I also realized that the western type of education, as received and practiced in Malawi at least, placed less emphasis on humanness in its curricular content and focussed on intellectual knowledge for its own sake. The wholistic character of the initiation ceremonies, which constitute a major part of the educational program in the African traditions and crucial to the humanization process, cannot be understood unless the idea of humanness is recognized as both the foundation and goal, not only of the rites of passage, but also of human growth and development.

It further occurred to me that without this traditional emphasis our very sense of political, economic and social development as a people and a nation would be greatly undermined through compromise and distortion (pp. 2-3).

Musopole goes on to describe the atrocities committed by the dictatorial regime as part of the context in which the values of humanness were not considered as part of daily life.

A fundamental alienation was taking place, foreshadowing the loss of humanness in daily human interaction. The political repression through fear and intimidation, the suffering inflicted on those who fall victim to the detention act and judicial system, are a few examples of the lack of humanness in our values (p. 3).

From the four Malawian studies on *uMunthu* described above, we see that African conceptions of the human being locate personhood in a community of other persons (Musopole, 1994; Sindima, 1995; Tutu, 1999; Chigona, 2002; Tambulasi and Kayuni, 2005). According to John Mbiti (1969), recasting the Cartesian dictum “I think therefore I am” into an African context turns personhood from an individualist gaze into a communal one, becoming “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti, quoted in Musopole, 1994, p. 10; see also Kaphagawani & Melherbe, 1998, Tutu 1999, and Chigona, 2002). In this configuration, one is human in relation to other human beings. The restoration of the humanness of our existence is therefore a fundamental step in envisioning a world peace that encompasses, according to M. B. Ramose (1996), “the human being’s relationship with nature, with other human beings as well as even with the individual human being himself/herself” (p. 225).

For Sindima (1995), *uMunthu* derives its life source from *moyo*, meaning life in Chichewa. Sindima conceptualizes *moyo* as the “foundation for everything there is” (p. 212), encompassing the cosmological, the biological, the material and the spiritual basis of existence. The transcendental purpose for *moyo* and *uMunthu* is to create community and societal structures that make it feasible for people to realize their full *uMunthu*.

Seen in this broad perspective, conceptualizing ‘peace’ as *uMunthu* enables a reflection that guides action for social justice and human security, embedded in our humanness, and becoming part of the continuous process of analysis. In understanding the indigenous concept of ‘peace’ and the historical events that have robbed Africans of their peace, African scholarship on the study of peace joins the body of work done by other peace scholars and researchers in other parts of the world.

From an African theological perspective, the identity of humanness and community are given by God, the creator (Musopole, 1994). It is an identity endowed with dignity and life. Part of the problems contemporary Africans are having to deal with are a result of a lost dignity and identity, a racialized dehumanization brought about by social circumstances human beings find themselves in, including the historical encounter between Africa and Europe. Europe brought to Africa a theology that claimed to be based on equality, yet in practice dehumanized Africans. Musopole argues that “It is false theology to claim that all people are made in the image of God and then live to oppress a whole people just because they were created black or women or because they did not discover and manufacture both guns and gunpowder in time to conquer and dominate” (p.175).

Musopole’s and Sindima’s respective conceptualizations of the spiritual rootedness of human identity offer a basis for reclaiming this lost dignity. It is a rootedness that also offers a vision of peace on the continent. Musopole points out that reclaiming the lost dignity is a reconciliation process: “In order to recapture our human dignity, integrity and wisdom, we do not primarily need an education; rather we need a reconciliation to our essential humanity. This reconciliation to our essential humanness is a process through which we get reconciled to the total universe” (p.178-9). Musopole is not necessarily dismissing the importance of education as it is understood in the modern sense, rather he is concerned with how educational constructs construe people as deficient, and as lacking in dignity, integrity and wisdom. Musopole is therefore suggesting that as human beings, we are endowed with dignity, integrity and wisdom, qualities that supersede education in the sense that everyone has these qualities and is therefore

not considered as deficient, as modern education tends to do. We lose these qualities when we begin dealing with social forces in the world around us. Musopole's view is supported by the Chichewa proverb *Lungalunga m'pobadwa, kuipa kuchita kudza*, meaning that on the day we are born, we come with an innocence that we lose, as we grow older.

Sindima (1995) views *uMunthu* in a similar way, extolling African intellectuals to “explore their world and capture the meaning of life and persons” (p.125). Sindima sees two reasons why this recapturing or reclaiming is important. First is the stopping or slowing down of the “erosion of loss of meaning of life now present in African society.” Second is the integration of “African values within the contemporary African socio-political situation” (p.125).

Sindima adds an ecological dimension to the concept of humanness. He points out that because the African universe is based on the totality of life, the meaning of life cannot be seen apart from nature. “Nature plays an important role in the process of human growth by providing all that is necessary, food, air, sunlight, and other things. This means that nature and persons are one, woven by creation into one texture or fabric of life” (p.126).

Sindima's ecological dimension to humanness echoes the work of environmentalists, who have recently gained recognition as part of the push for world peace. The most significant recognition so far has come from the Norwegian Nobel Committee in awarding the Nobel Peace Prize, for the first time in the history of the award, to an environmentalist, the Kenyan activist Wangari Maathai. In her acceptance speech upon receiving the prize, Dr. Maathai stressed the connection between the environment and peace:

The Norwegian Nobel Committee has challenged the world to broaden the understanding of peace: there can be no peace without equitable development; and there can be no development without sustainable management of the environment in a democratic and peaceful space. This shift is an idea whose time has come (Maathai, 2004).

The above views of humanness and community serve to situate peace in a context that allows for the recognition of the disruptions that have occurred in Africa, and how the pursuit for peace lies in recognizing the consequences of those disruptions.

An Africa-centered concept of ‘peace’ therefore allows for a historically-rooted inquiry into the contexts of contemporary problems Malawians and many other sub-Saharan Africans face. Problems of poverty, violent conflict, exploitation, and HIV/AIDS have been complicated by the alienation of the majority of Africans in the running of their societies and their day to day lives, a situation brought about by the perpetuation of governance structures put in place during colonial times, and maintained by a neo-liberal paradigm (Nyamnjoh, 2003; Prah, 1996; Sindima, 1995; Musopole, 1994). The period of colonization and imperialism especially in Africa changed the endogenous dynamics of defining ‘progress’ and ‘modernity,’ so that most African societies are now, according to Hizkias Assefa (1996) “caught in a tragic situation—they have given up much of what they were, but are unable to attain what they aspire to. No doubt this frustration will be a constant source of disruption, conflict and disillusionment at both the individual and societal levels” (p. 65).

### **Life writing and autobiography as peace praxis**

The discussion on life writing draws from patterns emerging from the narratives produced by and interviews conducted with the teachers who participated in the study. The first of these patterns is the political context under which the teachers in the sample went to school during the dictatorship of life president Dr. Kamuzu Banda. The second pattern is the violence, from peers, which these teachers were

exposed to, while growing up, at home and at school. Third is the socio-economic context of schooling during the times the participating teachers grew up in, followed by gender problems of violence in the schooling lives of the female teachers when they were students in secondary school. The fifth pattern is the psychological and structural violence the teachers report struggling against in their lives as adults, and as teachers. These patterns are anchored by attempts to define social justice and human security from the perspectives of the teachers' lives, as presented in their autobiographies and the interviews I conducted with them. Together, the injustices and insecurities experienced in the teachers' lives constitute an absence of individual and collective peace, which they view as requiring a promotion of the values of *uMunthu*, as it has been defined and explained above.

An important motivation for me to bring autobiographical perspectives into this study came from reading autobiographies by two Malawians who were at the center of the struggle for Malawi's independence from British colonialism. Henry Masauko Chipembere's (2001) autobiography *Hero of the Nation: The Autobiography of Henry Masauko Chipembere*, published posthumously, and Kanyama Chiume's (1982) *The Autobiography of Kanyama Chiume* filled me with a strong desire to learn more about how life writing perspectives merge with peace and justice, curriculum and pedagogy in educational contexts. Both Chipembere and Chiume foreground their educational experiences in different parts of southern and eastern African, demonstrating how their education opened up in them the awareness of the evils of colonialism for Africans. They each obtained university degrees in South Africa and Uganda respectively, in the mid-1950s, and returned to Malawi where they became actively involved in the efforts to secure independence for Malawi. Of particular interest to me was how their education equipped them to join the struggle for freedom and justice for their people.

