

# **The Politics of the Struggle to Resolve the Conflict in Uganda: Westerners Pushing Their Legal Approach versus Ugandans Insisting on Their Mato Oput**

by

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## **Introduction**

After combing through many different definitions of politics, ranging from the simple to the complex, and varying from the profound to the obvious, James Barnes, Marshall Carter and Max Skidmore assert that “the key idea that underlies them all is that politics somehow involves the fundamental values of a community....In ranking their values, people establish priorities for action” (1984:4). Thus, as can be gleaned from the title of this essay, the purpose here is to examine the competing values proffered by Westerners and Ugandans in the struggle to resolve the conflict in Uganda.

On March 12, 2008, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni rejected the call for a Hague trial of the top three surviving Lord Resistance Army (LRA) officials who face prosecution at the International Criminal Court (ICC). The LRA insists that the war crimes indictments be lifted before signing a peace agreement to end the 22-year rebellion in northern Uganda that has left thousands dead and nearly two million displaced. Government and LRA representatives have been engaged in peace talks for the past 18 months in Juba, the capital of South Sudan. Fearing arrest, LRA leader Joseph Kony has sent his representatives to the talks and refused to attend them himself. He remains in a forest hideout in the remote north-east section of the Democratic Republic of Congo (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7921274.stm>).

Museveni stated in London that local leaders had asked for indigenous justice (*Mato Oput*) to be applied, rather than a trial at the ICC in The Hague. As he put it, “What we have agreed with our people is that they should face traditional justice, which is more compensatory than a retributive system.” He then asked: “If that’s what the community wants, then why would we insist” on a trial in The Hague? (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7921274.stm>).

The Ugandan president does not have the power to make the ICC withdraw the arrest warrants, although they were issued at his request before peace negotiations began. LRA officials are currently at The Hague trying to get the warrants lifted. But as of this writing, the ICC prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, has refused to meet the LRA representatives and said that the indictments will remain in place. In 2005, the ICC charged five LRA commanders, including Kony, with war crimes and crimes against humanity; two of the commanders have since been killed. Museveni’s decision puts the ICC in an awkward position, for if it decides to drop the arrest warrants it could be accused of bowing to political pressure (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7921274.stm>). Nonetheless, since the ICC has no plans or the means to wage war against the LRA and capture their leaders and fighters, something the Ugandan government has not been able to do in 22 years, the ICC’s insistence on its legal approach appears reckless and might encourage renewed hostilities in Uganda. Moreno-Ocampo’s refusal to meet with LRA officials and insistence that the indictments remain can be interpreted as the actions of someone who only cares about safeguarding his job.

But even before Museveni’s recent statement on The Hague alternative, on May 30, 2007, the Ugandan government urged donors and human rights groups to accept traditional clan-based justice systems as an alternative to jail sentences for dealing with rebel war crimes. After two decades of a bloody civil war, the government and the LRA are engaged in peace talks aimed at ending the bloodshed. LRA members said that they will not sign any deal unless the ICC drops indictments against their four top commanders at the time. That prompted government officials to suggest reconciliation rituals as an alternative. The head of the government’s peace team, Internal Affairs Minister Ruhakana Rugunda, told journalists that he wants critics to take the proposal more seriously. As he put it, “Our traditions have sustained our societies for centuries. Instead of abandoning them...and jumping into Western solutions, Uganda may decide to stick with our traditions,” adding that traditional approaches had “resolved conflicts in the past” (Cocks 2007).

Traditional leaders from the LRA’s Acholi ethnic group—who have been the main victims of attacks by both the government and LRA troops, including the abduction of their children as recruits—want LRA leader Kony and his fighters to undergo *Mato Oput* justice. The ritual involves a murderer facing relatives of the victim and admitting his crime before the murderer and the relatives drink a bitter brew made from a tree root mixed with sheep’s blood. But human rights groups are not convinced that this traditional approach is adequate.

Human Rights Watch (HRW), for instance, said that any alternative to the Hague-based ICC would have to reflect the gravity of the crimes committed by the LRA. In the words of the HRW, “Fair and credible prosecutions with appropriate penalties will tell would-be perpetrators that no one is above the law,” warning that only hefty prison sentences would achieve this (Cocks 2007).

Many Ugandans in the war-torn north who are weary of a conflict that has killed thousands of their family members and forced two million of them into miserable camps, however, see the ICC as an obstacle to peace. In response, the ICC insists that it is being made a scapegoat. But according to Uganda’s Foreign Affairs Minister, Oryem Okello, “The most important thing is the acceptance of the justice system by the victims,” adding that “Most Acholis want Kony to be forgiven after going through *Mato Oput*” (Cocks 2007).

In light of this stalemate, the major question that emerges and addressed in this essay is the following: Is there evidence to support the insistence by Ugandans that *Mato Oput*, and not the Western legal approach, will lead to lasting peace in their country? To answer this question, the rest of this essay is divided into two major sections. The first section examines lessons from a Western and an African approach that have been used to resolve conflicts in Uganda. The second section discusses examples of successful African approaches used elsewhere on the continent to resolve very bloody and long-lasting conflicts. In the end, conclusion is drawn.

## **Lessons from a Western and an African Approach Used in Uganda**

As I have written elsewhere (Bangura 2007:60), a principal argument of the Western legal approach is that it will deter would be perpetrators of crime. But what is the evidence of this? Although proponents of this approach have offered convincing arguments for their position, there does not appear to be any decrease in crimes where the approach is used. It seems, then, that the fear of legal consequences fails to act as a powerful deterrent of crime. Why? There appear to be two main reasons. The first reason is that most crimes are rarely premeditated. In cases where crime is premeditated, the offenders obviously do not expect to get caught or punished. The second reason the approach often fails to deter crime is that, as presently applied, punishments are less swift or less certain (the very expensive, inefficient and divisive international tribunals in Rwanda and Sierra Leone are examples). And many times, the victims themselves do not pursue legal recourse for economic, social, or cultural reasons. Decisions via the legal approach, then, are not really about deterrence; they are about retribution—about society’s revenge on a person who is caught engaging in crime.

As Bethuel Kiplagat (n.d.) narrates the story, he had the privilege in 1985 of being directly involved in the Ugandan Peace Talks between the military government of Tito Okello and the National Resistance Army (NRA) of Yoweri Museveni, now President of Uganda. When Milton Obote won Uganda's 1984 national elections, Museveni rejected the results and went to the bush and launched a rebellion against the central government. After the overthrow of Obote by Generals Tito Okello and Basilio Okello, the rebellion spread to the western and central regions and significantly weakened the central authority. The warring parties were ready to talk.

The Ugandan peace talks were started in mid-1985. They lasted for four months, resulting in the signing of a peace accord. Kenya handled the mediation. The parties chose their representatives of their negotiation teams. The negotiations were conducted in secret, and participation was restricted only to invited persons. The talks turned into a bargaining session where each party made every effort to score points. After four frustrating months, participants came out with an agreement signed in the glare of the press and the public. After meeting with Museveni's commanders and explaining the agreement to them, however, Kiplagat realized that their intention was not to accept it (Kiplagat n.d.).

The agreement was never implemented, as Museveni and his men continued their offensive and finally overthrew the Okellos, seizing power on January 26, 1986. After that, rebellions sprung up in the west, the northwest and the north. As Kiplagat laments, the method used had no traditional input or binding force. Thus, he concludes that perhaps, certain styles of mediation could be alien and therefore ineffective in Africa (Kiplagat n.d.).

The Karamoja peace initiative of 1996, on the other hand, was predicated on an indigenous conflict resolution approach. As Michael Quam tells the story, Karomoja is a 27,200 square kilometer area of semi-arid savannah, bush and mountains in the northeastern part of Uganda. Karamoja was a single district from 1911 to 1971; but in 1971, it was divided into two administrative districts—Northern Karamoja and Southern Karamoja, later renamed Kotido District and Moroto District, respectively. As a semi-arid area, it may get short rains during April and a longer rainy season from July to early September. This pattern, however, is not reliable; and in many years, the rains have been sparse or fail altogether. Consequently, drought and hunger are recurrent features of life in Karamoja. Despite the fact that during years of adequate rainfall sorghum and millet provide most of the nutrition for the Dodoth, the Jie and the Karimojong, these ethnic groups have adapted to the often harsh environment by focusing much of their energy on their livestock—principally cattle, but also goats and sheep and, in a few areas, some camels. Besides being major sources of protein, the animals, especially cattle, represent wealth, both economically and symbolically. During long dry seasons, herdsman move their livestock from permanent settlements to temporary encampments near pasture and watering places in the west and south of the central plains, often crossing over into the territories of neighboring groups and districts. Competition for scarce resources, particularly water and pasture, and the high value placed on cattle have given birth to a culture of raiding and warfare within which men become famous for their bravery and wealth.

