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Theoretical and political implications of agonistic peace for decolonising peace education

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ABSTRACT

Discussions on the importance of decolonising peace education have become prevalent in recent years with continuing presence of coloniality and Eurocentrism in peace education coming under sustained critique. In this article, we contribute to discussions on decolonising peace education by bringing it together with the notion of agonistic politics, and specifically the concepts of agonistic peace and agonistic decolonisation. Through drawing on two common peace education programmes in the South African context, namely Facing History Facing Ourselves and Peace Clubs, we explore the potential that the concepts of agonistic peace and agonistic decolonisation offer to enrich debates on decolonising peace education. We argue that the analysis of these programmes through the lens of these concepts holds important theoretical and political implications for conceptualising peace and peace education as it enables one to understand these as open-ended and dynamic, alluding to the presence of *alternative* epistemologies and ontologies of peace that are entangled with politics that challenge Eurocentrism's (supposed) universalism. This, we suggest, is vital for understanding the decolonisation of peace education as a long and complex process, rather than a one-off event.

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Introduction

In recent years discussions on decolonisation in education have become more common place, occurring within both the Global South and Global North contexts. Although decolonisation takes on different meanings in different contexts, in its expansive sense, it is understood as the ongoing efforts to expose and dismantle the historical and continuing effects of colonisation as these manifest in political, social, and cultural life (Kruger 2020, 2021; Mbembe 2016; Shahjahan et al. 2022; Stein 2019; Zembylas 2018, 2021, 2022). For Stein

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and Andreotti (2017) decolonisation is an umbrella term that encompasses a diverse range of efforts 'to resist the distinct but intertwined processes of colonisation and racialisation' (370). This is achieved by transforming and redressing the historical and ongoing effects of these processes by creating and keeping 'alive modes of knowing, being, and relating that these processes seek to eradicate' (Stein and Andreotti 2017, 370.)

Coloniality and Eurocentric modes of being and knowing have also begun to be critiqued in peace education, and in particular in the areas of 'critical peace education', 'decolonising peace education' and 'postcolonial peace education' (e.g. see Bajaj 2015; Bajaj and Brantmeier 2011; Cremin, Echavarría, and Kester 2018; Hajir and Kester 2020; Kester 2019; Kester et al. 2021; Williams 2016, 2017; Zakharia 2017; Zembylas 2018, 2020). Although these are not necessarily discrete areas of studying peace education, they are joined by their interest to critique and dismantle coloniality and social injustices as those are manifested in peace education efforts. One of the primary concerns of critical peace education (CPE), for example, is to address the asymmetrical power relations that exist in the world, on both the micro and macro scales, by unpacking the political, social, economic, and historical roots thereof. Following a decolonial approach to achieve this involves problematising Western-centric and universalised notions of what peace and peace education entail by emphasising 'the importance of local meaning-making, different personal experiences, comparative dialogue, transformative agencies, and participatory citizenship' (Hajir and Kester 2020, 518). A decolonial infused approach to CPE thus attends to ontological and epistemic positions beyond Eurocentric perspectives by taking cognisance of the historical and political contexts within which peace education praxis unfolds (Zembylas 2018).

In this article we contribute to the developing discussions on decolonising peace education by bringing it together with the notion of agonistic politics, and specifically the concept of *agonistic peace*. To our knowledge, agonistic politics and agonistic peace have not been discussed yet in relation to peace education or in debates on decolonising peace education. Our discussion of agonistic politics and agonistic peace is largely informed by the work of Mouffe (1999, 2005, 2013, 2014) and Shinko (2008, 2022). Mouffe proposes agonism as an alternative to the Habermasian deliberative model that has become dominant in democratic discourse. An agonistic orientation positions dissent, conflict and counter-hegemonic actions as foundational to political life. Furthermore, whereas reasoned and reasonable debate stands central in the deliberative model, passions and affects are considered as inextricably entangled with political participation from an agonistic position. Similarly, the concept of agonistic peace (Lehti and Romashov 2022; Shinko 2008, 2022; Strömbom, Bramsen, and Stein 2022) highlights an understanding of peace rooted in agonism, thus emphasising the fact that understandings of

peace (and peace education) are inscribed in socio-political structures entailing norms of exclusion and hegemonies. An agonistic conceptualisation of peace and peace education, then, helps us understand these notions as open-ended and dynamic, alluding to the presence of *alternative* epistemologies and ontologies of peace that are entangled with politics and challenge Eurocentrism's (supposed) universalism such as liberal notions of peace.

We propose, therefore, that the philosophy and politics of agonism offer potential to enrich debates on decolonising peace education by rendering more visible not only the hegemonic norms and values informing understandings of peace and peace education, but also the challenges as well as strategic possibilities for decolonising peace education. In addition, an agonistic perspective on peace and peace education offers a means for passions and affects to inform dissent and counter-hegemonic actions around peace education efforts that have a decolonial lens. Furthermore, given that agonistic peace is not about seeking consensus but rather understanding that conflict is an essential driving force of social change (Shinko 2008), we argue that this concept offers a means to ensure that any normative and/or hegemonic aspects that might come to be associated with the concept of peace, and how these might manifest in the context of peace education, to remain open to critique and contestation. This, we believe, is vital for seeing the decolonisation of peace education as a long and complex process, rather than a one-off event.

