Homo Novus:
Learning to Being Renewed

An Intercultural Motif for Educational Transformation

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Abstract

This contribution anchors the topic of transformative education in the discussion of human renewal. It posits that transformative education can only be perceived as an endeavour that encompasses the whole human being and the potential of humans to change and to adopt different perspectives on seeing and being in the world. The motif of the new human being (*homo novus*), as per the argument presented, can serve to develop a meaningful conceptual and praxis-related framework for education. Especially when considered against the background of the debate on education serving the establishment of communities of belonging across cultures, in which ethics and values can be lived and probed.

1. Introduction: Seeing beyond the small worlds

When we were at school, our world seemed so small. We took the same itinerary, walking the same paths together with a group of friends, over and over again. We knew everyone, and everyone knew us. The sensorial impressions we gained in those years – the ripe mango fruits fallen from the trees we collected by the wayside, the scent of the black-eyed pea stew during our recreational breaks, and the houses of our neighbourhood we passed by left indelible marks on us. They undoubtedly shaped the way we see and are in the world today. Thus, ours was a small world, because it was the one we knew.

Yet, at the same time, it was a gateway to a much larger horizon that opened up before us: we were enabled to see the world around us, the people and the natural elements, and the bonds we established between them, as part of our own existence and becoming.

We realised even before having been taught about it formally, that the world we saw around us was not limited and exclusive, but indeed connected to other worlds, people, manners and conditions of living, beyond the one we knew. Simultaneously, it dawned on us that what we saw and what we learned inside and outside of school was much larger and more profound than the empirical world around us. It was not yet clearly defined, yet palpable in our conversations and shared dreams about who we wished to become in life, that it was also about our imagination – about the world we could not yet see, but hoped for.

This vignette on a youthful appropriation of the world by way of seeing, being and longing in the world may serve as an entry point for the discussion of the theme this contribution endeavours to undertake. It poses the question of education afresh from the specific vantage point of transformation. The thesis I would like to investigate consists in the presupposition that transformative education cannot be limited to a didactical framework nor to an educational objective or 'catalogue', but requires to be understood from within the emotive, intellectual, spiritual and ethical potential of human beings, their evolution in relation to their

neighbours and to the environment. Only from such a holistic perspective that encompasses the capacities of humans to renewal through the encounter with others, transformative education gains its full meaning.

Obiora Ike's biography and academic *oeuvre* is rooted in such an understanding of transformative education. Grounded in the conviction that humans find their purpose in responding to the gift of their life and to the 'givenness' of the world, both at the same time, and in holding these two dimensions in creative tension, he pursued his own career as an educator committed to transformation in the fullest sense of the word.[1] The following reflections are dedicated to his educational vision across continents, cultures, languages and worldviews that inspires those, like me, who have the privilege to work with and learn from him. His is the vision of a world that can be transformed because of the meaningful alliances people in all regions build for the good of all. He is generous in sharing his wisdom, spiritual profundity, and intellectual curiosity, his passionate and relentless motivation to see the good in others, and to believe that the good – however veiled it may be in the shadows of our realities – can be brought to the fore and effect the changes our world in peril requires.

2. How education points to human existence beyond oneself

The etymological origins of the word education in Latin, *educare*, signifying 'leading out', provide a propitious background for framing an intercultural transformative education. If the educational experience and journey is essentially one that 'leads out' of the habitual empirical, cognitive and imaginative terrains, it requires an appropriate description of how humans are engaged in this journey.

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[1] See, *inter alia*: Obiora F. Ike/ Chidiebere Onyia (Eds.). 2018. *Ethics in Higher Education. Foundation for Sustainable Development,* Globethics.net Education Ethics 2, Geneva: Globethics.net.