Men marry with cattle, and historically bride-wealth “prices” have been very high. Some young men mount raids on other pastoral groups in order to establish their reputations and build their own herds. Traditionally, these activities, as well as other group policy decisions, were controlled through a social organization of male age gradation within which the elders wielded great political and ritual power (Quam 1996).

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a combination of calamities that produced profound changes in the population, economy and culture of these semi-pastoral societies. Beginning with the 1970s, warrior herdsmen who had always fought with spears began to acquire modern firearms. Recurrent food shortages caused by localized drought, increased raiding among groups, particularly by well-armed Turkana, thefts and killings by armed bandits, and general political turmoil resulted in a major famine in 1980. Massive food relief efforts by international organizations managed to halt the disaster, but not before an estimated 21 percent of the population (about 50,000 people, 25,000 of them children) had perished mostly from starvation. The famine of the early 1980s was ended, but famine recurred in 1984-1985 and again in 1991 (Quam 1996).

Well into the 1990s, the deterioration of the traditional economy and armed violence continued to transform Karamoja’s society and ecology. Losing their cattle and abandoning many of their agricultural areas due to fear of armed raiders, poverty-stricken people turned to producing charcoal to sell to townspeople in the administrative centers and military posts. The result has been the disappearance of many trees and large bushes from the plains and the lower slopes of the mountains, opening up the land to be reclaimed by savannah grasses. This situation could lead to a further decrease in rainfall. In addition, the concentration of cultivation in a smaller number of more secure areas close to towns and military posts has caused soil depletion and lower crop yields. Since in the past these pastoralists had never relied on game animals for their subsistence, they had never developed a hunting culture with ritual and practical constraints on harvesting wildlife. With more modern firearms now in their hands and hunger in their homesteads, they have literally decimated the large populations of zebra, antelope, giraffe, ostrich and other fauna that were plentiful in Karamoja two decades earlier. Moreover, cattle herds had been reduced and redistributed through raiding (Quam 1996).

Even though there was no egalitarianism in terms of wealth distribution in traditional Karimojong society, nearly every family had enough livestock for subsistence, and the size of a family’s herd depended on the skills and the winds of fortune of the herdsmen. A man with even modest wealth could exercise some influence in the elders’ council. From the 1970s to the 1990s, however, some individuals became extremely wealthy through successful large-scale cattle raiding. These exceptionally rich and powerful leaders enjoyed the allegiance of many other armed men who had little or no wealth that had become attached to them. Meanwhile, many men and their families had been left poor by the loss of their herds and subsequently lost political influence (Quam 1996).

Many people became so destitute that they began scavenging for food in garbage dumps. To feed their children, some Karimojong women resorted to working as prostitutes, a practice almost unheard of in earlier times. Chronic drinking, not just of local sorghum beer, but often of distilled spirits, became more prevalent, and was undermining the stature and traditional authority of parents and elders. During these years of turmoil, many students dropped out of school and became unemployed. These alienated youth were easy targets to be recruited as cattle raiders and bandits (Quam 1996).

The towns grew, as poor people migrated to them in search of meager incomes and security. As a consequence, the basic amenities of town life declined. For example, Moroto Town, the largest town in all of Karamoja, could not sustain running water or 24-hour electricity; many of the shops along its main street were boarded up, and the hospital did not have the staff or supplies to provide basic health services. At the same time, Karamoja lost many of its inhabitants to neighboring districts where they became traders and farmers. The raiding and banditry took their toll in human lives as well. It was estimated that the Jie ethnic group, for instance, which counted some 25,000 persons, lost no less than 1,000 young men in gun battles in 1981. In Moroto District's only functional hospital, a mission facility in Matagn, many of the patients were brought in with gunshot wounds (Quam 1996).

Firearms first appeared in Karamoja in the late 19th Century. They were owned by ivory hunters and traders, the majority of whom were from Ethiopia. The British colonial power at the time became concerned, mainly for geopolitical reasons, about rumors of gun-running and territorial inroads being made by Ethiopian leaders who wanted to expand the Ethiopian Empire of Menelik II. This ungoverned and distant frontier was potentially strategic for continuing control of the River Nile. In 1911, a British patrol was sent to establish British authority over the area, run the Ethiopians and other "unsavory rascals" out, and disarm the local residents. By 1921, the British had firmly established a military administration in Karamoja. Guns were not allowed in the hands of local inhabitants except the chiefs that were appointed by the British. This state of affair continued for the next 50 years (Quam 1996).

In the 1960s, the Turkana from the west and the Toposa from the north, armed with modern high-powered rifles, began frequent incursions into Karamoja to raid for cattle and whatever else they could take. The Ugandan government's armed police stationed in Karamoja to enforce law and order appeared unable to respond to the raids. The police would waste precious pursuit time by interviewing the victims of raids at great length, filling out long forms, and then asking the victims what the raiders' likely path of flight might be. The police would then drive off in their vehicles to pursue the raiders, while leaving behind the local herdsmen who knew how to trace the tracks of the stolen cattle. If the police did encounter the raiders, who were well-armed and knowledgeable about how to fight in that terrain, the raiders could easily defeat the police militarily. Meanwhile, the police strictly enforced the law to keep guns out of the hands of local inhabitants (Quam 1996).

This situation continued until General Idi Amin's military coup d'état in 1971 brought a different armed force into the district. Amin's army assumed the responsibility of stopping the raiders and was brutally efficient. The army pursued the raiders with vengeance and recovered many of the stolen livestock; but instead of returning the cattle to the owners, army officers were selling them to local cattle traders. The people of Karamoja were now faced with both armed raiders and a thieving army. Believing that their only recourse was self-help, the people began to fabricate homemade guns. They broke into the schools and stole metal furniture to get steel tubing for gun barrels. Using the crude firearms and traditional weapons, they began attacking isolated police posts, overwhelming the officers, and taking their guns. Now better armed, a small group of Karimojong men mounted an audacious and cleverly planned early morning attack on the police headquarters in Nabilituk and took many more modern firearms (Quam 1996).

When Amin's regime collapsed under the onslaught of the liberation troops invading from the south in 1979, soldiers fled north and east. Along the way, they sold their weapons or lost them to local attackers. The Karamoja regional army barracks in Moroto were abandoned and the doors left ajar. Immediately, local inhabitants broke into the armory and carried off tons of rifles and ammunition. Now well armed, the Karimojong began to use the weapons to mount their own cattle raids on neighboring districts, particularly to the west and the south. The victims of these raids complained bitterly to the new Obote-led government, and Milton Obote, a northerner himself and sympathetic to the complaints of the Teso, Lango and Acholi ethnic groups, and equally concerned about a heavily armed and potentially rebellious populace in Karamoja, decided to use military counterforce. He sent police and militia units from these neighboring districts into Karamoja to pursue cattle raiders and disarm the Karimojong, but these outsiders were repeatedly defeated by the Karimojong and had their weapons seized (Quam 1996).

Within a few years, Obote's errors and misdeeds led to his downfall a second time, when, in 1985, the Okellos organized a coup within the army (the Acholi overthrowing the Langi) and against the Obote regime. Okellos' forces, however, also lacked discipline. Within six months, as stated earlier, they fell to the invading NRA led by Museveni. During all of this political and military chaos at the center, the army barracks in Moroto was once again looted by the Karimojong, helping themselves to another large cache of arms. At the same time, an internal and international trade in arms was well underway in Karamoja. The trade was buttressed by the continuing militarization and armed conflict in southern Sudan, western Kenya, and southern Ethiopia. The price of ammunition was determined by the distance from its source (Quam 1996).