It was for this reason that I put the two autobiographies on the list of readings for the writing institute phase of the study. All ten teacher autobiographies written by the participants, analyzed in the next chapter, were influenced, to some extent, by reading excerpts from the two autobiographies. That influence can be seen in how the teachers in the study also foreground their educational experiences, with some of the teachers, not all, tying their life experiences to the political atmosphere of the time they went to school.

Although they have not themselves published their own autobiographies, Jack Mapanje and Steve Chimombo, two of Malawi's most prominent writers and literary scholars, have spoken of the need for more Malawians to come forward with narratives of their experiences during the dictatorship. In numerous speeches and articles, Mapanje has pointed out he was able to survive his political detention without trial and come out alive after three and a half years, owing to the power of storytelling. He has talked of how he and fellow prisoners kept hope alive by sharing stories and folktales (Chimombo, 1999), and, for him, by keeping in mind that upon his release, he would turn his harrowing experiences into poetry and publish them. Arguing that other Malawians have their own experiences to tell, Mapanje (2002) has urged for the "orality of justice," the telling of stories by ordinary Malawians to counter those constructed by the dictatorial regime.

Adding to Mapanje's call, Chimombo (1999) has pointed out how words such as truth, reconciliation, forgiveness and healing will remain empty for as long as no attempts are made by artists to recount their experiences with repression going back to colonialism, continuing to the Banda dictatorship, to the postdictatorship era. Chimombo refers to his own personal experiences, saying "being a writer myself, I have been a victim too, in some form or other, of similar circumstances," adding that in his case the suffering has been more psychological than physical, compared to other writers and artists he lists as having suffered both physical as well as psychological violence during the Banda dictatorship (p. 85).

Chimombo observes that Malawian artists “have never been called upon to take stock of what they lost in their own career,” a statement that rings true even outside the arts. There are only a handful autobiographical accounts by Malawians, leaving the life writing terrain in Malawi acutely undertaken. An informative account of Malawi’s thirty years under dictatorship has come from a memoir by Fr. Pdraig O’Maille (1999), an Irish Catholic priest who worked in parishes and taught in the University of Malawi from 1970 until his deportation by the Banda regime in 1992. Titled *Living Dangerously: A Memoir of Political Change in Malawi*, O’Maille’s account of Malawi is a moving narrative offering a personal perspective on what went on inside Malawi as Malawi’s intelligentsia got arrested one by one, and how ordinary Malawians both colluded with the system and sabotaged it. I read *Living Dangerously* after I had already started writing up this study, but its account merged well with those of Chipembere and Chiume, writing much earlier. A few more autobiographies and memoirs are reported to be on their way, including one by Felix Mnthali, a professor of English who spent a year in political detention soon after O’Maille’s arrival in the University of Malawi. Mapanje, Chimombo and Catherine Chipembere, widow of Henry Masauko Chipembere, have also talked of their own forthcoming autobiographical accounts.

Two studies based on oral history techniques and focusing on lived experiences offer more insights into this project. Just before I left for Malawi in February 2004 I came across a book review of *Voices from Cape Town Classroom: Oral Histories of Teachers Who Fought Apartheid*. Written by Alan Weider (2003), *Voices from Cape Town Classrooms* portrays the lives of twenty South African teachers who were interviewed by Weider on their teaching and activism against apartheid. They were teachers who “were committed to their students both pedagogically and politically,” and whose teaching “promoted non-racialism, democracy, and the end of the apartheid system” (p. 6).

The other study, also an oral history project with teachers, is titled *Black Teachers on Teaching*, and was written by Michelle Foster (1997). Similar to *Voices from Cape Town Classroom*, *Black Teachers on Teaching* is also based on interviews with twenty teachers, whose real voices are presented verbatim, allowing “the narrators to speak in their own words” (p. xx). The teachers in Foster’s project ranged from elderly teachers now retired, to middle-aged teachers still teaching, to younger teachers just entering the teaching profession. Their experiences thus cover a whole range of historical and contemporary circumstances, including school desegregation and contemporary issues such as the standardized testing.

While the studies described above use life narrative and teaching, Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith’s (2004) study, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition*, looks at life narrative in contexts of injustice, violence, inequality and human rights abuse. The project by Schaffer and Smith uses five case studies, namely, South Africa, Australia, Japan, China and the United States to highlight the transformative role of life narratives in bringing to light human rights abuses in these countries. The study “explores how narratives that bear witness to suffering and impact differently upon dominant and marginalized, subaltern and outgroup communities, emerge in local settings that are inflected by and inflect the global,” effecting a range of practices and contradictions from enabling and constraining “subjects of narration” to the conditions under which “calls for recognition, response, and redress are mediated by the formal and informal structures of governments, politics, and culture” (p. 7).

The existing literature on the meanings and practices of *uMunthu*, peace and justice, life narrative and classroom teaching contribute to the four-part framework used in this study. From the above discussion, the existing literature on peace scholarship, life narrative, African epistemologies, curriculum and pedagogy, and the UNESCO project on a Culture of Peace all work towards an ideal that seeks social change as a transformation of existing conditions of inequality, injustice and structural violence. The four themes of the framework add to this ideal by emphasizing *uMunthu*, curriculum, pedagogy, and praxis as the key themes in the focus of this study. It is in this emphasis that the four-part framework contributes to

the prevailing views on peace, taking the scholarship on peace to another level where it becomes of practical relevance to people in need of a new peace paradigm.

### ***uMunthu* and autobiography**

A second practical significance and rationale for this research can be found in the cultural concept of '*uMunthu*,' the humanness and dignity of a person. As some of the teachers explained in the interviews, the problems of exploitation and injustice that teachers were working against in Malawi could best be addressed through the promotion of the concept of '*uMunthu*.' One particular teacher observed that '*uMunthu*' was something that both the home and the school needed to emphasize in order to prepare young people for a future in which problems of exploitation and injustice would be effectively prevented or decisively dealt with. The scholarship on *uMunthu* has been pioneered by theologians and religious philosophers, some of whom, like Harvey Sindima (1998), see *uMunthu* as standing for "basic values of human life, or that which gives human life meaning" (p.173). The dynamism of *uMunthu* is grounded in the moral agency characteristic of being a full human, giving people the recognition that "they can be agents of change when given a chance or when recognized as persons. To be recognized as a person is to have self-respect, or to realize self-determination" (p. 173).

As a philosophy of the essence of humanness, *uMunthu* sets itself apart from other definitions of humanness in that it sees the wholeness of human beings, rather than making distinctions between secularity and spirituality. Its core tenet is that a human being derives human identity from the community. Rather than the Cartesian individualist view of "I think, therefore I am," *uMunthu* posits that "I am, because you are," as Desmond Tutu (1999) observes in his memoir of his role in South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *No Future Without Forgiveness*. *uMunthu* therefore presents a framework devoid of the binaries and individualism found in other definitions of humanness. It has a breadth that subsumes under it the ideals of peace, social justice and human security.

The preceding discussion is an attempt to offer insights into how to utilize perspectives in *uMunthu*, peace and social justice to interpret the patterns emerging from the teachers' autobiographies and interviews. The intention is to take a closer look at how the patterns constitute a social justice and human security concern, derived from these teachers' lives. It must be stressed at this point that the terms social justice and human security are being used for the specific purposes of providing a broader framework in which to contextualize the social problems that the participants in the study wrote and spoke about. The terms are being used to highlight the need to privilege the stories and experiences of ordinary people, over the conventional usage of these terms in mainstream scholarship where they are reserved for state bureaucracies, international relations and military security (Vale, 2003; Bajpai, 2000; Hansen, 1988). The patterns discussed below emerge from autobiographies submitted by Likhaya, Mwalawo, Sakina, Mwandida, Mfuwo, Wembayi, Katchikolo, and Nduluzi, and from three separate interviews with Mwandida, Pinde and Nduluzi.