Regardless of the worldviews which determine anthropological paradigms, there is a large consensus that human life and existence is contoured by the relationships humans engage in the course of their lives. Human existence is intimately tied with the experience of being in relationship with others and appropriating oneself the world, from the youngest age, through the lens of these relationships. This relational human experience is not only limited to relations with other humans, nor to humans only in one's immediate environment, or to the empirical world. Part of the relational character of human existence is the capacity to continuously expand and intersect the notions of proximity and distance, and thereby to expand the linguistic inventory, the aptitude to express desires and to articulate aspirations, and ultimately creativity, that is the capacity to imagine another reality and consequently other forms of relationships and engagements at interpersonal, communal and international levels.[2]

A pessimistic view on the human condition would have it that the challenge resides in a kind of inevitable, innate concurrence and competition between humans: the 'mimetic desire', the uncertain, and at the same time, competing desire directed to an object another person desires, from where conflict and violence may arise.[3] The positive and less fatalistic anthropological perspective would hold fast not only to the capacity of humans to withstand and counter these misdirected desires, but on the contrary, to build harmonious relationships that are based on the human capacity to internal critique.[4]

The capacity to internal critique in turn is a precondition for change and alteration, as it points to the understanding of humans and human existence beyond one's own existence. It opens for the realisation of the gift and 'givenness' of life as not solely depending on one's own efforts, but

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[2] See Philip Ogochukwu Ujomudike : "Ubuntu Ethics", in: H. ten Have et al. (Eds.) 2016. *Encyclopedia of Global Bioethics*. Cham: Springer, 2869-2881.

[3] See René Girard. 1986. *The Scapegoat*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press (French original 1982).

[4] See Antti Kauppinen: "Reason, Recognition, and Internal Critique", in: *An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 45,4 (2002): 479-498.

embedded in the broader framework of recognising life in the double bind of given by and given for 'the Other' and others. Education anchors itself in this understanding of human experience of self-discovery and relation with and for others. The educational mission is based on the premise that the human condition and experience can be impacted by the integration of new knowledge about the world and the plausibility of human life in relation with others and creation. More importantly, education builds on the potential that internal critique unleashes to question the status quo. This is valid for the personal dispositions, actions and engagements, which become the subject of personal scrutiny, as well as with regard to the mutual interrogations people engage in about their existential meaning-making.

The capacity of education to lead humans to this introspection and to a critical engagement with the world and their neighbours is an essential social ethical function, which cannot be underscored, and a liberating function in the fullest sense. In the words of Paulo Freire – who locates education in the context of a liberating praxis:

> " For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other.[5]

3. Valuing humanity, preserving humaneness and the liberation of minds

Education can only be successfully undertaken if understood from such an emancipatory stance. Being human means the ability to relate both inside and outside of oneself, with others and with the environment, and to make meaning of these encounters in a reflexive manner. This entails sharp observation of the realities, the ability to read the meanings that others

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[5] Paulo Freire. 2007. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York/London: Continuum, (Portuguese original 1968), 72.

attribute to their being in the world, and to escape from the danger of reducing and compartmentalising observations and interpretations in static categories. This constitutes the genuine decolonial educational task to fulfil: to free oneself from the fallacy of ideology – of seeing the world through the prism of preformed assumptions or the epistemological framework that prefigure the interpretation of who can be counted as human and how humans have to be described. The subtle intrusion of domination and commodification of human life finds its genesis here and invites to insist on the inalienable dignity as well as the freedom of humans to being in the world in the fullness of their physical, mental and spiritual.

Emmanuel Lévinas[6] reminds us of the indomitable nature of the encounter with 'the other', constituting an engagement that resists the temptation of totalising and familiarising 'the other.' At the same time, it is through the encounter with 'the other's' face – in both its strangeness and familiarity – that ethical solicitation and responsibility begins. The presence and experience of 'the other' cannot be fully grasped or known, and thus the encounter constitutes is a disruptive and unsettling moment, while also calling into a responsibility for and to 'the other.' It is an ethical responsibility that intends to preserve humaneness as non-occupiable territory. It becomes apparent how this premise can be made fruitful amidst the contradictions of life and society: from the colonial domination, the enslavement of black bodies[7] to the modern day trafficking in human beings, the populist hate-speech against migrants and the xenophobic scapegoating of religious and ethnic minorities. The examples are manifold and demonstrate the historic and contemporary relevance of insisting on this preservation of the free encounter of human beings, who create relationships

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[6] See Emmanuel Lévinas: *Totality and Infinity: An Essay in Exteriority*. Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, [3]1991 (French original 1961).