When Museveni and his NRA took power, they began to pacify the whole of Uganda. Within a few months, NRA troops had reached the border of Karamoja. As they moved, they began to arrest gun-holders and seize their arms. When they tried to disarm the Karimojong, things went awry. The troops did manage to seize some weapons in some areas; but when the soldiers misbehaved, bullying people and looting stores, the Karimojong were convinced that their only protection hinged upon keeping their arms.

A violent resistance did not materialize because the troops were withdrawn from Karamoja and sent westward to fight the more serious rebellion that had broken out in northern Uganda, leaving behind only a token force and a still heavily armed Karamoja (Quam 1996).

In 1989, a group of policy-makers and other individuals deeply concerned about conditions in Karamoja convened a conference to seek solutions to the increasing violence and lack of security in the region. After lengthy deliberations, the preliminary report from conference participants detailed two policy alternatives: (1) the army could re-enter Karamoja and forcibly disarm the local inhabitants, or (2) the inhabitants could keep their guns and the armed Karimojong warriors could be transformed into a local level force to police the use of guns. Conference participants opined that the first option would be fiercely resisted, thereby being costly in terms of money, military effort and human lives. The second option was resisted by politically powerful opponents in Kampala (the capital of Uganda) who saw the option as government support for a group of rebellious warriors, many of whom had committed criminal acts. These opponents called for the Karimojong warriors whom they perceived as “thieves” and “murderers” to be arrested. The entrenched positions resulted in a stalemate. No final report emerged from the conference, and the government took no action (Quam 1996).

As security conditions continued to deteriorate in Karamoja, the Moroto District Council decided to take matters in its own hands in 1992. It appointed Sam Abura Pirir as Secretary of Security for Moroto District and charged him with organizing a local police force recruited from among the armed warriors. Members of this local force, called “vigilantes,” were recruited based on two major criteria: (1) one must own a gun, since the local government was not going to provide weapons; (2) one must be recognized as a leader in the community. Leadership criteria were quite traditional: one’s opinions are listened to and carry great weight; he is a man, or a son of a man, wealthy in cattle; his bravery and marksmanship are well-known and admired (or feared), or his skills at divination are recognized and respected. A small force was initially put together and, as events would have it, the group was immediately tested (Quam 1996).

A well-known and respected local school headmaster was ambushed on the road and killed in Matheniko County. A group of vigilantes from the area was quickly organized and began tracking the murderers. The vigilantes followed the fugitives to Namaalu in the far south of the district, then north to Nabilatuk, and finally back to Matheniko. During their pursuit, the vigilantes arrested a sub-county chief who had assisted the killers to elude the pursuers, thereby demonstrating their muscle in law enforcement. Two of the murderers managed to escape to Kenya, but the vigilantes were tipped off that the third one was hiding in a village just south of Moroto. Before dawn, the vigilantes surrounded the village, commanded everyone to stay indoors, and began a systematic search. The fugitive’s kinsman in the village had cleverly hidden him under the top of a granary that was removed and placed on the ground. The ruse would have worked, but the fugitive panicked, leapt out of the hiding place and began shooting only to be shot and killed.



The vigilantes' determined and effective performance in this event was perceived to be so impressive that several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) agreed to support the vigilantes through contributions of food and blankets, and their commander was able to get shirts for his men to use as uniform (Quam 1996).

Sam Abura Pirir organized the first vigilante force by recruiting ten men from each parish (a unit of a sub-county) for a total of 900 in Moroto District. He also recruited a few women to serve as intelligence gatherers. When they moved around, the women were capable of seeing and hearing things that might indicate illegal or non-peaceful activities that men would otherwise ignore. Abura Pirir decided that the top priority was to secure the roads. The army had not been able to do so, even when traveling in convoys, as their vehicles had come under fire. Private vehicles and convoys having come under attack forced many NGOs to withdraw from Karamoja. Initially, the ten vigilantes in each parish were posted to guard the roads, and they were immediately effective in making the roads safer (Quam 1996).

Meanwhile, President Museveni was under political pressure from districts bordering Karamoja to deal with the problem of armed Karimojong cattle raiders. When he visited the region, he was persuaded, albeit with misgivings, that his government had to support the successful vigilante program that already had the backing of NGOs and the local government. To allay his skepticism, Museveni took three major actions. First, he appointed Peter Lokeris, a trusted associate from Karamoja, to serve as the Special President's Representative on Security in Karamoja to oversee the volatile situation. Second, he appointed a new army commander for the Moroto division, a man from Karamoja who spoke the language and could relate to the local people. Finally, he insisted that the vigilante organization be placed under the command and control of the army. Although local government funds were used to pay the vigilantes' stipend, set at 10,000 Ugandan shillings (about US\$10) per month, the army became the paymaster. The overall force was expanded to 1,000 per county—5,000 in Moroto District and 3,000 in Kotido District. The vigilantes were issued their own special uniforms and a hierarchically elaborate military command structure was established, with commanders at each village, parish, sub-county, county, and district. Even the temporary cattle camps were supplied with vigilantes to guard cattle owners as they moved their herds. The army disbanded the women vigilantes Abura Pirir had recruited because they did not fit the military's conception of a soldier (Quam 1996).

By early 1996, the new form of security did appear to have a positive effect. In Nabilatuk, for instance, people would sit outside their houses and shops long after dark, talking and drinking tea or beer, in a relaxed atmosphere of sociability that they had not experienced for many years. They could walk from one homestead to another without fear of being attacked. Although still somewhat wary, many people traveled throughout the region. Reports of raiding and other forms of banditry dramatically decreased (Quam 1996).

Within traditional Karimojong society, major policy decisions were made through a process of discussion and debate by the adult (initiated) men of the community. As mentioned earlier, in these discussions, elders who had a reputation for good judgment, those who were wealthy in cattle, those who had special powers of divination and those who were known to be especially brave and militarily astute were influential. Although the changes that had occurred during the turmoil of the 1970s and the 1980s had threatened to undermine this system of traditional authority and decision-making, these leadership traits are still recognized and the form of group decision-making is still potentially powerful. Local government leaders in Karamoja have employed this traditional political process to prevent outbreaks of large-scale conflict and escalating violence in the region (Quam 1996).

Quam witnessed an example of this approach to peace-keeping when serious trouble was brewing in Karamoja in January of 1996. From the 1970s to the early 1990s, some Turkana herdsmen had lived in an area north of Mount Moroto. In the mid-1990s, they moved east and south of the mountain. They had made marriage and livestock alliances with their Karimojong “cousins,” the Matheniko, and lived in relative peace. Farther to the south, the Pian division of the Karimojong had developed similar alliances with the Pakot, some of whom live in Kenya and some in Karamoja territory close to the Pian. In Kenya, the Pakot and Turkana have an ambiguous relationship—sometimes, they are allies; other times, they are enemies. In the 1980s, the Pakot joined the Pian in large raids against other groups in Karamoja. Come the 1990s, the Pakot and Pian began complaining bitterly about what they perceived as a new and hostile military alliance of the Turkana and the Matheniko, and threatened to take a preemptive action against them. As word of these complaints and impending conflict reached Kampala, the central government decided that the Turkana must be forced back to the north side of Mount Moroto. The army commander in Moroto was sent to the Matheniko and Turkana villages to order the residents to pack up and leave in three days. The commander, harboring his own grudges against the Turkana, then informed the Pakot and the Pian about the action; the two groups expected the Turkana to be forced out of the area (Quam 1996).

To defuse the situation, a group of government officials, led by Honorable David Pulkol, Member of Parliament for Moroto District and then Minister of State for Karamoja Affairs, and including Michael Lokawua, then Chairman of the Moroto District Council, Peter Lokeris, Sam Abura Pirir, and the Moroto army commander, traveled to distant villages and cattle camps to engage in discussions, often late in the night, with local leaders, to ascertain the factual basis for the conflict and the potential for violence. The Turkana’s spokesman was a particularly powerful and influential man named Lowakaabong, who told the government officials that Matheniko and Turkana elders had agreed with Pakot elders just six or seven days earlier on how to share grazing and water resources in a particularly desirable and contested area called Ochorichoi. For more than 30 years, all settlements in the area had been abandoned due to continuous conflict over the area. When the Pakot leaders had their turn to tell their side of the story the following night, the government officials discovered that there had been no incidents of raiding or trouble with the Turkana and that the whole “problem” had been concocted (Quam 1996).