### **Brief profiles of participants who wrote autobiographies**

From my interviews with the participants, and from their autobiographies, I learned some details about each of them. For purposes of confidentiality and to protect their identities, I leave some of the details vague. For ease of description, I start with teachers from Chigwale School. Four teachers wrote autobiographies from this school, the biggest number of teachers who did so from any one school. They all participated in the writing workshop, which we carried out by meeting twice a week for three hours after school. At the time of writing, Mfuwo was in her late twenties. She was a Standard Five teacher, and came from the central region of Malawi. She was one of three female teachers at Chigwale. Likhaya, a male teacher in his mid-30s, was teaching Standard Three at Chigwale. He went to school in the city of Blantyre,

in the southern region, starting in 1974, and finished secondary school in 1989. He taught as a temporary teacher for a few years, and became a qualified teacher in 1992. Mwalawo, also in his mid-30s, was a Standard Seven teacher. Also from the central region, he started school in the southern region, before moving to the central region. He also taught as a temporary teacher first, before going to teachers' college in the early 1990s. Katchikolo was in his late twenties, and had just passed his teacher certificate examination when he became a participant in the study. Also from the central region, he was teaching Standard Eight at the time of the study.

Four teachers became participants in the study through the recommendation of curriculum specialists who had worked with these teachers in their schools, and had come to consider them to be national leaders. They did not participate in the writing workshop, as I only got to know them after the first writing institute had ended. Two of them came from and taught in the northern region. The third of these came from and taught in the central region, while the fourth came from the south but was teaching in the central region. Sakina was forty-seven years at the time of the study. She came from the northern region, where she had gone to school, and where she had taught for twenty-three years. Sakina did not participate in the writing workshop, so she did not read or view any of the materials used in the workshop. I learned about her from a national curriculum workshop where she was invited as one of the exceptional teachers in the country. Another exceptional teacher, Pinde, taught in a school in the central region, but had grown up in the south. Born in 1976, she was one of the younger teachers in the study. She was considered a national leader by curriculum specialists. She had attended several professional development workshops, and was actively involved in the curriculum reform project. Mwandida, the third teacher in this category, came from the north, and was at the time teaching there as well. She did her teacher training in the mid-70s, and at the time of the study she had taught for twenty-eight years. Nduluzi, the last teacher in this category, was in his mid-30s, and at the time of the study had taught for exactly ten years. Born in the southern region, he did his teacher training in the central region, where he was now a Standard Four teacher. Nduluzi participated in the writing workshop, after I learned of his participation in the national curriculum reform process. Wembayi, the ninth teacher to write an autobiography, grew up in the southern region. Aged forty-seven at the time of the study, he was a teacher at Medosi School, where he held a senior administrative position. He participated in the writing workshop, and read and viewed most of the materials used there.

Most of the participants mentioned some of these autobiographical details in their autobiographies, which shed some light on their views about *uMunthu*, peace and social justice in Malawian education. The discussion that follows below brings the patterns emerging from the autobiographies and the four-part thematic framework together. In the process the themes and the framework present the bigger story of perseverance, the politicization of teaching, the counterculture of marginalized voice, and a social critique of the teaching profession, that these teachers tell.

## **Themes from teacher autobiographies**

### The implications of schooling under a dictatorship

All the participating teachers who wrote autobiographies in the study were young and in school when Dr. Hasting Kamuzu Banda was life president of Malawi. Dr. Banda ruled Malawi from 1964 to 1994. There is a considerable amount of disagreement about Dr. Banda's rule, with many Malawians holding him as the visionary father and founder of the Malawi nation who built a strong foundation for the country. There are as many Malawians who argue that Dr. Banda's dictatorial rule suppressed freedoms that were necessary for the development of the country, and therefore Dr. Banda's rule did not prepare Malawi for the benefit of the majority of the population. For these teachers, going to school during the dictatorship meant having to deal with a specific set of challenges, some of them peculiar to the dictatorship, others peculiar to

Malawi's status as a newly independent, third world country caught in the geopolitics of the cold war (Barnes, 2005; Mapanje, 2002; Schoffeleers, 1999; Mhone, 1992).

The political nature of schooling under Dr. Banda's dictatorship and its effects on social justice and human security is illustrated in the narrative provided by Wembayi, a teacher in his late forties. In the year 1972, eight years after Malawi's independence and one year after Dr. Banda was declared state president for life, Wembayi was expelled from school, and banned from attending any school in the country. He was a standard 8 pupil at the time. What happened was that his seat in the class was directly below the portrait of the president, Dr. Kamuzu Banda. One morning the classroom opened to the discovery that somebody had desecrated the portrait by painting it and adorning it with sunglasses. "All the blame came to me. Because I was young, I was not arrested. . ." However the teachers were not prepared to close the case without somebody being punished, regardless of the absence of evidence. Wembayi writes that he was "suspended from school for good." He stayed home for two years, and then an idea came to him. He changed all his names and re-enrolled in a school some 15 miles away where no one knew him. He did well and was selected to attend a respected national secondary school.

Another illustration of the political nature of schooling under the dictatorship and its implications for social justice and human security can be seen in how attendance in school was mediated through the organs of the one and only political party in the country, the Malawi Congress Party, led by Dr. Banda. Likhaya, a teacher in his mid-thirties, saw this close at hand in his days as a primary school student.

Likhaya noticed the 'youth leaguers' in his very first grade. The youth leaguers were the youth branch of the ruling party. They came to sell party membership cards in the school. Everyone, starting with 4 year old children in Standard 1 up to the teachers was supposed to buy the annual party membership card, and have it in their possession at all times. School children who did not have money to buy the cards "were forced to go back home . . . classes and lessons were disturbed." The party chairperson in the said area would visit the school during assembly time before classes began, and order that any child or teacher who did not have the card leave the premises, and be allowed to return only after buying the card. Likhaya recalls being sent home from school because he did not have money for the party card.

The idea behind the party membership cards had originally been to raise funds for the party and use the money for development projects, but party leaders soon began using it as a means to assert control and instill fear of the party in the local population. Access to markets was based on possession of a current card, as was access to transportation such as public buses, and even to public hospitals. Students who lived in towns and cities where the president had one of his several state houses had more school interruptions than students in other areas. Likhaya lived in a township at the foot of the hill where the main presidential residence, Sanjika Palace, was built, and school had to be interrupted every time the president was leaving or returning to the palace, which was frequent. School children lined up along the street to wave at him as he passed by. Children, Likhaya writes in his narrative, "had to stand along the road the whole day with stick flags cheering the president."

Likhaya felt the repercussions of the dictatorship in another, more personal way. His father "stopped working and was arrested on political grounds." This forced his mother to leave the city and go to her home village, where they faced another set of problems. Because of the absence of his father, life was tougher. The village school was not as well equipped as the city school, a trend that continues in Malawi to this day (Susuwele-Banda, 2005). Although Likhaya does not provide details about his father's arrest, political detentions were common during the dictatorship, and many people were taken to jail and never charged with any crime. Some would just disappear into police custody and never be heard from again.

Even school rules were draconian, taking their cue from the political culture (McJessie-Mbewe, 1999). Likhaya writes that “when one failed to report for school in good time, he/she was likely to be punished severely. . . anybody who had no school uniform was sent back home; those who were not doing well in class were told to remain after classes and be punished, if a pupil was found making noise he/she was likely to be punished.” Mwalawo writes about having his hair pulled and his head knuckled by his Standard 1 teacher for not paying attention in class. In Standard 5 he was whipped with a hoe handle or a heavy stick for scoring less than fifty percent.

The examples above appeared ordinary and inconsequential as a pattern established through a dictatorial system that bred injustice and insecurity. On the surface, nobody ever questioned why even classrooms needed to hang the portrait of the president. While the idea in itself gave students an opportunity to see who the country’s president was, and how he looked like, in places where newspapers were not sold, in a country without national television, the fear that accompanied the presence of the picture in the room could only occur in a context in which people were kept under political control. Whoever decided to distort the portrait by adorning it with sunglasses and crayons knew they could not afford to be seen doing it. They obviously knew what offense they were perpetrating. It is unlikely the president ever came to hear about the incident, but the teachers and school administrators could not take chances. They knew that they had no option but to suspend someone, even when there was no proof that they committed the crime. Failure to be seen taking action could have been interpreted as condoning treasonous or seditious behavior.