[7] See the extensive literature on decolonizing/decolonial education, *inter alia*: Miguel Zalava: "Decolonial Methodologies in Education", in: Michael A. Peters (Ed.): *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 2016: 1-16.

not through erasing their differences, but through recognising their inherent and inalienable dignity.[8]

The consequences of such a rigorous pursuit of a non-invasive encounter of people can be demonstrated, for example, in the manner in which societies organise consensus-building around normative conflicts and facilitate a continued dialogue on the foundations of living together. Similarly, such an approach to the preservation of humaneness and the cultivation of values such as respect of the differences, solidarity and compassionate vulnerability as sources of an ethics of civic responsibility has also an impact on the conceptualisation and praxis of education. Valuing humanity becomes in this perspective not a content of learning in an education that seeks to identify locations of appropriate application. Rather education revolutionises the logic of content acquisition and application from a self-sufficient posture. Education becomes transformative in as much as it defies a reproductive pattern of learning, following a "banking concept of education."[9] Transformative education aims at the liberation of the minds first. It is through allowing a free engagement with the empirical world and a corresponding processing of the physical experiences through cognitive arrangements that humanity can find and renew its commitment to preserving the value of all life.

Willie Jennings[10] has contributed to the debate on the role of education in the process of liberation and preservation of humanness by offering an alternative imagine to the inherited Western, self-sufficient intellectualist model around possession, control and mastery. He posits against this image the contours of an education that facilitates belonging, gathers people for a

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[8] See Francis Fukuyama: *Identity. The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*. New York: Picador/ Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2018.

[9] Paulo Freire: *ibid.*

[10] Willie J. Jennings : *After Whiteness. An Education in Belonging*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2020.

rich life together.[11] An education that uses belonging and communion as reference point should, however, not be misunderstood as a shallow and unspecified direction for education. As per Willie Jennings, all education should aim at belonging in the sense of reconciliation of humans with the source of their existence. Rather than a self-contained education that does not 'lead out' of the familiar contexts of knowledge and understanding, an education of belonging offers to visit sites of contradictions and the encounter with those with whom a rapprochement is habitually avoided. In continuation of Jennings' ideas, on may emphasise that education from this vista unfolds its transformative potential fully when these loci of estrangement, surprise and discovery of the humane in unconventional circumstances – for example by studying a community project for and with socially stigmatised, marginalised and excluded in privileged neighbourhoods – are used as sites of learning.[12]

However, while a certain type of this educational approach already exists in form of experiential or service learning, what it often does not address and most of the time even establishes is the asymmetric relationship between those who possess knowledge and means, and those who supposedly are the sole 'receivers of learning outcomes.' A transformational education that takes ethical principles and values of equity and reciprocity seriously will emphasise, by contrast, the two-directional learning trajectory, respecting the full humanity of all involved, unveiling the open or hidden socio-economic impact on the relationship dynamics, and endeavour to develop

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[11] Willie J. Jennings develops this alternative image further by detailing its meaning against the background of theological education around the picture of Jesus and the crowd (Mark 5: 24b: "And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.").