Meanwhile the Moroto army commander refused to rescind the order to move the Turkana until ordered to do so by his superior commanding officer. Peter Lokeris went to Kampala to consult with the President's Office and to Mbale to convince the Divisional Army Commander to attend a peace meeting the following Saturday. Messages were then sent to the disputants and their supporters to attend a large meeting on Saturday at Ochorichoi in order to air their grievances (Quam 1996).

On the way to the meeting, Quam recalled that he and others encountered a group of Matheniko herdsmen, all heavily armed and tense with anger and apprehension, who said they were not attending the meeting. They had been warned by an arms dealer who had just been in Pakot villages that the Pian and Pakot were planning to raid their cattle while they were attending the meeting. At the meeting site, hundreds of men were already there, sitting in their various ethnic groups and armed. Many vigilantes were also there sitting with their various ethnic groups. The army had unobtrusively deployed men all around the far perimeter of the area. Peter Lokeris opened the meeting by making it very clear that the patience of the national government was not inexhaustible and that the army could be used to enforce peacekeeping. The younger speakers, two from each group, took the floor and traded vitriolic charges and counter charges. As the afternoon wore on, it was time for the elders and the vigilante commanders to speak. Demonstrating their wisdom, the elders and vigilante commanders spoke with a conciliatory tone and made many statements extolling the virtues of peace. As the meeting ended, all the men from the different ethnic groups were talking with one another and shaking hands. The Divisional Army Commander, convinced that violence had been averted, rescinded the order against the Turkana (Quam 1996).

In discussions after the meeting, several of the Karamoja government officials stated that the Pian and Pakot had deliberately fomented the conflict in hopes of generating hostility toward the Turkana and force them to move their herds and settlements. Since the Matheniko and Turkana livestock and homesteads had become so intermingled over the years, both groups would have to move. Then, while they were on the move and in their weakest position, the Pian and the Pakot would attack. They came to the meeting with tempers flaring, expecting the Turkana to be evicted. Thus, when the meeting began, there was a great deal of tension and a real possibility of violence; but the conduct and outcome of the meeting undermined their position and destroyed their strategy (Quam 1996).

At the close of the meeting, local government officials urged the men to establish in their villages local councils of leaders who would meet frequently to keep track of any trouble that might be brewing and take appropriate steps to defuse it. For example, if livestock were raided, the leaders would go to the people who had done the raiding and force them to return the cattle or make restitution. These local leaders would be the equivalent of traditional elders (Quam 1996).

As Quam summarizes, the escalation of armed violence in Karamoja in the 1970s and 1980s saw the control that the elders had traditionally exercised over the young men challenged. Rich men with guns recruited young headstrong warriors who were dispossessed and willing to break the cultural rules and restraints to form small armies of cattle raiders and bandits. Elders who also were dispossessed in the chaos of raiding, drought and famine lost respect or control over these young men. One of the most serious consequences of the transformation of weaponry in these warrior societies was the threat of a total breakdown of traditional law and order. Fortunately, the system of social control by the elders has survived. The practice of initiation into the age grade system continues. Even many of the modern educated men who are government officials had been initiated. The cultural principle and practice of respecting elders are deeply rooted in this pastoral political economy. Some of the elders have managed to maintain their status, albeit they have adapted to the new reality of modern firearms being widely distributed. They also are armed, have maintained their herds, and have networks of younger men to support them when necessary. Nonetheless, they are still committed to the traditional forms of decision-making and have grown weary of the violence and destruction around them. It is from the ranks of these elders and their networks that many of the vigilantes have been recruited, and it is to these elders that modern government leaders turn to resolve conflicts and build peace through the restoration of traditional forms of culturally legitimate social and political authority (Quam 1996).

Quam sums up the Karamoja peace initiative as being ironic in the sense that at the end of the 20th Century, attempts to isolate, control and change Karamoja have resuscitated the value of the elders. The British colonialists were convinced that the leaders were an impediment to progress and civilization, and so they appointed chiefs. When the chiefs proved ineffective, the colonialists blamed the elders and tried to destroy their political power by outlawing initiation ceremonies in order to undermine the community of the age grade system. The scheme might have succeeded; but, fortunately, when Ugandans won their independence, they rescinded the British edict and immediately revived their age grade system. Still, in the decades following independence, a series of Ugandan governments have viewed Karamoja as dangerously backward and irrationally resistant to change, and the elders have been mocked and disregarded, as outsiders appointed by Kampala have been sent to the region to implement a series of unsuccessful development plans or to impose a militarized order. Beginning with the mid-1990s, a few leaders from Karamoja have risen to some political prominence at the national level. In July of 1996, David Pulkol was re-elected to Parliament and was appointed to the powerful post of Director of External Security Organization, Michael Lokawua was elected to Parliament, Peter Lokeris was appointed Minister of State for Karamoja Affairs, and Omwony-Ojok continued to serve as Director of the National AIDS Commission. These modern men and their allies in the District Administration are convinced that the traditional forms of social control are the best hope of creating peace and community development in Karamoja (Quam 1996).

## Lessons from Successful African Approaches Used Elsewhere on the Continent

That there are numerous examples of successful African approaches that have been used to resolve conflicts from which to draw valuable lessons is hardly a matter of dispute. In my book titled *African Peace Paradigms* (2008), for example, I examined 35 cases involving various approaches. Due to space limitations, however, I discuss only three cases here.

### *Ubuntu in South Africa*

After almost a century of White domination over and oppression of Africans, the demise of apartheid, hailed around the world, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) emerged to help confront the transgressions and crimes committed from March 1, 1960 until May 10, 1994. Does the end of apartheid and the granting of amnesty to some perpetrators constitute real peace, but more importantly beyond just the absence of war, in a land recovering from huge differences? The revered Nobel Peace Laureate, Chair of the South African TRC and former Archbishop of South Africa, the Most Reverend Desmond Tutu (2000), puts forth the *ubuntu* paradigm as under-girding the peaceful changes in the South African society that emerged as a direct result of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. *Ubuntu* is a word from the Southern African Nguni language family (Ndebele, Swati/Swazi, Xhosa and Zulu) meaning humanity or fellow feeling; kindness (<http://www.wordreference.com>). By drawing from many works that have dealt with the concept of *ubuntu* and similar African thoughts on communalism, I (Bangura, 2005) deduced that *ubuntu* serves as the spiritual foundation of African societies. It is a unifying vision or worldview enshrined in the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*: i.e. “a person is a person through other persons.” This traditional African aphorism articulates a basic respect and compassion for others. It can be interpreted as both a factual description and a rule of conduct or social ethic. It both describes the human being as “being-with-others” and prescribes what that should be.

Indeed, the TRC has been beneficial to the healing of the wounds of South Africa, albeit not without complications for lasting peace. Understanding the basis for the need for amnesty requires that the atrocities be detailed and evaluated. The Commission handled 21,298 statements that covered a wide variety of human rights violations, totaling 38,000 human rights violations committed during the years 1960-1994 (Posel 2002:157). The immensity and depth of criminal acts necessitated a greater disclosure of what happened and to whom. The Commission defined a “gross human rights violation” as the commitment or conspiracy to commit the killing, abduction, torture between March 1, 1960 and May 10, 1994 that was politically motivated (Posel 2002:42). Bitterness and animosity grow out of such systems that constrain and destroy the human spirit in order to maintain leverage. Unfortunately, hatred can spring from the very same process meant to redress the crimes of the past.

The Commission had an immense task and deemed many applicants not eligible for consideration. Those atrocities that were tried exposed the brutal workings of apartheid from all sides. The granting of amnesty by the Commission was not meant to further harm those that suffered the most under apartheid. The process of amnesty was meant to bring a sense of closure and justice to a land that had neither.

The atrocities committed during the years of White minority rule qualified for amnesty considerations. No side involved in the struggle for South African freedom was exempt from examination, nor were the men and women in charge of supporting and maintaining apartheid. The struggle in South Africa was considered to be a “low-level war” waged by the African National Congress (ANC) and the White minority government of South Africa as a war where “both sides did things that seemed unforgivable at the time, things that would be hard to put behind them if they ever sat down at a negotiation table” (Moriarty 2003:15). The idea that South Africa would ever become a multi-party, democratic state on the African continent through a quasi-peaceful transition was not a prospect given much hope by any group involved in the struggle.