The article is divided into four sections. In the first section we provide an overview of the current state of debates on the decolonisation of peace education. This is followed in the second section by a discussion of selected principles, values and practices of Mouffe's agonistic politics; this section also considers Shinko's proposal for agonistic peace. This leads to a discussion in section three of examples of ongoing peace education efforts in post-apartheid South Africa that show how the lens of agonistic peace education might reframe the decolonisation of peace education. We conclude the article by considering how the current state of debates on decolonising peace education might be enriched by considering it together with agonistic peace, and we discuss the theoretical and political implications this endeavour holds.

State of debates on decolonisation of peace education

Understandings of peace and peace education since World War II have traditionally been premised on the notion of universality and embedded in the normative, often ahistoric, project of Western Enlightenment humanism (Zakharia 2017). As Zakharia explains, proponents of peace education have traditionally sought consensus around universal concepts of peace, humanity and progress towards the elimination of all forms of violence. 'To this end,' she writes, 'scholarship and practice in peace education have historically attempted to unify conceptualizations of peace and peace practices throughout a number

of prescriptive measures' (Zakharia 2017, 48). However, this tendency to homogenize the concept of peace and conceptualize peace education as a set of prescriptive measures has not only masked power relations in different socio-political contexts (especially colonized ones), but also undermined local understandings of peace and conflict/dissensus.

A number of critiques of peace education theory and practice in recent years have acknowledged that Eurocentric ideas of peace (e.g. liberal peace) and peace education have been at the forefront for decades (Bajaj 2015; Bajaj and Brantmeier 2011; Hajir 2023; Kester 2019; Shirazi 2011; Williams 2013, 2016, 2017; Zakharia 2017; Zembylas 2018). These critiques highlight the exclusions created by a Eurocentric modernist framework grounded in whiteness, coloniality and liberalism (Zembylas 2020). For example, liberalism is reflected in the epistemological, political, and ontological premises of peace and peace education regardless of the historical conditions and the socio-political context; these premises, according to some scholars, have had negative implications on local practices of peace education, as 'models' of peace and peace education are imported from the outside, undermining the local complexities (Zembylas and Bekerman 2013, 2017).

In particular, critiques of peace education theory and practice have been grounded in what has become known as 'critical peace education' (e.g. Bajaj 2008, Bajaj 2015; Bajaj and Brantmeier 2011; Bajaj and Hantzopoulos 2016, Brantmeier 2011; Trifonas and Wright 2013; Zembylas and Bekerman 2013), 'postcolonial peace education' (e.g. Shirazi 2011) and 'decolonising peace education' (Hajir and Kester 2020; Kester et al. 2021; Williams 2017). Although these critiques are informed by different theories, they are joined together in efforts to challenge various aspects of Eurocentric thinking that drive hegemonic norms and values informing understandings and practices of peace and peace education. Below, we discuss some convergences and divergences of these critiques to provide a brief state of the debates on decolonising peace education.

In one of the first definitions of the term more than a decade ago, Bajaj and Brantmeier (2011) write that 'critical peace education' seeks 'to enhance transformative agency and participatory citizenship, and open to resonating in distinct ways with the diverse chords of peace that exist across fields and cultures' (Bajaj and Brantmeier 2011, 222). Bajaj and Brantmeier point out that one of the most important features of critical peace education is its counter-hegemonic framework that aims to empower young people to engage in practices that increase societal equity and justice, which in turn, would foster greater peace. Bajaj (2015) reiterates that peace education needs to contest widening inequalities around the world and points out that it is important for critical peace educators to recognize the consequences of colonial and unequal socioeconomic processes. As Bajaj and Hantzopoulos (2016, 4) write further, what distinguishes critical peace education from regular peace education are three underlying principles:

First, while all peace educators draw from analyses of violence, critical peace educators pay attention to how unequal social relations and issues of power must inform both peace education and corresponding social action. Second, critical peace education pays close attention to local realities and local conceptions of peace, amplifying marginalized voices [. . .]. Third, critical peace education draws from social reproductive theory [. . .] and critical pedagogy (Freire 1970) to view schools as both potential sites of marginalization and/or transformation.

Other scholars in critical peace education (e.g. Zembylas 2015; Zembylas and Bekerman 2013, 2017; Zembylas, Charalambous, and Charalambous 2016) have also argued that peace education may often become part of the problem it tries to solve, when it adopts a Western Enlightenment framework that is moralistic and monolithic, thus failing to take into account the complex historical processes in different sites.