[12] See also on strangeness as the linking concept in intercultural learning, the elucidating insights of the study conducted by Jan Van Maele, Steven Schelkens, Katrien Mertens: "Encounters with Strangeness: Intercultural learning in an engineering course", in: *Journal of Praxis in Higher Education*, Vol. 3,2 (2021): 179-203.

critical thinking and reflective behavioural change around the project of a whole-person formation, including cognitive and emotional dimensions.[13]

It appears that a whole-person formation in a transformative educational perspective is fostering the attention to internal and external explorations outside of the conventional thought-patterns and rationales, to be able to discover new insights and to create novel connections. This is valid for the treatment of learning contents, the knowledge, as well as the methodologies and applications. Ultimately, such a transformative education contributes to sharpening the ethical awareness as it does not locate the evaluation, discernment and decision-making only externally, but includes the internal reflexivity as equally critical component.

Keri Facer points to this ethical dimension of education, in a temporal perspective, when she states:

> " …an ethics of futures in education would attend to the distinctive temporality of education as a space and time in which something 'new and unforeseen' by us might emerge. (…) The ethical responsibility that flows from this in educational futures work is precisely to resist the colonisation of the present by the future (or the past) and to keep open the regenerative potential of education as an encounter capable of caring for and creating new worlds.[14]

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[13] See David Sable, Cathy Driscoll, Linda Van Esch: "Applying Transformative Learning to Ethics Education", in: *Atlantic Universities' Teaching Showcase Proceedings, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia*, IX, 69: 1-14.

[14] Keri Facer: *Futures in Education: Towards an ethical practice*. Background Paper for the Futures of Education Initiative. Paris: UNESCO, 2021: 21.

4. Whose transformation?

Homi Bhabha in his published lecture "Our Neighbours, Ourselves,"[15] offers a critical reflection that assists in asking the question of the purpose of education afresh. This question becomes all the more relevant in times, when people in all societies have to engage with increasing levels of diversity and complexity. Homi Bhabha is inspired by Julia Kristeva's proposition of a "paradoxical community,"[16] by which she describes the simultaneous coexistence and fluidity of foreign and homogeneous identities in a selected democratic societal context. Bhabha utilises and transposes Kristeva's thoughts around "paradoxical communities" into the context of present day civil societies, and posits that such double, partial and fluid identifications complicates "Ethical Life (…) and, as such, is incompatible with the representation of the nation's people as *e pluribus unum*."[17]

It may be worthwhile to pursue this reflection in the context of education. What does a whole-person, transformative education aim at? Can education assume that there is a direct, and also one-directional, movement from the educational process to an expected outcome, and if so, what does this expected outcome consist in? There are at least two major strands of discussion to consider: on the one hand, the understanding that education is transformative in as much as it enables students to effect social change, and

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[15] Homi K. Bhabha: *Our Neighbours, Ourselves. Contemporary Reflections on Survival* (Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum et al. (eds.): Hegel Lectures). Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2011.

[16] See Julia Kristeva: *Strangers to Ourselves* (French original, 1988). New York: Columbia University Press, 1991: 194-195: "A paradoxical community is emerging, made up of foreigners who are reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognize themselves as foreigners…In France, at the end of the twentieth century, each is fated to remain the same *and* the other – without forgetting his original culture but putting it in perspective to the extent of having it not only exist side by side but also alternate with others' culture."

[17] Homi K. Bhabha: *ibid*, 2.

on the other hand, the view that transformative education is first and foremost an initiation into undergoing personal transformative experiences.[18]

Perhaps there is a constructive conceptual bridge that can be built between the two approaches. Douglas W. Yacer remarks that transformational experiences initiated in an educational context are characterised by four indicators: they are meant to be "momentous," "irreversible," "discontinuous," and "rapid."[19] Against this background, he poignantly articulates the ethical problematic of "transformative consent" and how educators can avoid a "directive pedagogy" by leading students to develop a change of their self-understandings presupposed as necessary for the transformative experiences, and most importantly how to address the potential "transformative loss,"[20] which comes with the loss of previously acquired and integrated convictions.