The history of South Africa is filled with conflict between the emerging European settler population and the indigenous ethnic groups already thriving in South Africa (Frueh 2003:40). The struggle for South African freedom took on various forms: Whites and non-Whites did fight against the system of apartheid that emerged after the National Party’s victory in 1948. The development of stricter laws regulating the races and interaction of racial groups hindered wider White and non-White co-operation in the anti-apartheid struggle. As Frueh states, “Apartheid forced South Africans to live their lives as if racism were true” (2003:41). The divisiveness of the laws prevented overt assistance in most cases, but also worked at forcing those that lived in the nation to conform to the social order as envisioned by apartheid’s architects: a racially segregated state with all benefits flowing from a top-down paradigm.

A brutal period of repression and heightened acts of atrocities emerged in the 1980s as a result of the State of Emergency declarations by the White-led government. The repressive powers of the state of emergency declarations mobilized the military and police units to stamp out the insurrections that were becoming more pronounced and organized against the *apartheid* regime (Frueh 2003:106-107). The cases of political prisoners, torture, poisonings, mass graves and detainment all became clearer to the South African populace after the hearings held by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The violence of South Africa’s past needed to be exposed and dialogued in order to construct a new level of partnership in this newly emerging democracy.

Violence did not only occur during the years of White-minority rule. Criminal acts have increased post-apartheid and violent actions between various ethnic groups emerged after the dismantling of apartheid began in 1990. During this period, the violence that erupted claimed more than 16,000 lives, a figure that exceeds all those killed during the apartheid regime and struggle against it (Taylor and Shaw 1998:13).

The sudden directional change of the National Party governance forced the South African society, Whites and non-Whites, to cope with not only the decline of the apartheid system, but also to contend with a rapidly changing society of blurred social roles and opportunities (Taylor and Shaw 1998:15). One element that explains this increase in violence is an acculturation to violence. The apartheid state forcibly and brutally kept power, utilizing immense intensity and violent means to contain any action against the state. This ignited a cycle of “meeting violence with violence.” This mentality, coupled with a society that has a firearm in one out of every five homes and approximately four million illegal weapons on the streets of South Africa, provides a deeper insight into the violence that dominates South African society to date (du Toit 2001:50-51). The institutionalization of violent measures into South African society was set into motion by the White-minority government and transcended all segments of South African racial groups. The tensions that escalated during this transitional phase were to be expected as Hernus Kriel, the South African Minister of Law and Order, stated in a 1991 address: “We are in a period of change in our country, of political change, of constitutional change. And history has taught us that whenever something like that happens in a country, it is always accompanied by some sort of instability” (Taylor and Shaw 1998:13). No longer held to the confines of emergency powers and the strict adherence to apartheid-era laws, all of South Africa’s citizens needed to re-negotiate their places in society.

Ethnic and social connections also proved to be connections that needed to be re-negotiated. Black-on-Black violence increased, as tensions soared between Inkhatha Freedom Party members and African National Congress members who battled each other in skirmishes meant to influence votes, gain new members and intimidate the opposition into submission. This period of factional fighting weakened the transitional phase and bolstered White arguments that crime and violence would multiply under majority rule. Alliances that were formed to conduct negotiations with the National Party government furthered the division and enraged constituents.

Accusations of “complicity” from the various African groups with the White government and “betrayal” by the White, Afrikaner dominated parties created an atmosphere of distrust and intense rivalry for power. This struggle for power killed several thousand South Africans and nearly derailed the transition of power (du Toit 2001:62). The result of apartheid’s legacy has been increased Black-on-Black violence. The design of the system forced Black South Africans into the most pitiful of living conditions and situations. When combined with a breakdown in regimented procedure, such as what apartheid created, and the effects of limited education, opportunities and a growing vision of what power can bring, the reasons for the ethnic clashes can be better understood.

The transformation of a society that is racially biased and restricted according to racial lines cannot occur immediately. A government can mandate appropriate actions, but the hearts and minds of the citizens ultimately possess the true power to alter a course towards better relations. Racism began from the first moment Jan van Reibeeck laid a foundation for European settlement on South African soil in 1652 (Frueh 2003:40).

In order to dismantle such perceptions, intensely ingrained on the psyche of all races within South Africa, substantial time and effort must be allocated to such a cause. Apartheid was not only law; it became a way of life for all South Africans. Simply, race defined who you were and what you were capable of doing in this particular society. Frueh notes that the Calvinist conception of predestination also influenced a moral imperative that each race had certain characteristics and strict adherence to these social responsibilities were deemed necessary to obey God's laws (2003:42).

It is clearly evident that any deviation from the familiar of racial beliefs will take time to undo in this polarized nation. Surveys conducted in 1996 and 1997 showed marginal changes that relate to societal integration and the social construct of Affirmative Action. There was an overall decrease in the perception that integrating schools would result in angering individuals, thereby creating an atmosphere of animosity for a learning environment. The number of respondents who disagreed with the statement that integration would be more divisive increased by over 10% in the span of one year. In terms of segregated communities *by choice*, the respondents who disagreed with the statement that South Africans should have the right to devise their own community according to race rose by 6.3% from 1996 to 1997. The overall increase does continue to a lesser extent as affirmative action issues are addressed. The perceived need for such equalizing programs only rose by one percentage point in the course of a year. How South Africa will deal with equalizing society after apartheid has yet to be fully determined. The trend is an increase in recognition of others as components of society and those recognitions are part of the healing process initiated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2004).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission set an agenda to address the wrongs of the past. Apartheid destroyed lives, family structure and created a hostile environment for all non-Whites to function in South African society. The atrocities committed to prop up the White-led regime and by those opposing the state-sponsored actions created the need for the Commission. A national dialogue that would provide answers to so many families, non-White and White, was needed to navigate the emerging South Africa: free and in need of closure. The idea that the decisions of the courts to grant amnesty should be respected increased overall within South African society. A 7.2% drop in respondents that agreed with the idea of disobeying the courts and seeking retribution indicates a change in thinking. That change in thinking has a strong base in the national healing from the Commission's exposure of apartheid horrors combined with the necessary ideal of forgiveness. The respondents who agreed with the statement they are actively working towards forgiveness towards those that hurt them under apartheid increased by 5.1%. Any movement forward must be interpreted as a positive step in the direction of reconciliation and healing. The 2004 survey saw an increase over the previous year by 10.2%. The final figure proves to be the most hopeful that South Africa is maintaining the direction of unity and reconciliation (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2004).



The transition from apartheid to majority rule created needs on every level. Whites wanted to maintain a standard of living unknown to most non-White South Africans. Blacks, in addition to freedom and voting rights, wanted a more egalitarian system for education, housing and basic human needs. Asians, Indians, and Coloureds also had a list of needs for their respective groups in the new South Africa. Political, personal and social transformations were either mandated goals or by-products of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Each section of transformation has helped mold South Africa into a more representative society, struggling to reconcile the very difficult past with an uncertain, yet hopeful, future. The difficulties of granting amnesty impact each transformation.

Politically, the Whites of South Africa had the most to lose in transition. Also, the regime leaders were perceived to be the most culpable in apartheid's crimes. The political transformation came with F.W. de Klerk's decision to end the insanity of apartheid and begin to dialogue with the African National Congress and Nelson Mandela. Without de Klerk's pronouncement, the relative peace of South Africa's transition would have devolved, instead, into outright civil war. The political change in South Africa was set into motion; the Truth and reconciliation Commission helped deliver the promises of the political change. The judicious granting of amnesty—150 out of 7,000—and the resolute pursuit for the truth from former President P.W. Botha and others directly responsible for crimes against humanity aided the Commission in achieving a major goal: the transition of power due to amnesty and truth (Wiessner and Willard 1999:331). The resignation of South African Whites to majority rule may have ultimately allowed for them to play a continued role in the political scene of South Africa. Amnesty for South Africa's White political elites will continue to cause debate, but so will the granting of amnesty to an accused ANC insurrectionist/freedom fighter. As the trends of reconciliation continue and perceptions alter, the political scene of South Africa appears to be transformed beyond any architect of apartheid could have ever envisioned. For all other races, full political representation was achieved in 1994 when multi-party elections were held. No longer did South Africans have to deal with the farce of the South African Tri-Cameral Parliament, essentially separate and not equal. Political transformations translate into power for the disenfranchised in South Africa. Given time and an equalization of education and other social aspects, the populace of South Africa may indeed form an even more remarkable democracy on the African continent.

