

MEMORIAL SERVICE & CAMPAIGN AGAINST VIOLENCE

TRANSFORMING VIOLENCE

IN

THE UNIVERSITY TO THE CULTURE OF PEACE- A MISSION POSSIBLE?

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While this day is yet another lamentation, it can be turned into a therapeutic gathering and a recommitment by peace-lovers to work tirelessly to transform violence in this university into the culture of peace. Even if it could be agreed that peace is needed, there are key issues to consider.

When we cry against violence at the university what are we lamenting at, what are we worried about, what exactly is it that we condemn? Are implying that there is no peace, if yes what do we mean by peace? Contrary to the widely held view that peace is an absence of war, it is a harmonious interaction of otherwise different parts of the whole. When Mosotho says “Ka u lotha ka majoala a mabeli ka nkhang e le ‘ngoe...” philosophises peace and if you are able to respond to that question “ke methoebe e ‘meli ea lehe ka khaketlaneng” without prior knowledge then you understand peace.

Difference bontate le bomme, makes us as human beings. Diversity does not only make world but we as the nation too. But what is violence? One of the most appealing conceptualisations of violence is an import from the theorisation of violence triangle; cultural, direct and structural violence by (Galtung, 1990:80), from which Harris (2003:15) defines direct violence as physical or verbal abuse, or threat of abuse by one party to another and refers to structural violence as maintenance of dominance of one group at the centre of power over another at the periphery within structures set to maintain that kind of skewed balance and asymmetrical power relationship. Structural violence therefore, as Barash (1991:8) argues, is a built-in within social and cultural institutions (and perhaps political institutions as well) denying participation in own government, limiting freedom of expression, determining how to raise family, how children grow up, how to play, etc. If we were to apply this conceptualisation of violence to our university what would be our description of the situation here?

Clearly the death of Tumelo Mohlomi, the death of Matšelis Thulo, a student struggling to recover sight after sustaining eye injury, a case of an employee who suffered the similar injury, protesting students beaten severely on the streets as they were dispersed, all these and others made by the trained and legally armed. Besides these cases of a student who sustained 7 knife wounds, a student still struggling at the hospital after being stabbed on the spine at Ha Sekaute and many similar cases which can come to mind, remind us that university is not only insecure against the police but community too. At one incidence students were beaten by members of Lesotho Defence Force in campus because students insulted or verbally abused them. This is called direct violence and as we have already heard there has been official explanation why they all these happened. How does university make its decisions affecting students, to what extent are they involved? Or is it the exclusionist approach which government is preaching that students should not get involved in the NUL-Government fee discussion? In this approach we are creating a cadre of leadership that knows nothing but violence either direct or structural as a way of dealing with differences. Should we teach our students that if someone insults you, the response should be beating? Every other day we hear politicians uttering inflammatory, antagonistic, arrogant, provocative, abusive and false statements against one another, should the response be beating? Clearly we must use this sad moment to turn things around. We need a culture of peace but what is it?

A culture of peace has been defined as *‘a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations* (UN,1999: Resolution A/RES/53/243, Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace). We should teach students that failure of NMDS to pay on time is not a license to violence. We should help students realise that violence does not solve problems but complicates them, blocking roads is criminal and disrespectful and destroying property is barbaric and uncultured, something to be associated with university students especially from typical Basotho families. In fact violence is an attraction to the intellectually bankrupt.

For illustration the table below compares the practice and the proposed culture of peace in handling public affairs. It illustrates culture of peace by comparing it with culture of violence.

Main characteristics of the two cultures

CULTURE OF VIOLENCE	CULTURE OF PEACE
Belief in power based on force	Belief in dialogue to resolve conflicts
Having enemies	Tolerance, solidarity, understanding
Authoritarian governance	Democratic participation
Secrecy and propaganda	Free flow of information
Armament	Disarmament
Exploitation of people	Human rights
Exploitation of nature	Sustainable development
Male domination	Equality of women and men
Source: (UN: 1999)	

If we agree to peace let us agree to deal with the situation in this university collectively, let us not hear government saying students are not involved yet they are victims, let us not hear government and university seeking to snatch public sympathy by using media to explain how one is bad and how smart the other is. Let students declare that it would not be violent physically and let the political authority pronounce publicly that police and all the security agencies shall find alternative means to deal with riots, let all the parties convene even if that could be with the assistance of civil society to re-establish, what are the issues of convergence and what are the areas of divergence, seek ways of dealing with them and jointly announce to the nation what the way forward is. The fact that the police who killed Tumelo is before the law, is a very strong message to the nation, but it can actually be seen as a determination to subject the armed to the civilian rule if all those who took life in uniform can face justice.

As civil society we are ready to work with the university on the broader issues turning this violence into the culture of peace.

To the Tumelo family, the pearl has fallen and many good images you had for future dashed. Take courage that not even a single statement has been ushered

against Tumelo. On the list of unanswered questions you might be asking, such as your already wet appetite for graduations, your eagerness to see your daughter in the university convocation among graduants, refer to the encounter where God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son, the one he had at a very old age. To many questions that came to his mind and those asked by Isaac, Abraham said “God shall see for himself” and indeed He saw for Himself. To you we say if you dedicate all the worries, concerns and issues and ask Him direct questions you shall in the silence of faithful prayer hear the message that God shall see for Himself and indeed “ MORENA O TLA IPONELA”.