At the didactical level, one will have to recall the aforementioned non-invasive posture of educators and the educational frameworks, in which the questions of transformation both internal and external are posed. Thus is crucial as it has consequences for the credibility of the intended learning outcomes, and the continuity of the transformational engagement – whether in form of a personal conversion, or societal action, or a blend of both. Education that commits itself to such a non-invasive transformational praxis honours the individual autonomy and agency, and builds upon it in view of the attainment of overarching goals anchored in shared values, of which the preservation of the humane in the fullest sense of a free, mindful, reciprocal and caring ethos is an essential part as outlined in the previous section.

Transformational education may therefore not be understood as a programmatic absolute within the confines and limitations of an institutional educational setting, but more so as a permeable concept, that allows to

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[18] See Douglas W. Yacek: "Should Education be Transformative?" In: *Journal of Moral Education*, 2020, Vol. 49, No. 2: 257-274.

[19] Dougla   s W. Yacek: *ibid*., 259-261.

[20] Id.: *ibid*., 262.

create an initiation into transformation that nurtures free reflection and agency, and that finds continuation in real life. Douglas Yacer offers a thoughtful contribution in this regards by stating:

> " …what is needed is a community that transcends the interpersonal relationships of the classroom… The transformative classroom should attempt should attempt to usher students into a community in which they will find lasting membership, and that provides them with an enduring framework for understanding the changes they are experiencing.[21]

A related but distinct strand of the discussion on transformative education is related to its possible and intended societal impact amidst increasing cultural, religious and ethnic diversities and corresponding moral positions emerging from different worldviews – which brings again to mind Homi Bhabha's engagement with Julia Kristeva's "paradoxical communities." Transformative education could make a meaningful contribution to providing interpretative orientation for these complex societal configurations, which "decapitates the dialectic"[22] of the attempt to attribute identities neatly according to defined ethnic, national and cultural categories, and societal settings, where in reality there is an ambivalent fluid movement. Similarly, education that aims at transformation confronts us with the challenge to avoid the fallacy of a direct translation of a transformational initiation in and through education into societal contexts.

A cautious attitude is necessary in order to elude that transformation can be acquired as a kind of quasi-knowledge for application in complex situations. This is valid not only because of the aforementioned multiplicity and fluidity of identity articulations, but also because there is a fundamental

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[21] Douglas W. Yacek: *ibid.*, 270.

[22] Homi K. Bhabha: *ibid*, 2, in reference to Jean Paul Sartre's description of Merleau-Ponty's method (J.-P. Sartre: "Merleau-Ponty *vivant*", in: Jon Stewart (Ed.): *The Debate between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.* Evanston: Northwestern University, 1998.

distinction to be made between the individual and collective expression of self-understanding and the representation and public attributions. Transformative education will cultivate spaces – inside and outside the institutional framework – for unravelling this distinctions and elaborating avenues "…for the insertion of social plurality – differential interests and values that vary within and between groups – into the subject's ambivalent identification with the web of human togetherness…"[23]

Recent educational studies have proposed to pay a closer attention to transformative practices[24] and the initiation into practices that allow to build communities of ethical learning, shared values and ideals within a common aspirational, aesthetic and emotional setting. The emerging student communities, alumni networks, societies of friends and institutional community engagement associations can serve as illustrations for such ethical learning communities as extension of formal locations of education continuing the process of supporting critical reflection and autonomous agency in making own, non-imposed transformational experiences fruitful for the engagement with others and for building communities of moral imagination. In other words, transformative education prepares, initiates and nurtures practices of individuals that have discovered through an internal journey of interrogation the motivation to enter into relationships of shared

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[23] Homi K. Bhabha: *ibid*., 17.