Personal transformations directly impact the social transformations. These transformations are so closely related in nature because the presence of a changed individual will have an influence on each person with whom s/he has contact. How effective that influence may be evolves over time, given the resources and opportunities for growth. In her book, *A Human Being Died That Night*, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela details her account of interactions with Eugene de Kock, a former officer in charge of death squads during apartheid. She states: "I, like every Black South African, have lived a life shaped by the violence and the memories of apartheid" (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003:6). Violence became a constant in South African life; violence shaped the futures of many lives. Gobodo-Madikizela speaks not only of her own personal transformation as a direct result of sitting on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but she also notes the personal transformations of others.

The healing and steps toward forgiveness are crucial to making South Africa work as a democracy and as a multi-racial state founded anew on equality. Pearl Faku, a widow of one of de Kock's victims expressed a need "to hold him by the hand, and show him that there is a future, and that he can still change" (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003:94). Power arises in surviving such immense obstacles, but it also lies in allowing those obstacles to shape an outlook that seeks the positive. Faku's personal transformation echoes that of many around the South African nation that are willing to forgive those that did such harm in order to make a better future. De Kock also becomes a focus and example of personal transformation. Eugene de Kock was required under oath to disclose the truth of his crimes to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. His vivid descriptions of murders and clandestine operations are later juxtaposed at his recognition of his crimes, crimes that cost many people their lives, but also terrorized an entire race of people. De Kock comes to the realization that the pain he caused affected more than just the lives he terminated. All South Africans paid for his deeds, especially the non-White citizens (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003:137).

Social transformations have also resulted from the Truth and Reconciliation hearings. Increased dialogues between previously discordant groups are creating a new environment of cooperation in South Africa. Mandela's leadership through the transitional period and beyond helped ease the tensions of a new South Africa. Mandela made it acceptable and empowering to be, in his own words, "an African" (Sparks 2003:262). The ending of economic apartheid, the social legacies created and maintained by racism and the optimism of a better South Africa comprise the most important segments of social transformation (Sparks 2003:341). The process of social transformation will not be an easy one as it evolves in South Africa. The destruction of the familiar identities that apartheid assigned to all citizens now confounds and provides new challenges to all races within South Africa (Frueh 2003: 178). These challenges and confusing times can be borne out, but will provide minor difficulties as society grapples with the new definitions and role reassignments that are necessary to facilitate and sustain the healing processes.

These words must be abided: "Mercy should be granted cautiously" (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003). Mercy should be granted with utmost caution, but it must be granted. The transformation from oppressive regime to multiparty representation for all remains a significant journey for South Africa and the global community. This journey, as it evolves, will reveal the true impact that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has had on South African society. Those that have benefited the most remain a matter of perception. The Commission, by granting amnesty to proven cases, created an environment that derailed the cycles of violence. An entire nation reeled from the horrible revelations; in that collective grief, social transformation gained a foothold and momentum in a land that stifled the most basic of rights.

The personal and social transformation must be nurtured and may take generations to fully take hold in South Africa, but the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has laid the foundation for the coming together of a people so long divided. The transformation of this society has neither been without issue, nor has it been complete. Differences do exist, and all indicators point to the continuation of such disparities. Given these challenges, South Africa has made remarkable progress in the national healing necessary to repair the damage of a history steeped in pain, blood and loss. The efficacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will continue to be studied, not only for the impact it has had on South Africa, but for the agency for change such a device can provide other nations in conflict.

### *Gacaca in Rwanda*

After the genocide I realised that Rwandans are in total darkness and we need some light somewhere and I was among the first to convince myself that one day I will speak the truth and I would call on other Rwandans to speak the truth.

—Sylvester Mwanza

Indeed, as the preceding excerpt suggests, and a BBC World Service report concurs, many years after the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, there is still a sense of disbelief among the victims and even among some of those who committed the murders. In 1994, an estimated 800,000 people were killed in 100 days in Rwanda. Now there are about 120,000 men and women in prison awaiting trial for their involvement in the massacres. Entire communities were killed and entire neighborhoods participated in the massacres. Rwanda's genocide became the worst in a series of massive crimes committed globally in the half century since World War II (BBC World Service November 2000). To understand the reason for all this, one must examine the history of Rwanda, albeit briefly.

In pre-20th Century Rwanda, the terms *Hutu* and *Tutsi* did not carry the same political meanings they do in today's Rwanda. The pre-colonial history of Rwandan Tutsis and Hutus is a complex series of events. The date when the Tutsis arrived and conquered the Hutu entity is unknown. In fact, the two groups lived in perfect co-habitation: Hutus were cultivators and Tutsis were pastoralists. Also, Hutus who accumulated sufficient wealth could become Tutsis, while Tutsis who lost their economic power became Hutus.

From the 7th Century until 1916, Rwanda was a highly monarchical polity. The state was organized, centralized, and hierarchical. It is fair to say that Tutsis were the dominant group that formed the warrior-aristocracy of traditional Rwandan society. While controlling and ruling Rwanda, however, the Tutsis did not monopolize the power over Hutus. In fact, traditional Rwanda was a mutually accepted organization of power. Moreover, the social cohesion of the society is illustrated by the fact that large-scale ethnic killings do not seem to have occurred.

Another aspect of Rwandan history is the existence of a strong militia tradition in the country. First playing a role of self-defense against enemies, militias then had a more economic and social role. Second, the militias had a lively cultural life with poetry, music, and dance. Also, both Hutus and Tutsis could be members of these militias. It was even not rare for a Hutu to be in command.

Colonizers of diverse horizons, the Germans and then the Belgians, transformed Rwandan society in its deepest meaning, since they came with firmly held convictions about race and racial hierarchy. Whites were obviously considered as being superior; but among Africans, certain ethnic groups were designated more worthy than others. This is how the Tutsis became superior to Hutus in the social hierarchy. Westerners had indeed a preference for the Tutsis' facial features. The Tutsis were in general taller and had more "European-like features." Thus, colonial authorities were largely responsible for exacerbating ethnic schisms between the Tutsis and Hutus. Therefore, the proposition that ethnicities are politicized is tenable in the case of Rwanda.

This postulate, however, is not the only one to be applicable to the Rwandan case. Indeed, wanting to make Rwanda more rigid and more controllable, in 1926, the Belgians decided that the population should be classified as Hutu and as Tutsi, with no possibility of one changing his/her group classification. All citizens were then given national identification cards which included the names of the ethnic groups to which they belonged. Thus, the complicated hierarchy of pre-colonial Rwanda was simplified, with more power concentrated to those at the top, the Tutsis, and fewer benefits for those at the bottom of the hierarchy, the Hutus. The colonialists then eliminated the Hutus' autonomous territories, reducing the status of the group and enhancing Tutsi domination under European control. The postulate that ethnic conflicts find their cause in the feeling of loss and oppression is also validated by the Rwandan case. Indeed, Hutus had lost their land and were politically as well as economically oppressed. Moreover, they also could experience and feel that the Tutsis were advantaged because of physical differences.

The 1994 genocide that occurred in Rwanda also confirms the proposition that ethnicities can be politicized from the top. Indeed, the slaughter that occurred in the 1990s "stemmed from efforts by the dictator-president Juvenal Habyarimana to wipe out his political opposition, Hutu as well as Tutsi" (Bowen 1996:100). In 1990-91, Habyarimana began to transform an armed gang into a militia called *Interahamwe*. This militia launched its series of massacres in a village in March of 1992, and in 1993 began systematically to kill Hutu moderates and Tutsis. Throughout 1993, the country's three major radio stations were broadcasting messages of hate against Tutsis, the opponents, and against specific politicians, setting the stage for what followed. Immediately after the still unexplained plane crash that killed President Habyarimana in April of 1994, the presidential guard began killing Hutu opposition leaders, human rights activists, journalists, and others critical of the state, most of them Hutus. Only then, after the first wave of killings, were the militia and soldiers sent to organize mass killings in the countryside, focusing on Tutsis.