The youth leaguers and their political leaders were known to be unsympathetic to anyone who did not enforce loyalty to the Life President. And loyalty to the president came in various forms, including buying the party membership card even for unborn children, and lining up along the streets to bid the president farewell as he left his palace, and to welcome him as he returned. Again, this included the youngest children in school. Thus the harsh punishments meted out to students for doing poorly in class were part of the same pattern in which corporal punishment was meted out as a prerogative of the government, of which teachers, at one level, were a part.

Taken together, the effect was a feeling of being personally beholden to the president, who in Malawi was called “Messiah,” as politicians referred to him at political rallies. Punishment was meted out in his name even for matters that did not constitute any criminality. Failure to act in accordance with these expectations would land one in trouble, in an oppressive system that thrived on fear. It is in this context that the above incidents, presented in the teachers’ autobiographies, are being understood as constituting social injustice, human insecurity and an absence of *uMunthu*.

### Peer violence

Four male teachers in the participating group write about herding cattle or goats after school, a preoccupation known in Malawi both for the qualities of perseverance and resourcefulness it teaches, and also the physical violence associated with it. Wembayi writes that he herded goats and cattle before he entered school: “Before I started school I was engaged in feeding goats and cattle until 1964 when I started school. . .” For Mwalawo, he would come home from school and proceed to herd goats without lunch. He writes: “At home sometimes I couldn’t get food. Therefore I walked straight to the goats’ khola where I opened them to the nearby dambo for grazing. This happened most of the times. While there with friends [. . .] we used to eat fruits. . .” Katchikolo’s account of life herding goats includes physical fights:

I used to go Dambo grazing my grandmother’s cattle with my friends after school hours. I enjoyed the life. It was the home of fighting, obscene language and stealing. People used to fight for no proper reasons and sometimes after the leader commanded. There was hardship to those who were not clever and didn’t like

fighting. Regardless of these things there were good things also like drinking milk, cattle riding and we were learning perseverance.

It can be argued that all young people are exposed to fights on the playground and in various places and contexts as they are growing up. The peculiar thing about herding goats and cattle in this context is that boys are forced to engage in a fight to determine who is stronger than the other, and the fight only comes to an end when the loser can fight no more. There is nobody to separate the two, and sometimes the loser surrenders after suffering great injury. It is not easy to draw out any detailed analysis of the effects of these fights on the young people, except to point out that they led lives that exposed them to gratuitous violence early in their lives. Katchikolo writes about challenging schoolmates to fights whenever he felt belittled, and being viewed as a belligerent student by his teacher. He writes: “At school I had many friends but I was easily getting angry and would fight whenever I collided with a friend, I didn’t want to look silly.”

Peer violence also occurred in school. Nearly all the teachers in the sample write about being bullied; being physically and mentally assaulted whilst in secondary school. Until a few years ago, the majority of secondary schools in Malawi provided full boarding facilities. Students would pack their suitcases, leave home, take a bus to secondary school and not return until the three-month school term was over. While promoting studious habits and concentration, this arrangement also promoted the practice of bullying, known to occur in many parts of the world. Commonly referred to as ‘teasing’ in Malawi, this assault is mostly reserved for Form 1 students (freshmen), or transfer students. It is experienced probably in all secondary schools in Malawi, including mission schools. Because it is widespread throughout the country, it is accepted as a normal rite of passage into secondary school, and school administrators do not do much to stop it. It therefore does not attract the kind of debate it ought to. There are known cases where a form one student has been severely injured as a result, sometimes becoming a criminal case.

Likhaya writes: “The Form Two students used to beat me without proper reasons whenever I met them. It was not only me; even the whole form one class was beaten by the form twos in a form of tease. The teachers were also cruel in the sense that they used to tell the form twos to tease us.”

In form two he and his fellow classmates decided that they would avenge themselves on the incoming form one class. So it was that one day Likhaya met a form one boy, and immediately started beating him up. Other form one students saw what happened and went to report to the head teacher. Likhaya was called to the office, and suspended from school. It took parental intervention for the suspension to be lifted for him to be allowed back in school.

For Wembayi, teasing started as soon as he disembarked from the bus carrying him to his new school. He was forced to carry three heavy suitcases, including his own, from the bus station to the school. He does not say how long the distance was, but it is known to be more than a mile, going up a mountain road. On the school premises he was made to fetch tap water from a distance of 20 yards filled with “obstacles”. It took him half an hour to cover that distance. “During our time teasing took only one week; after that no teasing. . .”

As we will see later in Mfuwo’s case, she was also teased, becoming an object of ridicule amongst other students because she carried her clothes in a bamboo basket rather than a suitcase. Fellow students made remarks about her family’s poverty, regardless of the fact, which they probably were not aware of, that her father was actually a wealthy man who was being manipulated by a jealous wife who was Mfuwo’s stepmother. Mfuwo writes that even her friends coming from the same village with her, and therefore probably aware of her father’s affluence, joined in the verbal assault. They immediately gave her a demeaning nickname, and at the end of the school term took the basket away and burned it. Mwalawo writes about being teased as a transferring Form 3 student, but does not go into details.

To enroll in school required paying school fees. It was not an exorbitant amount, but with the majority of Malawians earning their livelihood from cash crops and unable to afford mechanized farm tools to increase crop production, there were many households which were unable to send their children to school. As with Wembayi, his parents could not afford the amount for tuition fees, until the last minute when his father suddenly found employment.

The above incidents of physical and verbal violence, and economic deprivation are not unique to these teachers, let alone to Malawians, or even poor countries only. These incidents happen all over the world. Seeing them in a context of injustice and violence enables us an analysis that places them in the bigger picture of the breakdown of peace and *uMunthu*. They were allowed to happen because the general atmosphere obtaining in Malawi at this time encouraged gratuitous violence justified for purposes of political control. While teaching young boys perseverance and a work ethic, the fights that broke out during cattle and goat grazing for these young Malawians exposed them to physical and psychological violence from their more powerful peers, where physical fitness was valued more than the respect and dignity due to a human being, however young. While bullying in secondary school can be said to teach respect for age and authority, it is still violence, as it creates in students feelings of fear and vengeance. Likhaya writes in his autobiography that teachers in his school actually encouraged the practice, a situation that constitutes social injustice and human insecurity due to the power and authority implications involved.

#### Socio-economic contexts of schooling

To become teachers, these participants overcame access obstacles in a country whose age-appropriate cohort transition rate from primary school to secondary school is 18 percent, and from secondary to tertiary is 0.3 percent (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, 2004). The odds they overcame included hardship in finding tuition money and upkeep money while in school, as we already saw with Wembayi. This made it hard to concentrate on studies, and poor conditions in the schools made it difficult to create an atmosphere in which one participated fully and took advantage of the educational opportunities available.

In Wembayi's case, selection to a prestigious secondary school was one thing, finding the money to pay for tuition was another. He writes: "My parents did not have enough money for school fees. My father tried to find money from all sides in our neighbourhood but failed." He says there were relatives with money, but they did not desire to see him go to secondary school and become successful. ". . . My brother was also studying at [another] secondary and if I proceeded to secondary school our family would have been of higher standard."

His opportunity came one day when Wembayi's father found employment with a surveyor who arrived in the area to repair the road leading from a nearby military aerodrome to a lake. The money the father earned from the job was enough to send Wembayi to secondary school. Wembayi knew his family's poverty and decided that he would not ask them for upkeep money while in secondary school. He took his own initiative and looked for piecework from teachers in the school. He split firewood, and he slashed lawn grass. "I made my life simpler—moreover it was a boys' secondary school where I didn't care about anybody—I could stay without bath[ing] for five days—moreover Dedza is very cold."

For Likhaya, there were days when there was no money for soap, nor for school uniform. That meant being absent from school on some days. He walked long distances to school, and in the afternoon had to herd goats. There wasn't enough time to study and do homework. Poor preparation in the primary school meant poor chances of being selected to a good national secondary school. For many young Malawians,

this was the end of their educational career. Others persevered enough and went to what were then known as Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE) centers.