Postcolonial and decolonial critiques of peace education have taken a step further than critical peace education and offer theories and practices that recognize explicitly how modernity and colonialism are greatly responsible for ongoing structural inequality and coloniality (Zakharía 2017). In this sense, postcolonial and decolonial critiques expose the silence of (critical) peace education about the persistent consequences of coloniality. Postcolonial and decolonial frameworks also problematize homogenous notions of peace and peace education and aim at creating intellectual and educational spaces for considering how particular understandings and practices of peace education take into account structures of domination, coloniality and violence (Hajir and Kester 2020).

Several scholars in peace education have tried to draw connections between postcolonial, decolonial and critical peace education, pushing the boundaries of theorizing peace education in ways that pay attention to coloniality and its legacies. While examining the connections between postcolonial theory and critical peace education, Shirazi (2011) argues that ‘we must be vigilant to avoid ascribing a universal emancipatory promise to educational interventions that “disembody the subject from his/her social and political settings”’ (280). Shirazi (2011) suggests that ‘postcolonialism is a theoretical complement to critical peace education’ and that ‘Working “postcolonially” reminds critical peace education scholars to listen to the voices, communities and histories that have been historically muted and marginalized’ (291).

Also, Williams (2013, 2016, 2017) defines postcolonial peace education as a synergy between decolonization and critical peace education; this synergy, according to Williams, enables the analysis of power dynamics and intersectionalities, embraces transformative agency, and generates new forms of inquiry. Williams points out that colonialism and slavery need to inform the work of critical peace education; this may take various forms, such as, for example, the task of questioning the colonial histories and iterations of structural violence found in specific teaching and learning contexts in which ‘peace’ is invoked.

Similarly, Sumida Huaman (2011) makes a link between critical peace education and 'Indigenous education' by suggesting that it is important to recognize the legacies of colonization in Indigenous societies and the need to include Indigenous knowledges in nurturing transformative agencies toward critical peace education. Also, both Zakharia (2017) and Zembylas (2018) bring into conversation various aspects of postcolonial and critical peace education, arguing that this entanglement highlights the need to move away from the influence of Eurocentric theorizing and engage explicitly with how various understandings and practices of peace and peace education are implicated in modernity and coloniality. Finally, Hajir and Kester (2020) argue for a decolonial praxis in critical peace education—one that tries to bring together the concepts of critical peace education, cosmopolitanism, postcolonial thought and decolonial action; their analysis discusses how a 'pedagogy for the privileged' and 'pedagogy of discomfort' can promote a decolonial praxis in critical peace education.

This brief and certainly incomplete review of work in critical peace education, postcolonial peace education and decolonising peace education shows that although there has been considerable progress in the last few years, there is still more work to do. Critical peace education has paid attention to issues of structural inequalities and aims at cultivating a sense of 'transformative agency' or 'voice' to create new social, epistemic and political structures that advance peace and peace education (Zembylas 2020). Yet, concepts such as peace, consensus, agency or voice are problematic insofar as they are disassociated from coloniality and its history. As Zakharia (2017) reminds us, universal conceptions of peace and peace education become deeply problematic in contexts in which populations express dissensus towards peacebuilding efforts for various reasons; dissensus is often viewed as incompatible with peace education projects instead of being interpreted through the lens of colonial history and its painful legacies. Thus, efforts towards the decolonization of peace education open up an unsettled intellectual and political space for making sense of peace and its education practices within contexts of sustained violence and coloniality. Having provided an overview of the current state of debates of decolonising peace education, we next turn our attention to *agonism* to consider the potential contribution this concept could make to enriching understandings of decolonising peace education.

Agonistic politics, respect, and peace

In this section we discuss agonism as developed by Chantal Mouffe before considering how it has informed the concept of agonistic peace proposed by Rosemary Shinko. In providing an overview of agonism we focus on selected aspects thereof that we believe might contribute towards enriching understandings of decolonising peace education.

An agonistic orientation towards democratic politics (Mouffe 1999, 2005, 2013, 2014) has been posited as an alternative to the Habermasian deliberative model that has become prominent within democratic discourse (see Benhabib 1994; Gutmann and Thompson 2004; Habermas 1984). Ideal deliberative democratic practices are grounded in reaching collective consensus through engaging in rational and reasonable debates that meet the communicative preconditions of equality and willingness to listen to the other. As such, a deliberative approach is characterised by 'striving for consensus and univocal agreements' (Strömbom, Bramsen, and Stein 2022, 689) that arguably leaves little room for dissent and affective responses. In contrast, for proponents of agonistic politics, dissent, conflict and counter-hegemonic actions are foundational to political life and as such, passions and affects should be considered as inextricably entangled with political participation (Mouffe 1999, 2014). Mouffe (2014) makes a distinction between emotions, which can be understood as an individual response, and passions, which for her is a type of common affect that 'are mobilized in the political domain in the formation of the we/they forms of identification' (155). Any collective or partisan engagement is thus understood to entail engagement with affects since 'a counter-hegemonic politics necessitates the creation of a different regime of desires and affects so as to bring about a collective will [be] sustained by common affects able to challenge the existing order' (Mouffe 2014, 157). Dissensus is not only understood as an ontological condition of all political life, but also as an ideal that should animate such life (Mouffe 2013, 2014; Shinko 2008; Strömbom, Bramsen, and Stein 2022; Zembylas 2022).

