

Towards Deepening Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding

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The principle of indigenous empowerment suggests that conflict transformation must actively envision, include, respect, and promote the human and cultural resources from within a given setting. This involves a new set of lenses through which we do not primarily 'see' the setting and the people in it as the 'problem' and the outsider as the 'answer'. Rather, we understand the long-term goal of transformation as validating and building on people and resources within the setting. – John Paul Lederach (1995: 212).

For generations going back to ancient times, scholars and other interested parties have debated the causes of conflict and war. Conflicts and wars have become a major preoccupation of humans – from individuals to leaders, communities, and whole countries. Not surprisingly, scholarly explanations and theories now abound. For some scholars, conflicts and wars can be attributed to psychological factors, particularly the roles played by leaders and other key players. For many social psychologists and sociologists, the answer may be found by looking at the sorts of roles people play within social groups in society. Many anthropologists blame conflicts and wars on the cultural factors which condition human beings to particular behaviour patterns. Many scientists attribute conflicts and wars to human nature, suggesting that human beings – particularly males – are effectively coded genetically to engage in aggression as a survival mechanism in a world full of dangers (initially from wild beasts and subsequently from other humans). For many political scientists, historians and economists, the causes of conflicts and wars could be deduced by looking at human frailties such as weak, inflexible, greedy, manipulative or power-hungry leadership, nationalism, elite exploitation and injustice, and communal and national competition over ethnicity, religion or for scarce resources. Many peace researchers point more towards global and national economic or institutional arrangements and structures that create and embed forms of dependencies and exploitative systems that impose economic and structural violence on large groups of people whose human security needs are fundamentally ignored.

These theories notwithstanding, it has become increasingly clear that the circumstances in which armed conflict may occur cannot be limited to

single-cause analysis. Much available evidence shows clearly that the causes of specific wars vary widely. Usually, they are rooted in political environments characterised by a range of factors. No seemingly intractable conflict anywhere in the world – Afghanistan, Bosnia, Burundi, Casamance (Senegal), Colombia, Darfur (Sudan), Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Kashmir, northeast India, Korean peninsula, Kosovo, Middle East, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Somalia, Tibet, Xinjiang (China), etc. – can be reduced meaningfully to one theoretical explanation. It is for this reason that attempts to resolve many interminable conflicts have usually failed despite huge numbers of casualties, the investment of a significant array of resources in the form of major weapons purchases, and even third-party interventions. In many instances, fighting has flared up after peace agreements were reached and the conflict presumably resolved.

It is for this reason that proponents of conflict transformation insist “that contemporary conflicts require more than the reframing of positions and the identification of win-win outcomes” [as is done by conflict resolution efforts] (Miall, 2004:4). They insist that to achieve lasting peace more must be done to ensure that relationships are changed:

The very structure of parties and relationships may be embedded in a pattern of conflictual relationships that extend beyond the particular site of conflict. Conflict transformation is therefore a process of engaging with and transforming the relationships, interests, discourses and, if necessary, the very constitution of society that supports the continuation of violent conflict (Miall, 2004:4).

In essence then, the very idea of conflict transformation not only eschews the obstruction of constructive dialogue but also endorses the need for the profound and long term alteration of conflictual relationships or interactions that support violence by tackling the structural, attitudinal, and behavioural dimensions of conflict. Basically, the approach entails transforming perceptions through effective communication that address the root causes of a particular conflict such as social inequality and injustice. Because obdurate conflicts can only be transformed over the long-term, they involve gradual and complex processes that require the sustained engagement and interactions of the parties in conflict to effect a number of changes such as: the modification of the goals and approaches used by the key actors in pursuit of their objectives; working to alter the context within which conflict occurs in order not only to challenge the way the key actors understand and see one another but also the value, meaning and perception they have of the

conflict itself; working to redefine the vital issues associated with the existing conflict with an eye to reformulating the position and stakes the key actors attach to those same issues; facilitating changes in the values and rules central to decision-making at every level in order to shape the extent and depth to which the conflict would be constructively resolved; and changing the structural context since conflict is typically “underpinned by, and embedded in, the prevailing structure of relationships, power distributions and socio-economic conditions, changes to which impact the very fabric of interaction between previously incompatible actors, issues and goals” (<http://www.transconflict.com/approach/approach-to-conflict-transformation>).

Ubuntu: Journal of Conflict Transformation has been established with the above context in mind. As an idea, *Ubuntu* is fundamental to the African view of human interaction and oneness especially when an individual or a group is weak or vulnerable, or faced with challenges or adversity. In essence, this *Ubuntu* view of humanity and human relations is anchored on, and reflected meaningfully in, the philosophy of non-violent conflict transformation. Therefore, *Ubuntu: Journal of Conflict Transformation* is an attempt to further encourage a philosophical shift toward a more transformative, less costly, and more effective approach to lasting peace in a world ravaged not only by the destructive powers of modern weaponry but also by unprecedented investments in the development of technologies of war at the expense of more productive and uplifting pursuits.