MCDEs were under government supervision like most other schools, but they were left to their own devices in terms of funding and admissions process. The teachers there were trained as primary teachers rather than secondary teachers, and were sent there to supplement the shortage of teachers. Thus student performance was always below that of proper secondary schools. However they were the only available alternative for a secondary education for the majority of young Malawians of secondary school age since national secondary schools up to the mid 90s accommodated only 11 percent of eligible students (Hauya, 1996, quoting Ministry of Education figures). Without the MCDEs, the only alternative was dropping out of school altogether. Because of the sheer numbers of the students who were not accommodated in secondary schools, the MCDEs did attract some students who were bright and hardworking, who had been left out of secondary school merely because of the small number of secondary school places available. Otherwise, some of these students in MCDEs were as good as their counterparts in secondary schools. But four years in a system with untrained teachers and virtually no government support did a lot to deny a better education for most of the young people who went there.

### Gender and life in school

For the female teachers some of the challenges they met in their schooling were related to gender problems. Sakina, a teacher from the northern region and in her late forties, writes that she saw more boys than girls finishing secondary school, a situation that threatened marriages, as many women were not as educated as the men. Sakina managed to finish secondary school due to her “assertiveness but also God’s plan.”

As a secondary school student, Sakina escaped attempts to rape her on the school premises, on two occasions. On both occasions she screamed, and somebody came to her rescue. The first time this happened a young man she estimates to be 20 years or so at the time heard her screams and when he appeared on the scene, the would-be-rapist ran away. The man advised her not to report the incident to teachers for fear that the teachers would disbelieve her story and suspend her from school. In the second attempt a reverend came to her rescue after her friend, another girl, ran away. The boy who attempted the rape was suspended for two weeks, and was later transferred to another secondary school. She writes that he did well there, and was selected to the university, a result she attributes to him having learned his lesson. Surprisingly, her friend who ran from the scene was herself was given a week-long punishment by the school for abandoning her friend instead of coming to her aid.

In Mfuwo’s case, a female teacher in the central region of Malawi, gender-related problems had an effect on her welfare as a student. Mfuwo’s narrative discusses family problems between her father and mother, which eventually led to her father leaving her mother, and marrying another woman. This created problems for her as her stepmother did not treat her kindly. “My stepmother was cruel. [Whenever] my father [went] away to Zomba my stepmother treated us badly.” It can be inferred that Mfuwo received this kind of treatment specifically because of her gender as a female child. On the day she started secondary school, her stepmother persuaded her father not to buy her a proper suitcase for her clothes, so she went to school with a bamboo basket. She became an object of ridicule amongst other students. “It means your parents are poor [sic]? Why have you carried a bamboo basket?” Even her friends who came from the same village with her joined in the ridicule. “My friend Zione said her parents are very rich, they can’t fail to buy her a luggage [sic].” Other friends said you couldn’t carry a basket bamboo to a secondary school, therefore they were going to burn it. Some said her parents were probably witches, and they gave her a nickname, “wasungwiyo”—the one with the bamboo. And they carried out their threat: “When we were about to close that term my friends [took] away my basket and [burned] it.”

School closed and she went home. Her stepmother asked her about the bamboo basket and she told her what had happened to it. Her school report came, and her father went to buy her a proper suitcase. Her stepmother's attitude toward her improved a little bit. "She roasted ground nuts, maize and meat for me to carry to school."

In her second year in secondary school her father divorced Mfuwo's stepmother and married another woman. "This woman was [more] cruel than the first stepmother." The new stepmother convinced Mfuwo's father that Mfuwo would never take care of him in his old age, therefore it was useless for him to pay her school fees.

Still Mfuwo went to school, but her father would not give her money for transportation. Instead, he would ask one of his employees, a watchman, to accompany her on foot all the way to the trading centre near the school. This was probably a journey of no less than 10 miles walking on foot. One day she queried her stepmother about why she gave her only one tablet of soap to last the whole school term. "Your father said if you don't want school [just drop out of] it. In future you are not going to assist him," was her stepmother's response.

In school there was a female teacher who took pity upon her and offered her some support. Mfuwo also came up with a plan that helped her solve the problem of insufficient laundry soap. She invited her schoolmates to give her their clothes for her to wash. They gave her soap, and she was able to wash her own clothes as well.

In her fourth year her father did not pay her school fees at all. The boarding mistress was kind enough to let her stay in school and used her influence to allow the cooks to give her food. On the days that the boarding mistress was not around, she had no food. A close friend of hers would bring her food to the dormitory and share it with Mfuwo. It is not clear whether she was able to sit for the secondary school leaving examination as her father refused to pay for the examination fees because "my step mother did want me to write MSCE (Malawi School Certificate Examination)." When she went to her father's place at the end of the school year "my father chased me away [saying I should go back] to my mother." She went to her mother's home.

The importance of the stories by Sakina and Mfuwo does not lie in the mere fact of their being female participants in the study. The stories can be located in a specific gender milieu in which Malawian girls, and many girls around the world for that matter, experience schooling (Department for International Development, 2005). For example, in any country, the local media is full of stories of schoolgirls coming under threats and risks of sexual assault. Students bully and tease each other all the time, with boys exhibiting aggressive behaviors especially towards girls. Parents get divorced all the time, sometimes exposing their children to social and emotional problems. However the fact that these threats and risks are commonplace does not preclude an analysis that views them as problems of social injustice and human insecurity. Addressing them, whether in Malawi or elsewhere in the world, increases the opportunities for girls to learn in an atmosphere more conducive to learning and future success.

In the case of Sakina above, a male student who rescued her from a rape attempt advised her not to report the issue, fearing that the school administrators "would not believe [me] and [would] suspend me in the end. Indeed I did not report." The fear of having her story discredited was not only real, it also speaks of an atmosphere of male dominance, gender injustice and insecurity. For Mfuwo, she saw the way her father treated her mother, and how a jealous step mother convinced his father not to provide for her schooling needs, on the belief that as a girl child, her education would not bear her father any future benefits. This is a common belief not only in Malawi, as a report by the British Government's Department for

International Development, DfID (2005), titled *Girls' education: towards a better future for all*, states: "Investing in sons, rather than daughters, is perceived as bringing higher financial returns for families as boys are more likely to find work and be paid a higher salary" (p. 16). In addition to the lack of support for her schooling, Mfuwo also found herself hungry and without food at times, as she now lived with her mother who had no means of supporting the family.

### The "torturing profession": Life as teachers

In their current lived experience, working and succeeding as a teacher involves overcoming contempt, disdain and belittlement, and denial of opportunities, from those in positions of power and influence. We have already noted that these problems are not peculiar to Malawian teachers; teachers and educators in other parts of the world also report similar problems besetting teachers. We have also noted that the fact these problems are commonplace is no reason to ignore them, or view them as not constituting a peace and social justice, human security or *uMunthu* concern.

Several of the teachers wrote and talked of being treated with disregard and disrespect by superiors in the schools, community and in the government. They wrote about being denied deserved promotions, being denied good housing, being exploited, and not being consulted on important decisions affecting their lives. They also talked of being denied opportunities for further education, and of being passed over for foreign study tours that usually go with attractive allowances paid for by the government. The teachers' descriptions of these issues are vivid and detailed. The teachers felt very strongly and passionate about these issues.

According to one teacher, Pinde, the teaching service commission of Malawi stipulates that if a teacher has gone for eight years without undergoing an interview for promotion, they should be awarded one. Sakina wrote of how it took 14 years before she could receive her first promotion, and another seven before the second promotion came. "Such things in my life have been very painful," she writes. She adds: "The profession which indeed is teaching became a torture," alluding to a saying common amongst Malawian teachers that the teaching profession should really be renamed the "torturing profession."

Mwalawo, a teacher in the central region, wrote about the four years he worked as a temporary teacher being taken off his record when he moved to another school. He wrote: ". . . my question up to now is where [have] the days I worked as a temporary teacher gone? Because I haven't received anything showing that I was on temporary." It is not obvious what he was supposed to receive as a temporary teacher, other than a salary, so it is possible that he was either unpaid for the 4 years he worked as a temporary teacher, or that those years should have counted in determining his new salary but they were not.