For the purposes of our argument, it is important to note that agonistic politics, on the one hand, foreground the power/resistance nexus present in all relations of political life, while on the other hand, highlight 'the multiplicity of strategies, counter-strategies, responses, and counter-responses that power provokes' (Shinko 2008, 475) present in such relations. The power/resistance nexus emerges as conflicting parties compete over the hegemonic power present in a shared symbolic space, where this space becomes constituted in a public sphere characterised by confrontation (Mouffe 2005). Yet from an agonistic perspective, this confrontation is not understood as occurring between 'enemies' and being characterised by violence. Rather, confrontations are repositioned as occurring between political adversaries.

An important relational difference between viewing others as adversaries, as opposed to enemies, is that adversaries are encountered with *respect* — an element that is often missing in colonisers-colonized relations. For Connolly (2002) an adversarial relationship entails creating the conditions for 'respectful strife between parties who reciprocally acknowledge the contestable character of the faiths that orient them and give them definition in relation to one another' (211). This then is agonistic respect; 'a social relation of respect for the opponent against whom you define yourself even while you resist its

imperatives and strive to delimit its spaces of hegemony' (Connolly 1993, 381). Thus, notwithstanding the central place afforded to adversarial contestation and confrontation within agonistic politics, embodied relationality and intersubjectivity, as made manifest in agonistic respect, remains constitutive aspects thereof (Lehti and Romashov 2022). This aspect of embodied relationality is also foregrounded by Mouffe (2016) who argues that any political identity can only be constructed through a constitutive outside – through the act of affirming difference in relation to an other.

Drawing on Connolly's concept of agonistic respect and Mouffe's agonistic politics, Shinko (2008) proposes the notion of agonistic peace as 'critical practices... along a multifaceted political continuum which accepts neither the promises of a peace to come nor a politically detached peace infused with its depoliticized silences' (477). For Shinko (2022) this means that since peace is an inherently political activity, it follows that conflict will inevitably form part of its creation and maintenance. This is the case given the foundational role that conflict and dissensus play in all aspects of political life. An understanding of peace rooted in agonism thus emphasises the fact that it is a socio-political concept that is temporally and spatially bounded and always remains open to contestation.

As such, placing peace within its socio-political context potentially allows for avoiding a repetition of the 'structural, cultural, liberal western facets of domination, exclusion, and marginalisation within the terms of its [peace] own contestational discourses' (Shinko 2008, 474). Furthermore, a contextualised conceptualisation of peace provides an analytic for understanding localised practises that set out to resist, challenge, and transform structural patterns of domination (Lehti and Romashov 2022; Shinko 2022). This means that ideally agonistic peace enables a contextual response to addressing direct violence, while at the same time tending to structural and cultural violence by avoiding conflating universality and particularity (Shinko 2008; Strömbom, Bramsen, and Stein 2022). In this sense then, agonistic peace is not about seeking consensus but rather understanding that conflict is an essential driving force of social change. As such, within the framework of agonistic peace ways should be found to work constructively with conflict without resorting to violence (Strömbom 2020).

For Strömbom, Bramsen and Stein (2022), agonistic peace entails a dynamic and open-ended process that is continuously (re)created in a public sphere informed by contestation where the balance between political unity and the demand for plurality remains open to negotiation. This conceptualisation of agonistic peace allows any normative and/or hegemonic aspects that might come to be associated with the concept to remain open to critique and contestation. To allow for such openness, Strömbom, Bramsen and Stein (2022) argue that agonistic spaces should be understood as a central element in constituting the concept of peace. Agonistic spaces are needed for

safeguarding continuous contestation of hegemony by allowing for dissenting voices to be heard. This would entail ensuring equitable representation of all stakeholders, as well as allowing for engaging in agonistic dialogue (Maddison 2015). Such dialogue is characterised as being intensive in engagement, sustained over time, and relational (Maddison 2015; Strömbom, Bramsen, and Stein 2022) in that it allows each participant:

to incorporate the concerns of others in their own perspective, even when they continue to disagree. [This means that] no participant gives up his/her identity, but each recognizes the validity of the claims of other human beings and therefore acts differently towards others (Cuentas and Linares Méndez 2013 cited in Maddison 2015, 1016)

For Strömbom, Bramsen and Stein (2022) this means that agonistic spaces should be thought of 'a multiplicity of discursive areas' (694) that allow for contestation and counterhegemonic imaginaries to be voiced. Importantly, Shinko (2022) argues that a consequence of conceptualising peace as unfolding within the context of agonistic politics enables rendering visible the majoritarian and hegemonic norms and values informing existing relations of power. This in turn allows for recognising 'the violences across and within all relations of power' (1400) as well as challenging and ultimately transforming them. Since violence emerges in the drawing of ontological and epistemological boundaries, agonism should allow for attending to the practices of boundary creation and associated exclusions, and the forms of marginalisation and discrimination that follow from these.