African conflicts are often described as habitually motivated by the quest of ethnic groups or warlords to capture and control natural resources. Ostensibly, this parochial pursuit occurs typically in a context where such groups are faced with favourable opportunity structures in an environment of state weakness or incapacity. In this inaugural issue of *Ubuntu: Journal of Conflict Transformation*, we focus on two important aspects of conflict – its territorial and peacebuilding aspects. Despite relatively common land or border-related disputes between groups and within communities across Africa, the issue of territoriality as a factor contributing to conflicts, especially protracted disputes, has been largely sidelined until recently. This is despite significant and growing evidence that territory matters a lot. As Matthew Fuhrmann and Jaroslav Tir (2007) have shown, internal territorial conflicts not only contribute to the development of enduring internal rivalries but also that such rivalries are “particularly problematic in terms of conflict recurrence and shortening of the periods of post-conflict peace”. Looking at existing literature, Fuhrmann and Tir found that although scholars identify territory as a focal issue influencing the onset of persistent internal conflict, they

typically reduced their analysis of the same conflict to issues of ethnicity and identity. Territory is usually ignored as a principal focus of research. In this way, our appreciation and understanding of why territory is such an important contributor to conflict has remained limited. Thus, this issue of *Ubuntu: Journal of Conflict Transformation* seeks both to re-table the high relevance of territoriality as a causal factor worth focusing on and to foreground the need to recast or envisage it as a useful way of looking at the many civil conflicts in Africa and the variances in contestations over space in individual contexts. In many ways, issues of territoriality serve as a prototype around which many of these conflicts over resource-access and use as well as citizenship rights are framed and challenged.

The post-colonial period in Africa has been especially marked by a “plethora of armed conflicts, civil wars, and brutal struggles for control over financial revenues and territories of *blood diamonds*” (Orogun, 2004: 151). It has also featured major struggles over agricultural land, water, and oil resources (Muhammed, 1997: 143-151). It is precisely for such reasons that Solomon Gomes (2004) asked rhetorically if “Africa will ever know peace”. If Africa has not known peace, it would be because territoriality as a source of abiding conflict has not received enough scholarly attention and the attendant meaningful, hard-nosed engagement from political leaders within countries and regionally.

Looking at a wide variety of issue-areas, the contributors to the inaugural issue of *Ubuntu: Journal of Conflict Transformation* provide useful insights and illustrations of the salience of territory to the many conflicts being experienced in parts of Africa. Since the turn of the 21st century, the region has experienced conflicts over a range of issues: colonialism and apartheid; access to land; access to sea and border routes for international trade; control over natural resources; boundary demarcation; claims over citizenship rights; and population growth and urbanisation.

The articles on offer in this volume touch on a wide range of issues of territoriality and peacebuilding. Kenneth Chukwuemeka Nwoko argues in “Footsteps in History, Colonial Origins of African Conflicts: An Insight from the Nigeria/Cameroon Border Conflict” that most of Africa’s conflicts are the net outcomes of colonial vestiges regardless of appearances and claims. This is especially so if members of an ethnic group are separated and reduced to minority status in different countries, or where a high-value natural resource ends up on the other side of the colonially-imposed boundaries. Using the Nigeria/Cameroon dispute over the Bakassi Peninsula as case study, Nwoko attributes the conflict to the arbitrariness of the colonial boundaries inherited by both countries. Following the Nigeria and Cameroon examples, he argues that Mixed

Commissions provide workable mechanisms for mediating interstate territorial disputes before they deteriorate into armed conflicts.

Aboubakr Tandia's article, "How African Civil Wars Hibernate: The Warring Communities of the Senegal / Guinea Bissau Borderlands in the Face of the Casamance Forgotten Civil War and the Bissau-Guinean State Failure", examines the reasons for persistent conflicts despite conflict resolution and reconstruction policies. Attributing enduring conflicts at "the edges of states" to the "local dynamics of cross-border areas", and using the border areas within Senegal/Guinea-Bissau regional space as a case study, Tandia argues that the various manifestations of the Casamance "forgotten civil war" are linked to the effects of state failure in Guinea-Bissau. The resulting growth and development of a "local history and territoriality of violence and wariness" has been aggravated by the reduction of the local communities of the frontier areas to the use of cross-border survival strategies in the face of scarcity and poverty. This situation is encrusted by the particular flavour of national and local politics in Senegal which not only hinders meaningful political representation but also the socio-economic development of the borderland areas and communities. It is this situation that has fed Casamance separatism. Tandia concludes by arguing the need for intergovernmental initiatives to link up with community efforts to reduce violence in the borderland areas as well as in other conflict parts of Africa.