One month, the headteacher of his school withheld teachers' salaries for three days. In rural parts of Malawi where there are no banking facilities, teachers' salaries are brought to a central position, where head teachers from surrounding schools go and collect salaries for all their teachers. They then distribute the salaries to each teacher in the school. When the teachers at Mwalawo's school discovered that the head teacher had withheld their salaries, Mwalawo writes that the teachers "attacked" the headteacher. Mwalawo does not specify what kind of attack this was, although he mentions two teachers who physically fought in the head teacher's office as a result of the issue. Mwalawo's narrative alleges that the head teacher and his deputy were pocketing the salary of a 'ghost' teacher; a teacher whose name showed on the payroll when in fact there was no such teacher at the school. One teacher wrote a letter to the Anti-Corruption Bureau, a government agency dealing with official corruption, but by the time the Bureau responded, the complainant was dead. No explanation is offered for the cause of his death. This head teacher was later accused of making unilateral decisions without consulting his colleagues, as when he passed over Mwalawo for a house that was due to him. Instead, the headteacher offered the house to a female teacher who was

posted to the school to follow her husband who was going to teach at a nearby secondary school. When Mwalawo complained about this, he was transferred to another school, and was told to use his personal money as moving expenses. This was contrary to regulations because when a teacher is transferred to another school, the policy is that the district office will provide a vehicle to transport the teacher, his or her family and their belongings. “Why did the government not provide the transport? Anyway I only obeyed because the words were coming from the boss,” he writes.

At the new school, Chigwale, Mwalawo writes that he was given a warm welcome. However before long he started discovering that this school too had its own tensions. “The headteacher most of the time was commanding; he did not want to hear juniors’ ideas. Most of the times he was quarrelling with Mrs. [Unika] . . .,” and with the other teachers too.

Another teacher was about to come and join the teaching staff at Chigwale school. Mwalawo noticed that the new teacher was being given a better house than the one he had been allocated, yet he had come earlier. He went to see the school committee chairperson, “who authorized me to get into the house before the new teacher [arrived].” The head teacher reported the matter to the primary education adviser, who summoned Mwalawo and accused him of indiscipline. Mwalawo explained himself, and the issue was resolved.

Another teacher, Katchikolo, writes about going for several months without pay: “My life as a teacher became unbearable and we worked for five solid months [without] pay.” He developed a network of friends, which eased the problems for him, he writes. Because Katchikolo came to Chigwale as an untrained teacher, he faced another problem. The community did not hold him in high regard. “. . .we were being teased by qualified teachers as well as pupils even parents.” They were ridiculed as ‘aphunzitsi a poverty’ or ‘aphunzitsi a ganyu,’ in reference to the poverty alleviation program that the new multiparty government introduced, which had education as its main cornerstone. The belittling names they were called translate into “impoverished teachers,” a double entendre on the poverty alleviation program that recruited them, and their untrained status and suspect skills in the classroom. The government had introduced free primary education as soon as it won the elections in 1994, and recruited 18,000 untrained teachers to match the increased enrolment.

For teachers like Katchikolo these demeaning accolades were unwarranted. The headteacher at Chigwale, as well other teachers in the area and individuals in the area held him up as an exceptional teacher. As soon as I arrived in the area and talked to one retired teacher and the head teacher about my project, separately, they both announced his name as the most suited to what I was talking about. I was thus able to establish what a highly regarded teacher he is both in the school and in the community. At the end of the school year in 2004, Katchikolo was transferred to teach at a nearby day secondary school. In Malawi such a transfer indicates an official recognition of one’s efforts, and is regarded as a promotion. What this development tells us is that despite many teachers feeling demoralized and angry with the system, many teachers still work hard, and a few teachers do get noticed and rewarded. But there are still many teachers for whom that recognition takes years to come, and many others for whom it never comes. Each of the twenty-one teachers who actively participated in the study by granting me interviews, writing autobiographies, or participating in the discussions talked more about hardships than about rewards and recognition.

The problem Mfuwo writes about encountering on the job was ostracization. In 1997 she became a primary school teacher, after putting behind her the problems she encountered in secondary school and from her two consecutive stepmothers and their corrupting influence on her father. She reported at her new school and found that the teachers were not interested in having her enter their classrooms. “When I reached the school, teachers didn’t want [me] to be their partner in class, for how I was looking.” She

would go to the school everyday and spend the whole day in the headteacher's office. She does not explain what it was about "how I was looking" that made the other teachers refuse to let her into their classrooms as a partner. It is possible that she is referring to her young age, or perhaps to not being well-groomed due to lack of support from her father and stepmother. The headteacher convened a meeting and warned the other teachers that he would send her back to the district office and report to the district education manager. This would mean the school losing a much-needed teacher on their staff. A Standard 4 teacher volunteered to have her in her class. This teacher became her mentor and taught her how to teach, supervising her teaching and offering her feedback.

A more comprehensive and thorough account of problems teachers face on the job, all of them having to do with the conduct and attitudes of superiors in the administration hierarchy, comes from Pinde, a female teacher from the central region. I interviewed Pinde in her school. It was a warm sunny late morning, and the teachers were preparing for a staff meeting. The headteacher gave her permission to miss the staff meeting. It was the last week of the second term, and there were no classes being held that week. We entered a classroom and through the windows I could see the full view of Dedza Mountain and its green, tall, leafy blue gum trees in the distance.

At the time of the interview Pinde was a 28 year-old teacher. A curriculum specialist who had worked with her recommended her to me as one of the finest teachers in the country. This opinion is supported by the frequency with which she is invited to the numerous workshops where the new primary curriculum is being planned and developed. I attended one such two-week workshop and saw her address an audience of about 130 people. The audience comprised directors of departments in the Ministry of Education, in the Malawi Institute of Education and the Malawi National Examinations Board, senior education officials in the country's six educational divisions, international resource persons from Kenya, Zambia, South Africa, Germany and the United Kingdom, and fellow classroom teachers. I talked to her and a group of other teachers invited to another workshop at MIE about my project, and explained to them the autobiography part of the study. After two weeks she confessed that she did not have the time to respond to the questionnaire, but could find time to grant me an interview. I traveled to the central region, obtained permission to interview her from the district education manager's office, and interviewed her for three hours on Thursday, July 22, 2004.

Pinde divided problems that teachers face in Malawi into three categories: poor teacher education, poverty, and injustice. Because most primary school teachers in Malawi are poorly educated, they generally have to work extra hard to attract respect from their superiors. The lack of opportunities for professional advancement means poor remuneration, which demotivates many teachers. The overall impression created out of these experiences is injustice and psychological violence on teachers.

The problem she saw with teacher education was that the majority of Malawian teachers are poorly trained. She had an example for me. That week her school had received visitors from Canada, and one of them was training to become a teacher. She observed that there was a huge difference in the amount of time it took to train a teacher in Canada as compared to Malawi. The short amount of time it takes to train a teacher in Malawi was contributing to problems that teachers were facing, she said.

Most teachers are not adequately educated. If they trained well . . . for example the current program . . . it's very difficult to build a teacher. There was a group of North Americans here; one of them is training to become a teacher. They came from Canada. They just left, we said farewell to them yesterday. They were right here. The teacher candidate is in her fourth year. To become a teacher in Canada, it takes six years. While here at home, our teacher training is very hurried, forgetting that this person who is going to teach, is being relied upon to handle the lives of over a hundred children. In our class we have 111. The way I have been trained, to handle 111 lives, is unhelpful. It means all those 111 lives are damaged. And it only takes one year. How about next year? How about by the time I clock 25 years, how many lives have I damaged?

Calculate . . . 25 multiplied by 110. They don't think about this, that these people we are training will handle lives. Many lives, more than in the hospital. And by the time one retires. . .

The poor training results in teachers who fail to do their job, who are unable to improvise and adapt the teachers' guides to suit their style and the needs of the students.

The teachers' guide is written by human beings. Sometimes you notice things that are not helpful for these particular children. Sometimes you see that the level of the textbook and the level where my children are, are not compatible. But it requires your own intelligence to understand that. Otherwise you will just go with the book. Which is better, covering the textbook and the syllabus, when a child has not understood a thing, or leaving the textbook unfinished, even if you only go as far as page 15, but the children have understood? I am asking you. Which is better?