Having considered agonistic politics and how this has informed agonistic respect and agonistic peace, it is important to also acknowledge some critiques that have been directed towards agonism, particularly as these relate to postcolonial contexts. Mouffe's proposition for agonistic politics, for example, has been critiqued for its 'modernist' character and the Western binary logics through which it is framed (Sant 2019; Singh 2018; Zembylas 2022). In particular, Singh (2018) has offered four lines of critique in working from a decolonial perspective. Firstly, Singh points out that although in later work Mouffe (2005) takes a critical position towards the universalism of modernization narratives and the privileging of Western tenets of morality and rationality, her proposition for agonistic politics remains 'modernist' in character as it is located within a Western history of democratic revolution. Secondly, Singh argues that agonistic politics remains Eurocentric since it does not aim to dismantle (Western) liberal democracy, but rather change it from within. This means that 'the referent and normative standard of comparison' (Singh 2018, 340) continues to be the West. A third critique that Singh highlights relates to the question of land. Given that Mouffe does not explicitly address the question of land within the context of postcolonial or settler colonial societies means for Singh (2018) that agonistic politics might

'actually serve to consolidate, rather than challenge, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples by settler colonial states' (345). A final critique offered relates to the fact that insufficient recognition is given to ethico-political gestures such as 'refusal' and 'turning away' from liberal democratic principles that are central to engaging in a decolonial ethics (Simpson 2014, 2017). These gestures, Singh (2018) argues, might be perceived as hostile towards a Eurocentric political framework informed by liberal values given the counter-hegemonic position it takes up in relation to (Western) democratic hegemony.

In focusing on the unresolved questions of Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination and land in contemporary settler colonial societies, Maddison (2022) proposes a concept that brings together agonism and decolonisation, thus suggesting that despite the limitations of agonistic framework it can be combined with decolonial goals. For Maddison (2022) whereas '*agonistic inclusion* seeks to engage reconciliatory relations *within* colonial democratic institutions, *agonistic decolonisation* rejects the legitimacy of these institutions and seeks radical innovation in their place' (1309). The former approach is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, within the context of settler colonial societies inclusion is understood as a form of elimination of indigenous self-determination and sovereignty since it 'reduces sovereign First Nations to just another ethnic minority within liberal multicultural societies' (Maddison 2022, 1310) and secondly, it fails to adequately attend to the materiality of power relations that sustain injustices in settler colonial societies. Rather, in drawing on Tuck and Yang's (2012) argument that decolonisation first and foremost concerns the repatriation of land, Maddison (2022) argues for agonistic decolonisation understood not as a means through which inclusive and harmonious relationships can be established in settler colonial societies, but rather as a political orientation that allows for 'a permanent state of discomfort' (1320) that has real material consequences through the restructuring Indigenous-settler relations as well as repatriation of land.

Entanglements between agonism and decolonising peace education: the case of South Africa

Despite the critiques of an agonistic framework that it does not escape its 'modernist' character and the Western binary logics, we find Maddison's (2022) idea of agonistic decolonisation as a valuable insight into the debates on how to decolonise peace education in different socio-political settings. To show the theoretical and political potential of this idea within a specific context, we take up some examples of peace education efforts in South Africa – a context in which we have done research as both 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Frans is an insider in that he is a South African and has worked in the country's higher education context for the past decade with his research

focussed on the role of education and teacher education in contributing towards social justice and transformation. Michalinos is an outsider, as he lives in Cyprus, a post-colonial country, in which he has done extensive research on peace education; he is also an insider in that he has done research on higher education decolonisation in South Africa for the past decade.

South Africa became a democratic country in 1994 when for the first time *all* South Africans had the right to vote in the national general election. After a decade of intense political conflict and violence from the mid-1980s onwards, the post-1994 period was characterised by initiatives aimed at generating social cohesion between the different communities in South Africa (Mulcahy and Christie 2007). This orientation towards promoting social cohesion also manifested in informal and formal education context (Christie 2016). Yet, anyone writing about peace and peace education in South Africa confronts the fact that it is a country that still struggles to find ‘peace’ in its broader sense in the aftermath of colonialism and Apartheid (Christie 2016; John 2016; Martin-Howard 2023). As John (2018a) writes, South Africa ‘has grown more unequal, corruption is rife, and violence has become endemic’ (55). Peace education efforts in post-Apartheid South Africa have mostly focused on how to reduce violence through school and community projects (e.g. Harber and Mncube 2017; Ngidi and Kaye 2022; Shabangu 2021), promote peacebuilding practices that are grounded in Ubuntu principles (e.g. Msimanga 2021; Murithi 2009), or establish peace education programs at universities that are concerned more with research and policy than peace interventions in the society (John 2018a). A review of the scant literature on decolonising peace education in South Africa shows that although there has been an increasing recognition of the consequences of colonialism and Apartheid and more inclusion of the voices of underrepresented groups in the curriculum (e.g. see Harvey, Cook, and Bishop Simeon Trust 2021), peace and peace education in South Africa are not only ill-defined terms but also they are rarely, if ever, used in public and academic discourses (Harber 2018; John 2018a). Calls for peace education to move beyond knowledge and skills acquisition for conflict resolution and nonviolence and engage in community projects, then, require careful attention to how decolonization efforts in South Africa define understandings of peace and peace education.