In their article, "Managing Violent Conflicts over Marginality From Below: The Role of Non State Actors in the Management of the Niger Delta Conflict in Nigeria", Augustine Ikelegbe and Christian Opukri take the position that the base causes of the violent conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria are linked to the systematic marginalisation and the assorted negative externalities of over five decades of oil and gas production, which have imposed immense development and human security challenges on the local population. With the state unable or unwilling to take adequate responsibility for mitigating the challenges, local non-state organisations have sought to fill the vacuum by building collaborations and partnerships with international organisations. This has resulted in a range of intervention schemes such as relief and humanitarian assistance, development projects, and conflict resolution and peace building initiatives. Ikelegbe and Opukri conclude by arguing that despite some progress in terms of empowering some youth and women, and providing some infrastructure and building capacity for peace building, much remains to be done to achieve conflict transformation and prevent the reoccurrence of violent conflicts.

In "Post Conflict Reconstruction and the Resurgence of 'Resolved' Territorial Conflicts: Examining the DRC Peace Process", Charles Nyuykonge examines why conflicts reoccur in states where, ostensibly, they were previously resolved. He argues that this is due largely not only to the focus of conflict resolution mechanisms on the short-term but also the lack of adequate attention to ensuring that intervention policies are devised by, and accommodate the needs of, indigenes affected by the civil war. Pointing to the economic wealth of the Congo as constituting an impediment to the peace process by actually increasing friction, posing additional political obstacles and making compromise difficult, he questions the efficacy of international peacekeeping to stabilise the Congo and as a vehicle for conflict resolution. For Nyuykonge, the "design and conceptualisation of peacekeeping as a foreign regiment" is responsible for the cyclical and prolonged Congolese conflicts. Using the role of MONUC and other interveners in the Congolese peace process as a case study, he sought to clarify the "difference between peacekeeping as a mediator, meddler and interventionist in African civil conflicts" in order to change attitudes about the usefulness of peacekeeping as a vehicle for the resolution of civil conflicts in contrast to the role of indigenes as owners of the peace/nation building process.

Abdul Karim Bangura and Hunter Sinclair focus on how effective collaborative arrangements can prevent potential border disputes. In their article, "Strengthening Ties among Landlocked Countries in Eastern Africa: Making Prisoner's Dilemma a Strategy of Collaboration", they take the position that coastal states have a vested interest in exploiting and even cutting off trade with landlocked states "unless landlocked states can provide incentives for collaboration and build seaborne states' dependence upon them". Using Uganda as case study, the article examines the outcomes of relations between the nations in the region and possible strategies for strengthening ties and interdependence among the countries. They conclude that though Uganda may have devised a way to "permanently influence collaborative outcomes in its relations with Kenya and Tanzania", there are good reasons to question the sustainability of such influence even within an economic union. Nevertheless, the authors are convinced that other landlocked developing countries can emulate Uganda's relative success in either encouraging or forcing cooperative outcomes with their transit partners (in terms of trade) and, in so doing, achieving significant economic progress.

Joseph S. Gbenda's "Age-Long Land Conflicts in Nigeria: A Case for Traditional Peacemaking Mechanisms" makes a case for appropriating traditional peacemaking strategies in peace building processes. Arguing that land space and associated resources are primary causes of civil

conflicts in Nigeria due to competition by a range of people to achieve sustainable livelihoods in the face of a growing population and relative scarcity of needed resources, Gbenda proposes the utilisation of typical traditional peacemaking processes as mechanisms for resolving long-running land conflicts such as the Mbaduku-Udam and Ife-Modakeke disputes.

In his article, "Social Protection, Labour Markets and Economic Reconfiguration of Post Conflict Northern Uganda", Fredrick Kisekka-Ntale argues that although a considerable number of social protection programmes have been put in place to reduce vulnerability in Northern Uganda, very little attention has focused on employment and labour markets despite their relevance in peace building processes. Focusing on northern Uganda, which has been ravaged by years of war, Kisekka-Ntale assesses the utility of policies and instruments of reintegration in a post-conflict situation as mechanisms not only for reducing regional marginalisation but also fostering the economic reconfiguration of northern Uganda in order to better reintegrate it into Uganda's wider political economy.