[24] See *inter alia*: A. R. English: "Transformation and Education: The voice of the learner in Peter's concept of teaching", in: *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 43 (s 1), 2009:75-95; C. Higgins: *The Good Life of Teaching: An ethics of professional practice*. Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2011; M. Luntley: "On Education and Initiation", in: *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 43 (s 1), 2009: 41-56; C. Martin: "The Good, the Worthwhile and the Obligatory: Practical reason and moral universalism in R. S. Peter's conception of education", in: *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 43 (s 1), 2009: 143-160; K. A. Strike: "Trust, Traditions and Pluralism: Human flourishing and liberal polity", in: D. Carr/J. Steutel (eds): *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education*. London: Routledge, 2005: 224-237.

meaning and the "pursuit of common ideals, one's embodiments of common values and adherence to common standards."[25]

5. Homo novus – the new human being: An intercultural motif at the heart of transformative education

Transformative education, as outlined, cannot be understood in relation to one specific external outcome, for example with regard to expected societal changes. All too contested are the ideas and paradigms around societal transformation. The conceptual approach this contribution endeavours to advance is rather unpretentious: describing the contours of a transformative education, and conditions under which it can take place, as the organisation of a continuous learning process – both in time and in space – around a double bind and back-and-forth movement between internal interrogation and reflection of the external world.

At the heart of such a learning process lays the perception that human beings are intrinsically learning beings, and find in learning their sense of purpose beyond self-oriented interests. This anthropological perception is essentially positive and reposes on the conviction that no human being is limited to the sum of his or her actions and thoughts, but that the trajectory of becoming human remains throughout life – from birth to death – open to renewal. It is a life-time journey towards becoming a new human being (*homo novus*) and for nurturing relationships for a meaningful life in this perspective. From this standpoint, education is never accomplished in a life cycle, but consists of awakening this potential for renewal in changing circumstances, and to provide adequate stimulation for using the renewal for aims outside of oneself.

How can these aims of a new human being nurtured by an education with transformative purpose be described? Three selected dimensions will be

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[25] Douglas W. Yacer: *ibid.*, 270.

outlined in the following: the renewed human being for an engagement with diversity, for the dignity of all life and for a praxis of mutual accountability for the good of all. This list is not exhaustive but includes key pointers for a discussion that merits to be conducted inside and outside of educational circles, as they are related to different kinds of engagement with knowledge and orientations towards life, and are hence of paramount importance for coming to terms with the needs of contemporary, so called 'knowledge societies'[26] largely dependent on the discernment capabilities human deploy with regard to material, cognitive and relational renewal. The starting point of this reflection is that human renewal and the motif of the new human bears its full potential in an intercultural conversation on education and the purpose of learning. In other words, education and renewal, and human renewal in particular, cannot be discussed in cultural nor in disciplinary isolation.

The UNESCO World Report Towards Knowledge Societies[27] has determined learning, more than a decade ago, as a key value for knowledge societies: "…learning reintroduces a critical dimension, allowing our societies to face the possibility of assimilating the incredible amount of new knowledge that they produce." It has become evident, in the meantime, that learning is much more than a societal and institutional tool for processing new information and knowledge, but that it is about learning as a process of

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[26] See Jérôme Bindé: *Towards Knowledge Societies: UNESCO World Report*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2005; Ola Erstad, Kristiina Kumpulainen et al. (Eds): *Learning in the Context of Knowledge Societies*. Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers, 2016; Andy Hargreaves: *Teaching in the Knowledge Society: Education in the Age of Insecurity*. New York/London: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 2003; Berry Nyhan (Ed.): Taking Steps towards the Knowledge Society: Reflections on the process of knowledge development. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2002; Russell H. Kaschula, H. Ekkehard Wolff (Eds): *The Transformative Power of Language: From Postcolonial to Knowledge Societies in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

[27] Jérôme Bindé: *Towards Knowledge Societies: UNESCO World Report*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2005.

perpetual renewal and creativity against the background of shared values for the survival of humanity and the planet.[28]