To illustrate the potential of bringing together ideas of agonistic peace and decolonising peace education in South Africa, we focus on two examples that have been part of peace education efforts by civil society and discuss how they can be reframed through the lens of ‘agonistic decolonisation’. We draw on these two examples from civil society not only because they are familiar community projects on peace and peace education in many parts of Africa and around the world, but also because they ‘tend to be more responsive to the current societal priorities... such as violence and attention to healing,

reconciliation, and inclusion' (John 2018a, 64) as well as employ more participatory and experiential approaches (see also Juma 2019; Moyo 2022). These examples are 'Facing History and Ourselves' and 'Peace Clubs'.

'Facing History and Ourselves' is a U.S.-based non-profit organization that has done work globally for many years, especially in post-conflict societies, and aims to engage students in examining racism, prejudice, and antisemitism in order to promote a deeper historical understanding, critical thinking, and socio-emotional learning (Barr 2005; Maxwell 2008). By doing this, students are afforded the opportunity to engage with different points of view to reflect on how present conditions came about, and to consider the role that they can play in addressing the different forms of violence present in society (Facing History and Ourselves 2023; Maxwell 2008). The 'Facing History and Ourselves' programme was introduced in South Africa in 2003 and is currently run in partnership with the NGO Shikaya who support both formal and informal educators by providing training and resources (Facing History and Ourselves 2023). 'Peace Clubs' have more recently been introduced as a response to increased conflicts and violence in schools across Africa. These clubs, which started in Zambia in 2006 and were introduced in South Africa in 2012, entail weekly meetings between stakeholders to discuss conflict occurring in schools to collaboratively develop solutions that support peacebuilding and promote cultures of nonviolence (Jasson 2016; Juma 2019). As pointed out by Moyo (2022) and John (2018a), the objectives of 'Peace Clubs' are to empower students on how to use peace education to achieve sustainable and positive peace, develop skills useful to finding peaceful solutions to conflict, and to explore the potential inherent in conflict for improving relationships.

Far from critically reviewing the conceptual grounding or implementation of these two examples in South Africa, our goal here is rather to discuss how the entanglement between agonism and decolonising peace education creates theoretical and political openings that reframe these peace education efforts. In particular, the questions that drive our analysis are the following: What would these two examples look like in a context of decolonising peace education that also foregrounds agonistic peace? And, how possible are such educational projects in South Africa today as part of decolonization efforts?

In response to the first question, we would like to highlight three insights emerging from using a combined lens of agonistic decolonisation to theorise these two peace education examples:

- (1) These two projects will have to recognize first that there may be conflicting notions of 'peace' in South Africa and that opportunities for generating adversarial relations to emerge in ongoing efforts towards peacebuilding should be encouraged. Some groups (e.g. whites, Blacks, etc.) may understand peace (and history) in different ways. These understandings would also be recognised for potentially not being unrelated to

the consequences of Apartheid and coloniality (epistemic, social, political) in South Africa. The educational goal of these projects is not to drive students to reach a consensus that erases conflicting views, but rather to encourage students to examine how and why different groups and stakeholders (as well as themselves) in South Africa understand peace in different, and sometimes conflicting ways. This agonistic notion of peace will also render visible different norms and values informing peace and peace education, and how certain understandings, and associated norms and values of peace have become hegemonic. Furthermore, this agonistic understanding implies that 'Facing History and Ourselves' and 'Peace Clubs' will have to encourage understandings of peace and peace education as open-ended processes rather than as processes with predetermined outcomes. In other words, it would entail ongoing efforts of engagements across difference that follow the principles of agonistic mutuality and respect in working towards peacebuilding and decolonisation, while recognising that sometimes peacebuilding and decolonisation may also be conflicting processes.

- (2) It is important for these projects to recognize how and why the emotions, affects and passions involved in peace and peace education processes are 'political' in the sense that they are produced and enacted in the context of power relations. In this sense, it is crucial for students to explore the ways that emotions (e.g. anger, resentment, shame), including their own feelings, play a significant role in peace education efforts. Decolonising peace education, then, is not a neutral process but rather a deeply affective one; these projects, if informed by agonistic peace, will not aim to discount these difficult emotions, but rather seek to engage with them in pedagogically productive ways. For example, these projects will have to encourage the discussion of controversial issues such as the return of land and reparations, as well as the emotions emerging in the process of decolonization efforts taking place in South Africa. Emotions, affects and passions will thus be understood as a means to engage in a counter-hegemonic politics that may lead to 'the creation of a different regime of desires and affects so as to bring about a collective will sustained by common affects able to challenge the existing [violent] order' (Mouffe 2014, 157).
- (3) Finally, it is important to recognize that violence (e.g. structural, emotional, etc.) may be exerted even by those involved in peace and peace education processes. For example, if students are 'forced' to find 'peaceful solutions' to eliminate conflict (in the context of 'Peace Clubs') or to reach a common historical understanding that ignores sensitivities (in the context of 'Facing History and Ourselves'), then the risk is to undermine the decolonisation of peace and peace education efforts. If peace is understood as the absence of any conflict, then forcing such an understanding