Pinde suggested that teachers be educated in a more comprehensive way. She pointed out that teachers should be taught how to interpret the teachers' guide. "I went to teachers' college for one year. But as far as learning how to handle the teachers' guide, I should not lie, I have learned this after I returned from college. People used to laugh when I told them I had never seen a syllabus before."

She observed that the work of teachers would greatly improve if teachers were taught how to carry out research on their teaching:

small scale, not the research you know, but still being able to investigate something on his/her own, things would be well. But we don't even know. If I have been able to carry out investigations it is when I was part of the continuous assessment project. That's when I investigated children's behaviors. But previously, if I did it, I didn't even know it. I don't recall that I ever did anything resembling research. So a teacher ought to be taught to research things on his/her own, it can help him/her. Because right now we rely solely on the guide. Without the guide, that theme won't be taught. Why? Because teachers' education is inadequate. Even if you gave the guide to an untrained teacher, do you think he/she can deal with it? I don't think so.

The next problem teachers face on the job that Ms. Pinde identified was poverty. "There are several types of poverty," she said, identifying material poverty as the one that affected teachers the most. She described material poverty as lacking "things necessary in life," saying that this kind of poverty "brings another kind of poverty." She said one was

always worried about the first poverty. But some people can work very well. Imagine I come to school in the morning. I am well prepared to teach, but once here my thoughts turn to home. What will my children have for lunch? We are failing to even afford the basics, like bathing soap. If the money was enough to enable one buy food enough for everyday of the month, I would still be worrying of course, but not too much. What happens is that the salary is not enough even for food alone for the month.

There were ways in which poverty affected teaching and eventually society, creating a context for what in this study constitutes social injustice and human insecurity. Ms. Pinde said:

The quality of teaching suffers. Sometimes you just give them notes instead of engaging them. That contributes to poor performance, and affects their future. Eventually the children end up failing in life. Once they fail to continue with school, that's it. If they are boys they marry after standard 8. And they marry women who themselves didn't go to school. The children born in such a family are themselves disadvantaged from the start. The child may be bright, but the home conditions may affect his/her school performance.

The third problem that Pinde pointed to was injustice. She observed that teachers were being oppressed, and they were losing their interest in the process. "Interest goes away, and you lose direction. You don't see where you are headed in the profession. What I mean is that there are teachers who have worked for several years. They have never received a promotion. Do you think that teacher can work with motivation? Twelve years?" Pinde defines injustice in similar ways to Sakina. Both of them cited denial of promotions

and opportunities for advancement. “I think there’s someone up there who just likes to oppress others. Because the stipulations are that after eight years one ought to be promoted, if there have been no interviews in between. But here we go up to twelve years; even fifteen.”

She sees the injustice visited upon Malawian teachers as stemming from the lack of appreciation for the humanity of other human beings. When one is able to appreciate and respect others, one is said to have ‘*uMunthu*,’ a concept that is used quite commonly in Malawian discourse, and which carries with it a tradition of philosophical and theological scholarship, pursued by a number of Malawian and southern African intellectuals, theologians, religious leaders and public figures. Pinde spent a considerable amount of time giving examples of what ‘*uMunthu*’ was, and pointed out that it needed a combination of cultural upbringing and educational opportunity for one to develop ‘*uMunthu*.’ Many of the education officials at the district, division and ministry levels were better educated than most teachers, but there were those in their midst that had not developed ‘*uMunthu*,’ and therefore did not regard teachers as people worthy of dignity and deserving of opportunities:

Ethical responsibility is not the responsibility of the school alone. ‘*uMunthu*’ starts at home. *uMunthu* is when you can do things that make other people say you are a human being; you have certain characteristics that make you a human being; to listen to what other people say; to associate with other people, elements like those are what make a human being. And there are times when ‘*uMunthu*’ disappears. And somebody becomes a thug. And these forces can have nothing to do with education. A person can be highly educated, but have no ‘*uMunthu*.’ I have heard of what goes on at Chancellor College (University of Malawi). Those people are educated; the conditions for them to be educated are there. But some of them have no *uMunthu*. So this *uMunthu*, as a teacher you can do your best, but the environment at home can cause *uMunthu* to disappear. Those students at Chancellor College, when they go home, they are good kids. Once they leave home and go to school the environment in the schools makes it easy for their *uMunthu* to take leave of them, and they are like wild animals. Education is one thing, *uMunthu* is another. Intelligence is one thing, *uMunthu* another. Some bosses are very bright. When they make a decision, everyone admires their capability. But tell them there’s a funeral at home, they tell you ‘you can’t go.’ That’s about *uMunthu*. They have the intelligence, but not *uMunthu*. Because with *uMunthu*, I can’t tell my boss I have been bereaved, and the boss denies my request to take leave and go. You ask for an office vehicle to help in the funeral proceedings, and they say no, the vehicle is being used for other purposes. That’s lacking *uMunthu*. So intelligence and *uMunthu* are different. Some people are very intelligent but their *uMunthu* is nothing.

Another teacher who also had elaborate comments on *uMunthu* was Nduluzi. Nduluzi’s comments on *uMunthu* address specific abuses directed at him by his superiors, especially during his participation in curriculum development workshops. He writes about his views being subjected to scrutiny and ridicule with specific reference to his not possessing a university degree. Like Pinde, Nduluzi’s views about *uMunthu* are derived from knowledge that is expressed by ordinary Malawians, without recourse to highbrow intellectual theorizing:

*uMunthu* is an act of doing something for anybody as you would want anybody to DO the same for you. Usually the *uMunthu* act has self-giving and a total equalization of somebody’s being, by way of valuing and looking at somebody as a human being. It does not emphasize who this person is, who is this, *kodi akuchita ngati ndani*....*Akufuna akhale ngati ndani ameneyi*....*Kodi kamwana kameneka* [who do does he think he is. . . this little child]

*uMunthu* is self-realized in very few people. Many do not have *uMunthu* qualities. Usually those practicing this mentality do not themselves realize that when somebody’s being is realized and valued, that particular person reaches his or her full potential.

The majority of people do not realize that every person has the potential. The duty of the so called superior, or those in the know, should be to construct meaning by not deliberately ignoring the obvious potential. My recent reference has been “*Osaphunzira ameneyu, akufuna kungochita dominate . . .* [this one is uneducated . . . he just wants to dominate. . .] Surely, do statements like these give a taste of *uMunthu* by the executor? Usually if it is my contribution or my submission. It is viewed as an act of dominance by an uneducated person who wants to impress.

In education, the uMunthu way of teaching is noticed when equal opportunities are provided for all learners regardless of their abilities in class. It becomes the teaching of valuing learners' potential with efforts directed towards the letting of the learners to advance their thinking while the teacher constructs this through meaningful deliberations.

In Malawi, especially those that assume a reality of responsibility because of position or education, more often assume that those not in similar positions are chuff. It is usually very difficult in certain circumstances to be believed or be taken seriously. If you, the less educated, are placed to have access to latest information for public consumption and benefit, you are gagged not because what you are saying is not true but simply, "who is he?" The uMunthu way is to be able to take issues and information as it comes.

Nduluzi goes on to list names of his superiors who have been an exception, and have been respectful to him, acknowledging his contributions, and treating him as an equal.

All these, at one time or many times, provided me opportunities to participate in high level science gatherings both in Malawi and abroad. In such meetings instead of being treated pathetically, I was treated equally just like anybody else and I was referred to as a primary school science teacher. This reference gave me an opportunity to participate and contribute as "an expert" within my scope of knowledge regardless of the level, status and where I operate. I have even managed to publish in science journals and participated in high level research work internationally. Remember there is no such a title as a primary school science teacher in Malawi. But I guess this was an emphasis done towards the validation of my ability. In my own work place I hardly get this reference. In fact it is usually the "focus" that drives me to forge ahead and not get obsessed with what I face. The environment is hostile and, coupled with my frequent visits abroad, some people think this comes on a silver platter; but it is not the case.

There are challenges to overcome and my now greatest motivation has been to be referred to as OSAPHUNZIRA [uneducated]. This has been a driving force of late. It is important to realize that uMunthu takes many forms in beings but its outcome is the same.