Living together amidst diversity and nurturing relationships

Therefore, learning to be renewed positions human beings in a common responsibility to discern how living together can be enabled. We noted earlier in this reflection how articulations and locations of identities are not static categories, but rather permeable fields. Nonetheless, individual and collective lives are significantly marked by the manner in which stories of belonging and aspiration can be narrated. It is evident, that these narrations, particularly those that emphasise belonging can be utilised for fostering representation and claims of interest made plausible against the background of historical and contemporary experiences often in association with the grand narratives of transmitted worldviews. However, they can also be used to foster relationships and collaboration around stories of aspiration: how life in community, democratic participation and normative consensus-building can be organised around shared values, even in situations where the factual conditions of societal life and cohabitation contradict the aspired ideals and principles.[29]

Global and regional civil society movement could be seen as viable spaces for the circulation of these stories of belonging and aspiration across religious, ethnic and linguistic communities building on a common agenda. On the one hand, movements for social or ecological justice gain their relevance through the mobilisation of local concern, for example with regard to the balancing economic and ecological interests in the industry, or creating a vision for sustainable tourism, for inclusive urbanisation and for leveraging indigenous knowledge and resources for community-building.[30]

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[28] See Rebecca L. Oxford, Jin Lin (Eds): *Transformative Eco-Education for Human and Planetary Survival*. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2012.

[29] See James A. Bank: *Diversity, Transformative Knowledge and Civic Education.* London: Routledge, 2020.

[30] See on this emerging intercultural studies field of relation ethics, *inter alia*, the work of Upolu L. Vaai, A. Casimira (Eds): *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising*

On the other hand, they succeed to establish linkages across regions and enable visibility for the local concerns on global platforms of engagement.[31]

Preserving dignity of life amidst conflict and violence

The urgency of building such holistic alliances arranged around shared concerns and values as a scope for a transformative, renewal-oriented education can also be demonstrated in the field of conflict and violence. The pervasiveness of violent conflicts all over the world – the inclination to destroy and erase life – can also be interpreted as a denial of the human potential for learning and renewal. Tis inclination is not only directed against human life and manifests itself not exclusively in physical forms of violence, but also against other living creatures, and nature in general, and in various ways of commodification of life – turning humans into marketable objects and denigrating the value of human life by weaponizing human bodies as instruments in armed conflicts. The need for a transformational education that emphasises the dignity of all life, has to begin with the renewal of humans who convert themselves from dividing and destructive practices. Transforming education enables learning to return to the basic principles of respect for the dignity of all life. Such a learning process can only begin from a critical introspection of an individual living in relationship. It is from the recognition of the interdependence of all life and

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the mindset and the Pacific Itulagi. Suva: University of the South Pacific/Pacific Theological College, 2017; John Coates, Mel Gray (eds): *Indigenous Social Work around the World: Towards culturally relevant education and practice*. London: Routledge, 2009.

[31] Examples in the educational sector would be the UNESCO Global Education Coalition, the Global Education Compact of the Holy See, the regional working groups and the International Council for Open and Distant Education (ICDE) global advocacy campaign for open, flexible and distant learning.

the precariousness of life,[32] that an ethos of conflict resolution and peacebuilding can be developed.[33]

Cultivating a praxis of mutual accountability for the good of all

All education is confronted with the frailty of the relational fabric in societies, between nations and at interpersonal levels. It is therefore imperative to not only build and strengthen alliances of and for education, as alliances advocating for a transformative education apart and alongside educational institutions, but to expand the educational realm so as to underline that learning about the potential for renewal of humanity belongs to the key societal tasks for the future. It entails, as William C. Smith and Aaron Benavot indicate, that "…strengthening accountability in education involves providing different actors with an opportunity to articulate and represent their views as the accountability process unfolds."[34] This relates to the governance, to the political conditions of education, as well to the monitoring of educational quality.

Most importantly, mutual accountability has to be embedded in the educational praxis itself within institutions with a particular mandate for education and in the communities and societies at large. The future of education will be measured against its capacity to create lifelong learning opportunities not only for the actualisation of competencies and skills, and the preparedness for the labour market, but for the renewal of humans' allegiance to the core of life-affirming and life-sustaining values benefitting the good of all.