Brilliant Mhlanga argues in "Devolution – The 'Ticklish' Subject: The 'Northern Problem' and the National Question in Zimbabwe" that each post-colonial African state has its own version of Zimbabwe's 'northern problem' and the associated threat to the national project. Describing the 'northern problem' as a metaphor that refers to "the existence of a disgruntled group claiming a particular history and a particular identity that is different from that of the dominant 'ethnie' in a state," Mhlanga argues that its mere existence gives impetus to calls for a revision of systems of governance or secession. He insists that Zimbabwe's 'northern problem' is the net outcome of an internal political context that has given rise in one ethnic cluster of "feelings of being dominated, suppressed, excluded and marginalised from various national development projects, resource distribution, policy formulation and implementation". Although (as yet) this has not resulted in violent conflict in Zimbabwe, the associated discontent has undermined the national project by separating the state along ethnic and regional lines in which Mashonaland is seen as the region of the 'rulers', while Matebeleland stands for the land of the 'ruled.' Mhlanga proffers that Zimbabwe is now in need of a federal agenda – a people driven system of governance – to avoid a future marked by divisive civil conflict.

Using the case study of a conflict that erupted in Swaziland in 2000 with serious socio-economic dislocations as people were evicted and forced to migrate from lands they had occupied for generations, Hamilton Siphon Simelane argues in his article – "The Monarchy, Land

Contests and Conflict in Post-Colonial Swaziland” – that this Swazi conflict was a typical example of contestation over the control of a land resource. As he states, “it shows that land can be contested as a resource for production and accumulation, and also for political control in agrarian economies such as that of Swaziland”. Placing the Swazi monarchy at the centre of the conflict, Simelane argues that the dispute arose because of land greed by a monarch who wanted to concentrate land resources in the hands of members of the royal family and, by so doing, to achieve more effective control of regional traditional leaders and the population within their jurisdictions. He concludes by proffering that conflicts over land will be minimised through equitable and comprehensive land reform and redistribution policies that avoid arrangements that empower some groups or individuals over others.

Jacob Kehinde Ayantayo’s article, “Re-Engineering the Ethics of Land, Space and Territorial Acquisition as Strategies for Resolving Nigerian Civil Conflicts”, is an appeal for broader approaches to resolving issues of territoriality by using religious methods of preventing, managing and resolving conflict as integral parts of the conflict and peace discourse in Africa. Focusing on territorially-induced civil conflicts in Nigeria, and the principle of human equality, moral worth and natural rights to occupy and live in any given territory without hindrance from any quarter, Ayantayo takes the position that all human beings deserve an equal share of the world’s natural resources such as land. Arguing that ethics “calls for land restitution, compensation, redistribution and re-sharing as essentials in addressing the territorially induced conflicts in Nigeria”, he insists that religious methods are worthy of experimentation given their potential “to complement modern conflict-handling styles” and to enhance genuine reconstruction after territorial conflicts, rehabilitation or reintegrating and provision of livelihoods to persons displaced during the conflicts, and reconciliation by facilitating “mutual cooperation through justice, truth, mercy and forgiveness”.

Individually and together, the contributors to this inaugural issue of *Ubuntu: Journal of Conflict Transformation* provide valuable insights into the challenging and divisive issues of territoriality, citizenship and peacebuilding, and how each of those issue-areas challenge (individually and collectively) efforts to achieve sustainable peace within the African continent. The authors paint an overall picture of the national and regional dysfunctions associated with territorial conflicts. Basically, they serve to deter or retard development by destroying national stability and peace, and challenging and exposing the hollowness of the so-called national developmental agendas and efforts of individual governments that pursue predatory policies against their own citizens. Beyond

detering productive investments in the political economies, territorial conflicts often destroy social cohesion and infrastructure such as roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, water supply systems, and even farm lands. To exacerbate matters, conflicts force governments to re-direct significant amounts of resources required to fund developmental projects such as education, agriculture and health care facilities to non-contributive or wasteful purchases of arms and the maintenance of public order, including the need to mitigate or contain incidents and the effects of violent conflict. For instance, Collier *et al* (2003) estimated that the Angolan war guzzled a staggering US\$ 54 billion. Similarly, it was estimated that the cost of armed conflicts in Africa (most of which were territorial in origin) between 1990 and 2005 exceeded USD 300 billion – an amount that equals the overall Overseas Development Assistance in the region for the same period (UNDP, 2007).

Clearly the cost estimates do not account for the human costs, which are unquantifiable in terms not only of the financial costs of wasted and lost lives but also of opportunities and social welfare. Given such contexts and costs, there is a clear and growing need to better understand the territorial origins of African conflicts. The link between such an understanding and the sustainable resolution of the region's many conflicts associated with issues of territoriality has never been more urgent. This fact is further amplified by emerging conflicts in Libya, Mali, Nigeria, South Sudan/Sudan, Somalia and the Horn sub-region, and elsewhere. Further, more intensive and systematic research is now needed not only on the implications of territorial conflicts but also on how best to stem the emergence and effects of such conflicts through the emplacement of appropriate transformation systems.

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