### **Triumphs and challenges**

The above stories portray a picture in which we see the lives of the teachers in various contexts, dealing with issues of social injustice and human insecurity. The teachers portray their lives in contexts that are personal, political, economic and historical. In this sense, the teachers' stories constitute a life history (Goodson, 1991). In presenting these stories alongside developments in the social, political and economic arena, we understand these stories as not depoliticized and cut off from the wider social context, but rather as constructing a counter-culture in which teachers voices, themselves a "historically marginalized" group, can be heard (p. 15). The larger story these narratives tell conveys simultaneous complicity with and subversion against an oppressive system. The theme of perseverance is mentioned several times by some of the teachers. The contextualization of these teachers' lives shows a political awareness of their surroundings, as it constructs a "counter-culture" against a system that silences teachers' voices (p. 10). The teachers voices amount to an indictment against the oppressive and dehumanizing elements of their profession, with one teacher calling it "torture" as we saw earlier.

### **Complicity and subversion**

The stories portray instances when Malawians are being complicit with an unjust system, and times when they are also being subversive against the system. We see them at times as helpless victims of political repression, yet we also see them coming up with initiatives to survive the injustice. In Wembayi's story, there is no one standing up for truth and justice when he is expelled from school and banned from attending any school in Malawi. The teachers in Wembayi's school serve as tools of the ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1971; see Chaunfrault-Duchet, 2004), punishing a student on behalf of the state, in the absence of evidence linking him to a crime one could argue did not deserve such harsh punishment.

Yet we see Wembayi subverting the oppressive system by changing his name and re-entering the system to rise to the position of deputy headteacher (principal) of an important school. It was very easy for Wembayi to simply quit school altogether and forfeit the opportunities an education affords one in Malawi. We see how ordinary Malawians became agents of state injustice also in the way organs of the single ruling party, especially local chairpersons and members of the youth league, terrorized school children and teachers for not possessing the party card. We saw how some students laughed at one another for being impoverished, and how they inflicted physical and psychological violence on each other as a rite of passage.

### **Perseverance**

The accounts by all of the teachers who wrote autobiographies and granted interviews have a strong perseverance theme in them. We see perseverance in the story of Mfuwo, who could have easily given up on schooling, given the pressure from her two consecutive stepmothers, the neglect from her father, and the abuse from fellow students. We see teachers who came to the rescue of students in desperate need of help, such as the boarding mistress who allowed Mfuwo to receive food provided by the school, despite her not having paid the boarding fees. We also see a friend who shared her food with Mfuwo when the boarding mistress was not around.

Wembayi persisted in the face of state-sponsored banishment, making it to secondary school, and becoming a deputy school principal. Mwandida wrote about enrolling in a correspondence course and obtaining a diploma in education. When she approached the ministry to upgrade her records and award a promotion, she was told that the college she obtained the diploma from was not recognized officially. “I got so shocked and gave up studying but now I regret and I have learnt that it’s good to persevere no matter what problems you face” (emphasis in original). Sakina expresses similar sentiments, writing: “I have learned to grow up and never give up on problems. They can always end.”

### **New framework for uMunthu, peace and social justice education**

We see these teachers reaching back to the recesses of their childhood memories to construct a life story narrative that recalls important events in their lives growing up. For people who never considered themselves writers, their ability to produce a personal narrative that includes the history and socio-economic context of the society in which they grew up points to the potential for auto/biographical approaches to professional development for teachers (Chanfrault-Duchet, 2004; Tripp, 1994; Sparkes, 1994).

The four-thematic framework contributes to the development of an African peace epistemology in a number of ways. The first theme of peace as *uMunthu*, the humanness and dignity of a person, formed and defined by the community of human beings, characterizes the ideals that the teachers in the study aspire to, and whose erosion represents the contexts of the problems the teachers reported encountering. An analysis of the problems opens up patterns consistent with a desire for the promotion of the humanness and dignity of a person, to address the prevalence of structural violence, namely, social injustice and human insecurity. The narratives produced by the teachers come out of this analysis, and ground the ideas about Malawi’s history and contemporary society held not only by Malawians in general, but by teachers as well. This analysis exposes the need to contextualize Malawi’s problems of structural violence in a peace and justice context, understanding them through the autobiographical writings and the classroom experiences of the participating teachers. This contextualization leads to the second theme in the framework, issue-driven curricular topics about peace, and provide a better understanding of narratives of social injustice and inequality, and of the educational needs of Malawians. Coming from the teachers’ own lived experiences, and from their classroom experiences, the curricular topics present a pedagogical imperative, the third theme in the framework. At the pedagogical level, the framework becomes a guide to

action and reflection for social transformation, by teachers and other educators, towards peace. This action and reflection makes up the praxis that is the fourth theme of the framework.

### Future research

While participants wrote their draft autobiographies in the dissertation study, the design of the study did not allow for the amount of time needed for a follow up consultation process with the participants to clarify ideas and revise their narratives. Nor did the design allow for a process in which the participants would begin exploring the relationship between their autobiographical life writing, and their pedagogical practices in the classroom, school and community. For future research, it would be important to follow up on this consultation process with participants to see their narratives to a satisfactory end, with revisions, editing, and even some form of publication. This would entail working with the teachers to revise and edit their autobiographies, and to explore the relationships between their narratives and their teaching for peace and social justice.

Due to the small number of participants, the study is incapable of making generalizable conclusions. There is therefore a need for a broader, longitudinal and representative study in which typical teachers would have a chance of being selected for the study. The participants in this study were drawn from primary schools. For a more comprehensive peace education framework, a future study would need to include secondary school teachers, as well as teacher educators and other officials in the education system other than practicing teachers. These would include students, student teachers, and educators such as primary education advisers, district and division level education administrators, and administrators at the ministry headquarters level. Such studies would help provide a better understanding of the hierarchical nature of the social injustices at different levels, and the perceptions of social injustice by individuals at those levels.

Studies of this type, focusing on other groups in the educationist community, would have as their aim the integration of *uMunthu*, peace and social justice in the curriculum and in pedagogical practices. The observation by Musopole (1994) that the education system emphasizes “intellectual knowledge for its own sake” (pp. 2-3) and in the process devalues the *uMunthu* of learners, leading to what Sindima (1995) calls the “crisis of people’s identity and rupture of society” (p. 196) needs to be taken seriously in reconceptualizing curricular content. This calls for more studies that merge the various understandings of what constitutes *uMunthu* and how it can provide an endogenous framework for the revitalization of society in its various spheres, including education, politics, economics, the judicial system, and religious life. At the conceptual-content level, it is also worth paying attention to Zeleza’s (1997) call for the school curriculum to be aligned with advances made in the study of Africa, and of Malawi in this particular case (Dzama, 2003). This would mean more evidence in the curriculum of the inclusion of the scholarship on *uMunthu* by the likes of Musopole (1994), Sindima (1995, 1998), Chigona (2002) and others. It would also mean deliberate efforts to promote the writing and publishing of autobiographies, to build on the tradition established by Chipembere (2001), Chiume (1982), O’Maille (1999), Chipembere (forthcoming), Chimombo (forthcoming), and Mapanje (forthcoming). The political and historical contexts of these works would enhance and support other scholarly projects on Malawi’s recent colonial and post-independent past (Englund, 2002), Schofeleers (1999) (Tambulasi and Kayuni, 2005), and many others.

At the policy level, there is need for a discussion and examination of the teacher education curriculum at the pre-service and in-service professional development levels. The discussion on what constitutes policy will need to demystify the top-down notion of decision-making, to recognize how daily teaching and learning practice and local knowledge are an important part of policy formulation. This will entail a healthy balance between learning from other parts of the world and learning from the suppressed knowledges of endogenous Malawian and African values and experiences.

When I set out to begin conceptualizing this project, little did I know that I would be inducting myself into several disciplines that have seemingly nothing in common amongst each other. In the process, I have learned how to utilize a trans-disciplinary framework that puts the endogenous epistemology of *uMunthu*, the elements of peace and social justice, and auto/biography as a methodology, at the center of educational practice. Whatever the shortfalls of the study, and my shortcomings in carrying it out, I see myself as taking on the challenge by Achebe (1965) to espouse a revolution, to put away the years of denigration and self-abasement, and heal the wound in the soul of Africa.

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