Why did people obey the order to kill? For sure, as Bowen affirms, “leaders were able to carry out a plan, conceived at the top, to wipe out an opposition group. They succeeded because they persuaded people that they could survive only by killing those who were, or could become, their killers” (1996:100). Indeed, by broadcasting radio messages conveying hate and portraying the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front as a group of bloodthirsty killers, organized Hutus turned into killing groups. Bowen sums up the situation by saying that “the killings of 1994 were not random mob violence, although they were influenced by mob psychology” (1996:100). The analysts who support the idea that ethnicities can be politicized would surely agree with this interpretation of the events that occurred during the massacres, and especially with what led to these events. Indeed, negative stereotyping, fear of another group, killing lest one be killed are what the so-called leaders led the people to do. Believing that such conflicts are natural or inherent to specific ethnicities is problematic. These negative stereotypes, this fear of another group, and killing to prevent from being killed are typical causes said to precipitate ethnic conflicts by those who believe that there are real ethnic triggers and mechanisms in conflicts. This suggests once again that neither politicized ethnicities, nor behaviors and reactions inherent to ethnicities, are the unique variables in the Rwandan case. These two perspectives are actually intertwined.

In essence, the ethnic conflict in Rwanda is the consequence of old and entrenched rivalries of values between ethnicities and the manipulation of these ethnicities by colonizers and contemporary political leaders. Indeed, the greed of these leaders led them to build a nation-state by oppressing minorities. This situation created and intensified some feeling of oppression, fear, and loss that then launched the multiple genocides that Rwanda experienced. Despite all this, one is encouraged by the path towards peace upon which Rwandans have embarked.

In March of 2005, African leaders and scholars gathered at the United States Library of Congress in Washington, DC to talk about reconciliation in Africa. The participants discussed their experiences with religion, truth commissions, the media and other culturally-based methods of reconciliation at an all-day seminar. It was sponsored by the African Section in the African and Middle Eastern Division and the John W. Kluge Center at the Library of Congress, in collaboration with the African Presidential Archives and Research Center of Boston University, the Africa Society of the National Summit on Africa, the Nigerian People’s Forum, the United States Institute of Peace and the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University. The Samputu-Ingeli Dance Troupe of Rwanda, demonstrating how music can be a tool of reconciliation, concluded the seminar with African dances and drumming. The three-member troupe included a Hutu, a Tutsi and a Twa, representing the three ethnic groups in Rwanda. In addition, lead performer Jean-Paul Samputu sang and played the guitar (Urschel April 2005).

In the case of Rwanda, Athanase Hagengimana, an instructor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and a John W. Kluge Fellow at the Library of Congress, talked about the contributions of religion to truth and reconciliation in Rwanda. Hagengimana's observations were based on interviews and psychological assessments of more than 300 perpetrators of genocide currently detained in a Rwandan prison he conducted. He found the prisoners to be open and willing to describe the atrocities they committed, because many had been "saved" and were "born again." He observed that many new churches that came to Rwanda after the genocide reached out to the prisoners. Not only did the churches preach forgiveness among the victims' survivors, they also preached to the killers in prisons about the importance of the "apology." He also observed that people who had killed others have more problems than people who are grieving, as guilt is more painful than sorrow. He further stated that he had witnessed survivors who, full of religion, have healed from trauma and can reconcile with criminals. He added that he had seen criminals be born again, free to confess what they did, went to the families of survivors and apologized and revealed everything, and they are now functioning in the society (Urschel April 2005).

Joseph Nzabmwita, defense attaché at the Embassy of the Republic of Rwanda in Washington, DC, talked about the *Gacaca* (pronounced *Gachacha*) model of reconciliation, a traditional African village system that works on the principle of reconciling the parties and promoting social harmony rather than penalizing the guilty party. Nzabmwita believes that under the Western criminal justice system, it will take 100 years to try the cases. Thus, he asks a profound question: "So who is that justice going to benefit?" (Urschel April 2005).

According to Nzabmwita, after July 1994, at the end of the genocide in Rwanda, there were nearly one million people dead. The government was destroyed and the society dismantled. Rwandans needed to rebuild their society, so they sat down and went back to their roots—simply sitting together and discussing among themselves the truth. The truth included learning from the perpetrators where to find the dead bodies, so that families could give them proper burials. After learning the truth, healing could begin. Nzabmwita believes that through *Gacaca*, Rwandans will benefit (Urschel April 2005). Thus, a poignant question here is the following: What is *Gacaca*, and why do Nzabmwita and many Rwandans believe that it will work given the bitterness precipitated by the genocide? The following paragraphs address this question.

Constance Morrill offers a succinct definition and an explanation of the origins of the *Inkiko-Gacaca*. According to her, the traditional *Gacaca*, which literally means a "grassy space," is commonly associated with the activities that used to take place in any open-air, grassy areas, such as the discussion and resolution of problems within the community. In the event of a conflict within the community, the parties involved in the conflict would be heard and 'judged' by an assembly of "*inyangamugayo*," or individuals accepted by everyone in the community to be those who "detest opprobrium." These were individuals whose status of "*inyangamugoya*" was acquired by virtue of their probity, old age, erudition, wisdom in decision-making, altruism or political or economic influence within the community (Morrill 2004:3).

Morrill also notes:

Before colonization and the introduction of written laws, Rwanda's traditional *Gacaca* system was the only "real" justice system. "Sentences" were assigned according to the nature of the act committed by the guilty party and always involved reparations to the damaged party. (Imprisonment did not figure among the penalties, as the prison system was introduced by the colonial powers.) Even in cases where the commission of a 'wrong' was incurred by an individual, the responsibility for that wrong was shared by all members of the clan or family to which the individual belonged. As a result, family or clan members were equally responsible for "making reparations" to the damaged party. If both parties agreed to the terms of reparation, they would share a drink as a symbolic gesture of agreement. When the 'crime' was judged to be too serious for reparation to be an adequate sentence, the judgment could call for ostracism of the members of the particular clan or family associated with the wrongdoer or 'defendant.' As the *Gacaca* 'rules' were never written, they were passed down orally from generation to generation as part of the social education of all Rwandans (Morrill 2004:3).

She adds:

With the advent of colonialism, the *Gacaca* institution underwent some distortion. A law passed in August of 1924 confined *Gacaca* to the resolution of civil and commercial disputes among the indigenous population. Criminal cases became the responsibility of colonial courts, and the concept of the *Inyangamugayo* also had to submit to colonial influence: instead of acquiring this status by virtue of the individual's good standing in the community, the *Inyangamugayo* were conferred their influential status by the colonial authorities, and this method was continued by Rwandan authorities even after independence (Morrill 2004:3).

Today, the Rwandan government believes that *Gacaca*, modified as necessary to factor in the realities of modern Rwanda, will enable the justice system to find the balance between mass release and the need for some kind of accountability on the part of the accused (Duly 2000:35). But even more encouraging are the positive and peaceful developments that are taking place in the country because of this reintroduction of traditional Rwandan ways of doing things. Two of the many examples I find outstanding are the Village of Hope initiative in Kigali and the leadership role being played by women in the reconstruction and reconciliation programs. The following is a discussion of these two examples.

As the UN-HABITAT office in Nairobi, Kenya reports, Village of Hope is a civil society initiative to rebuild the lives of women, mainly genocide victims. Several crimes committed against humanity like rape, torture and mutilation left the majority of the Rwandan women traumatized. The initiative also takes care of orphans and people living with HIV/AIDS. Most of the women had been widowed and dispossessed and had no means of survival.

The initiative is an extension of the Polyclinic of Hope, a project of Rwanda Women Network (RWN), which addresses shelter needs of genocide victims. The village is made up of 20 housing units and a community center. The houses were constructed from 1999 to 2000 and the center in 2002. The center is located in Gisozi Sector, Gasabo District, Kigali (UN-HABITAT 2006).