will probably have the opposite effects. It is, therefore, important *not* to create a 'hegemonic regime' of peace and peace education around decolonization, but rather to explore solutions that take into consideration the sensitivities of all groups. This would necessarily entail the creation of agonistic spaces and agonistic dialogue (Strömbom, Bramsen, and Stein 2022) for decolonizing peace education efforts to allow for contestation and counterhegemonic imaginaries to be voiced and enacted.

The second question, namely, 'How possible are such educational projects in South Africa today as part of decolonization efforts?' is much more difficult to answer, because local social and political conditions vary significantly throughout the country. Any reflections, then, on teaching or policy interventions about/for peace and peace education in South Africa will invariably be shaped by the local context in which such teaching or intervention occurs (Christie 2016; Harber 2018; John 2018b). Both Juma (2019) and John (2018a) point out, 'Facing History and Ourselves' and 'Peace Clubs' started as small, localized interventions and now have a presence around the country and the world. To turn these two projects into ways of agonistic decolonisation, it is important to examine the feasibility of decolonization of peace (education) both in the broader society of South Africa and in present education institutions (e.g. Higher Education institutions). Examining in practice the extent to which specific projects such as these two might be transformed by the notion of agonistic decolonisation is extremely important in future research efforts on peace education in South Africa.

Theoretical and political implications of agonistic decolonisation for peace education

In the last part of this article, we discuss the theoretical and political implications that agonistic politics and agonistic peace hold for debates on decolonising peace education. As noted above, the problematics of the Eurocentric foundation of ideas of peace and peace education have marked the field in recent years (e.g. Bajaj 2015; Kester 2019; Williams 2017; Zakharia 2017). This has allowed for challenging the unequal social relations and relations of power, and especially how these are grounded in whiteness, coloniality and liberalism (Zembylas 2020). In building on and expanding the decolonial project, we propose that agonistic decolonisation contributes to the project of decolonising peace education in both political and theoretical terms.

The political implications of agonistic decolonisation for peace education are threefold: Firstly, it offers an alternative to consensus-driven approaches to peace and peacebuilding by foregrounding the critical role that dissensus play; secondly, it offers an opportunity to foreground the materiality and structural foundations of prevailing injustices. This in turn allows for actively

seeking ways to transform these injustices through addressing ongoing coloniality in our conceptualisations and practices of peace and peace education. Thirdly, agonistic decolonisation allows for peace to be conceptualised as desired but deferred (also see Hajir 2023), as adversaries with often incommensurable differences contest its meaning and enact alternative imaginaries of what it might entail. We briefly discuss each of these political implications in turn.

Critical peace education takes as a central concern fostering social equality and justice which most often find expression in the rights to recognition, inclusion, and reconciliation (Bajaj 2015). As has been pointed out by others, these rights are premised on the Western liberal ideals of liberty and equality (Hajir 2023). Since working towards recognition, inclusion and reconciliation in peace education largely remain founded on consensus building (Strömbom, Bramsen, and Stein 2022), it allows for Western and Eurocentric values and norms to become hegemonic and universalised. Agonistic decolonisation challenges the centrality of consensus seeking in peacebuilding by foregrounding the importance of dissensus in all political life and the foundational role that affects and passions play in this. By privileging dissensus, opportunity is created for alternative archives than Western liberalism to inform dialogue and practice that work towards social equality and justice. Dissensus, thus, allows for different (and other than Western and Eurocentric) onto-epistemological *and* political concerns to come the bare on peace education projects. It is, furthermore, through bringing alternative archives to the fore that prevailing power/resistance nexuses could be highlighted and the Eurocentric norms and values that continue to inform peace education, be exposed and dismantled.

Agonistic decolonisation, secondly, allows for foregrounding the materiality and structural foundations of inequality (Maddison 2022) and the need to give recognition to and address these aspects in peace education programmes. A potential shortcoming of current decolonial approaches to peace education is that they remain predominantly focussed on epistemological transformation in their focus on inclusion, reconciliation and consensus (Strömbom, Bramsen, and Stein 2022). The focus on curricula change within the discourses on decolonisation serves as an example here, where such changes are often orientated toward creating more democratic and inclusive curricula with the aim of furthering epistemic justice and participatory parity (Heleta 2016; Kruger 2020; Masaka 2019). We argue, however, that decolonisation entails more fundamental change that should also encompass ontological and ethical transformation (see also le Grange et al. 2020). Focussing largely on epistemological transformation holds the danger of remaining blind to the materiality of power relations and the structural inequalities that these arrangements continue to produce within settler-colonial relationships. Peace education efforts informed by agonistic decolonisation should thus firstly enable exploring the prevailing structures of inequality in society

and how these are manifested in differing material conditions experienced by different communities. Secondly, agonistic decolonisation foregrounds the importance of creating opportunities for enacting different forms of relations that allows for transforming the materiality of power relations and structures of inequality, even if this is initially done on a small scale such as within the classroom context. The latter position is premised on the conviction that counter-hegemonic and micropolitical actions unfolding on the local level are the driving force of socio-political transformation.