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[32] See Judith Butler: *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence.* London/New York: Verso, 2004.

[33] See John Paul Lederach: *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington: Institute of Peace Press, 1997; Leonisa Arizzone: "Towards Global Understanding: The transformative role of peace education", in: *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 2001: 16-25.

[34] William C. Smith, Aaron Benavot: "Improving Accountability in Education: The importance of structured democratic voice", in: *Asia Pacific Education Review* 20 (2019): 193-205.

6. Conclusion: Educating as hope against hope

We have seen that transformative education is an elusive and even contested field. What and for whom transformation is intended remains to be discussed. What is clear however, is that transformative education gains its momentum in times, in which human decision-making is more important than ever before. Hence the ethical dimension in education cannot be underscored. The ongoing conversation will have to take into account not only aspects of temporality and sequencing of education (life-long learning), but also of locations and emphases. Jennings' proposal on communities of belonging over against (higher) education communities of exclusivity and mastery constitutes one inspiring avenue. Another one would be to stress a values-driven agenda that enforces learners' moral agency and capacity of being interpreters of changes in the world against the background of own reflected experiences of transformation, or at least experiences of renewal through estrangement. In this context the methodological discussion need to be pursued on how theoretical, wisdom-based and practical dimensions of education can be held together. Alliances between educational institutions in the conventional sense and other societal actors could be made fruitful for this endeavour of facilitating an initiation into transformation through the experience of self-renewal. This is all the more valid as such transformation cannot be taught as a subject matter in the classical sense: emerging adults – who are tomorrow's leaders – will have to be guided to embrace the opportunity of effecting change that begins with the discovery of their own potential for renewal, of becoming new human beings capable of seeing and acting for the futures of the world beyond their own 'small worlds.'

Finally, expanding the conceptual debate on transformative education will have to encompass aspects of the educational arrangement. Bringing the world into the classroom, and classrooms into the world constitutes a crucial aspect in view of diversifying learning inputs and methodologies, and encouraging internationalisation of education. An intercultural dialogue on the choices, methods and locations of educational praxis will assist in facilitating more open and flexible opportunities of learning that involves the whole person, while insisting that such an educational orientation will

also contribute to continue democratising education in a world still marked by significant disparities in access to quality education.

The learning paradigm Obiora Ike developed solidly reposes on the premise of the goodness of humans and their inherent potential to translate this goodness into acts of considerateness for others and creation. His worldview and his anthropological perception are optimistic and grounded in humanistic values.

They are undergirded by his deep spirituality and experience that all life remains tributary to a source beyond one's own life. It is at the same time, the decisive turning point and motivation for being engaged in education – not for the sake of knowledge creation and acquisition, nor its transmission as such, but for contributing to close the gap between the world as it is and the world how it ought to be. This constitutes perhaps the noblest of all educational tasks: the task to dream and to dedicate one's life, as whole person and new human being to the whole world.

I see Obiora Ike walking in his garden, pausing at times under the shadows of the mango trees, contemplating creation, a book in his hands and a smile on his face as he is receiving his visitors from near and far. His mission as educator dedicated to the transformation of the whole person, so that all may live to the fullest of their potentials, is not completed. The journey continues for him and for all whose lives he has impacted, for all he has educated and nurtured, and who believe like him in the renewal of humankind – against all hope believing in hope – *n'ihi olile-anya nile o kwere na olile-anya*.

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8. Short biography

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She also co-edited two volumes in relation to the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute in Arusha, Tanzania, 2018: (with Marion Grau and Atola Longkumer) Translating the Message, Transforming the World. An Ecumenical Reader. Geneva: WCC, 2018, and (with Pamela D. Couture and Samuel George) For Those Who Wish To Hear. Emerging Theologians on Mission and Evangelism. Geneva: WCC, 2018. She is the 2015 Bjoern Bue Lecture recipient of the VID Specialised University of Stavanger, Norway.

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