A third political implication of agonistic decolonisation for peace education is that peace is conceptualised as desired but differed (Hajir 2023). This conceptualisation foregrounds an understanding that peace is continuously re-invented within particular contexts as adversaries, with often incommensurable differences, contest its meaning and enact alternative imaginaries of what it might entail. The 'pluralisation of the political sphere' (Machin 2019, 351) that agonistic decolonisation demands, and through which localised understandings and practices of peace and peace education emerge, allows for peace and peace education to be reconceptualised as socio-political concepts that are ambiguous and dynamic, and that remain open to contestation. In a sense, peace and peace education emerge from 'a dangerous understanding of uncommonality' (Tuck and Yang 2012, 35). Furthermore, the enactment of alternative imaginaries of peace education are understood to be open to being informed by Southern ontological and epistemic perspectives. This means that the ethico-political positions of refusal and turning away are understood as legitimate responses in moving beyond Western and Eurocentric notions of what peace and peace education entail and the (political and social) institutions through which these could be enacted and contested. This is an important political move as it allows for remaining vigilant to the danger of agonistic politics replicating existing forms of coloniality (see Maddison 2022; Shinko 2008).

Having briefly discussed the political implications of agonistic decolonisation, we next consider the theoretical implications that agonistic decolonisation holds for peace education. An important theoretical implication of agonistic decolonising is that conflict and dissensus are positioned as fundamental to any social or political transformation. The means that peace education programmes have to provide opportunities for productively and nonviolently engaging with conflict and dissensus. Central to this would be that political 'enemies' are repositioned as 'adversaries' with legitimate political claims, notwithstanding how incommensurate with one's own, that need to be respected (Connolly 2002). In this regard, facilitating agonistic spaces that allow for contestations and counter-hegemonies to be voiced are important, as well as understanding the concepts of peace as emergent from the 'continual contest among incompatible visions, identities, and projects' (Maddison 2022, 1315). The shift from inclusion and consensus to conflict and dissensus, furthermore, signals the imperative within peace education programmes informed by decolonisation

of making evident and dismantling the materiality of power relations and structural inequality. This would also mean being open to replacing (Western) liberal values and institutions with more context specific values and institutions that reflect localised histories and onto-epistemic traditions.

Agonistic decolonisation furthermore encourages affective responses and passions to be legitimised within peace education projects. This, we argue, is important since it creates opportunities for engaging in difficult and sensitive conversations about the contribution that a decolonised peace education could make to address hierarchical and unequal relations of power established through colonialism and continuing under coloniality. These conversations would be informed by localised histories and contemporary lived realities, and could entail questions of land redistribution, reparations, indigenous sovereignty, and ongoing violence in post-conflict societies. The affective responses engendered by these difficult conversations could form the basis for creating different regimes of desire that are informed by the 'voices, communities and histories that have been historically muted and marginalized' (Shirazi 2011, 291).

A further theoretical implication that agonistic decolonisation holds is that it makes evident the prevailing hegemonic regimes of peace and peace education and how these continue to be implicated in modernity and coloniality. Making these regimes evident through foregrounding the foundational role that dissensus place in all political life allows for attending to the practices of boundary creation and associated exclusions, both in onto-epistemological and political terms, present in current understandings and enactments of peace and peace education within specific settings. Similarly, agonistic decolonisation permits for considering how hegemonic regimes might inform debates on decolonisation peace and peace education. An agonistic orientation, thus, allows for contesting the manner in which concepts such as peace, agency, voice, transformation, and even decolonisation are conceptualised within the field. This is important, since attending to how boundary creation and exclusions manifest and hegemonic regimes meanings and practices become to be associated with important concepts in peace education projects allows for counter-acting them. Any form of counteraction should, however, remain rooted in radical openness that allows for the participation of adversaries in ongoing efforts towards peacebuilding.

Concluding thoughts

In speaking to peace education's decolonial turn, we emphasize the role of concepts such as agonistic peace and agonistic decolonisation in combatting the limits of Eurocentric notions of peace and peace education. Scholarly engagements with ideas that pay attention to both onto-epistemological and political concerns of decoloniality, peace, and peace education are helpful in interrupting and dismantling theories and practices that continue to be

enclosed in Western liberal values. If peace education is to become a force for decolonisation, it needs to uncover and actualize alternative ways by which to enact peace that are relevant, meaningful, participatory and critical (Suffla et al. 2020), and that allow us to make connections between the micro- and the macro-, between the affective, political, epistemological and material dimensions of peace and peace education. Our contribution in this paper is ultimately a call on peace education scholars and practitioners to embrace agonism in our struggles to envision decolonial possibilities.

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