After the genocide, Rwanda received a great amount of humanitarian assistance. Then United States President Bill Clinton visited the country in 1999 and was moved by the Women Survivors Empowerment Program. After his visit, RWN received a grant of \$100,000 from the United States Department of State. The program's members decided to build houses to meet the shelter needs of the most vulnerable women in the city, the Village of Hope. They use a holistic approach, with an end goal of healing the wounds of genocide, by supporting peace and reconciliation. They also undertake awareness-raising on the rights of women, including the right to own and inherit property. The program provides space for free interaction and dialogue. It has a participatory approach in decision-making, implementing, monitoring and evaluating activities. Weekly meetings are facilitated by the RWN staff at the Village of Hope, where women and youths share their problems, needs and vision, and discuss solutions to issues that affect them. Some residents also participate at the RWN General Assembly and planning meetings. Village of Hope raises most of its support through donor funding. The residents are also put into groups that make contributions through "basket funds" for emergency purposes (UN-HABITAT 2006).

The program's major achievements include construction of 20 housing units, providing shelter to approximately 120 persons, a community center that provides support to around 1,000 women and 200 youths, a youth center for youth activities, tailoring training offered to 28 women, training on greeting cards making to 32 youths, beadwork training to 14 women, knitting and weaving training to 12 women, provision of school fees for 17 secondary school children, provision of medical services, psycho-social/trauma/HIV/AIDS counseling, and seminars on gender issues. Three out of every five employees at Village of Hope are trained in the center (UN-HABITAT 2006).

The impacts of the initiative have been felt throughout Rwanda. The spirit of volunteering has been re-cultivated among the women, who have initiated voluntary home-based care for HIV/AIDS patients in their villages. Women have willingly provided information for documenting case studies through personal interviews and testimonies. In essence, Village of Hope is a multidisciplinary initiative that deals with trauma in a post-conflict situation while at the same time providing realistic concrete solutions: i.e. shelter and livelihood. This gives the women confidence by "getting them out" of their traumatized state psychologically, physically and economically. The UN-HABITAT office in Nairobi has certified that the initiative fully meets the basic criteria of impact, partnership and sustainability as well as additional considerations of leadership and community empowerment, and gender equality and social inclusion (UN-HABITAT 2006).



Theodora Ayot interrogates the various reconstruction and reconciliation programs in Rwanda in an effort to assess the degree and the impact of their political, economic and social empowerment of women, and how women have translated and utilized this empowerment to mobilize and sensitize the grassroots as well as national levels as a means of combating the recidivist pressures that are likely to influence the recurrence of conflict. Specifically, Ayot considers the establishment of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission in 1999 as one of the most important programs which the new government of Rwanda instituted in its attempt to deal with the challenging issues emanating from the rejection and violation of the humanistic moral code: Thou shall not kill. She assesses the place of women in the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission to determine the impact of women's efforts towards reconciliation and reconstruction in post-conflict Rwanda (Ayot, in press).

Ayot points out that in 1995, Desmond Tutu visited the village of Ntarama, just a few kilometers from the Rwandan capital, Kigali. It is in this village where the Tutsi had been killed in a church. According to Tutu, "The new government had not removed the corpses, so that the church was like a mortuary, with bodies lying as they had fallen the year before during the massacre. The stench was overpowering. Outside the church building was a collection of skulls of some of those who had been brutally done to death—some of the skulls still had *pangas* (machetes) and daggers embedded in them. I tried to pray. Instead I broke down and wept." But despite this heart rending experience for Desmond Tutu, he was so much humbled when he visited the Nelson Mandela Peace Village, a new settlement that had been built through the efforts of women themselves. The women at the village were all orphans, widows and refugees who had come together to try to forget their ethnic origins in an effort to live together in peace and build a new Rwanda. While visiting the village, Tutu spoke to the women leaders. What impressed him the most was the strength of these women and he reports his encounter and observations:

They (women) said, 'We must mourn and weep for the dead. But life must also go on, we can't go on weeping.' How wonderfully impressive, how indomitable. Over at Ntarama, we might say, there was Calvary, death and crucifixion. Here in the Nelson Mandela Village was Resurrection, new life, new beginning, new hope. Once more it was noteworthy to see how women have this remarkable resilience and an instinct for nurturing life (Ayot, in press).

Addressing post-conflict Rwanda through the lenses of women, Ayot provides us with the opportunity to appreciate their incredible sense of leadership that gives hope to their families and the people of Rwanda as doctors across their country's landscape. In Rwanda, women who watched helplessly as their husbands, fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, friends and even children were cut down with machetes have been able to pick up the pieces of their broken lives and their broken country and begin a process of rebuilding. Women have demonstrated an amazing strength and courage in the midst of the national tragedy, and it is that inner strength that enables them to survive even the most horrific conditions in which they find themselves (Ayot, in press).

According to Ayot, in concerted efforts to restore peace in Rwanda, the government of national unity was established and it came into existence as a result of the survivors' desire to transcend the negative images that had led to the genocide. From the time of its inception in 1999, the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) paid particular attention to issues pertaining to Rwandans, the civil society, efforts to bring the Rwandans of all walks of life together and the challenges posed by the prevailing poverty in the country. In order to ensure national cohesion, the government of national unity embarked on a number of strategies:

- (a) Ensuring democratic governance: actions to ensure democratic governance since 1994 have included the passing of the genocide law to challenge the impunity which characterized acts of violence in Rwanda for three decades before 1994; adherence to the Arusha Accords of 1993 to guide the composition of the government of national unity and national assembly.
- (b) Public service reforms to enhance transparency, efficiency and effectiveness in public service delivery.
- (c) Promoting peace, security and unity through reconciliation programs.
- (d) Creation of a community police force to enhance security at the local levels.
- (e) Promoting national dialogue on the country's needs and aspirations through fora.
- (f) Initiation of the decentralized process to facilitate the devolution of administrative responsibilities and supportive to local government units, and consolidation of the structure of local governments.
- (g) Provision of social and physical infrastructure in the local administrative units is substantially supported by direct contribution from local communities, a visible evidence of the popularity of representative local government.
- (h) Cooperation with the international agencies in monitoring human rights standards and reconstruction. Above all, in a remarkably short time, Rwanda has succeeded in rebuilding a functioning civil society; in particular, strong women's associations, and a free press, and employers and workers associations (Ayot, in press).

NURC undertook aggressive measures to organize meetings for the various groups of people in the country. Other measures included workshops and conferences whose major themes specifically addressed concerns for national unity and reconciliation. These attempts by the Rwandan government to deal with the post-conflict crisis culminated into the organization of various national summits where Rwandans of all levels of society, including representatives from Rwanda's Diaspora community, were present (Ayot, in press).

NURC also organized workshops which targeted different segments of the population. The main objective was to give an opportunity for these individuals to undergo “civic re-education” or “solidarity camps”—the *ingandos*. Demobilized soldiers (from the national army as well as from the ex-FAR), *Interahmwe* and other groups that had been repatriated to Rwanda mostly from Eastern Congo provisionally released prisoners, and others were required to stay at an *ingando* from six to eight weeks. These individuals were offered courses covering, among other areas, “their socio-economic reintegration into the society.” This became a preparatory stage through which an individual could begin to make the journey back to the real world, to the new Rwandan civil society after the ravages of the war period. It also formed part of the most important initiatives by the Rwandan government in its attempt to rehabilitate and enhance the spirit of national unity and reconciliation among its citizens (Ayot, in press).

In discussing the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission from a gender perspective, Ayot points out that when the Rwandan government took a bold step towards the establishment of a government of national unity, it recognized women as a formidable force within the society. Women had been both the providers for the two sides of the conflict. They took care of the sick, the wounded, the elders, the youth and the children. Even those who went on a killing spree returned home to be fed by women as well as those in the refugee camps. Therefore, in an effort to increase the representation of women, for example, in 1999, the government split the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs into the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Gender and Promotion of Women. The latter Ministry was charged with the responsibility of developing projects that would see to it that all laws that discriminated against women were reformed. It was also given the responsibility of promoting the education and training of women. Thus, it is not surprising that today women in Rwanda constitute 48.8% of the members of the Lower House in the Parliament (Ayot, in press).

The Constitution of Rwanda had allocated 30% of the seats in Parliament to the women. Indeed, with the elections of 2003, a large number of women were elected to that August house. Women garnered six out of the 20 seats in the Senate. On the other hand, in the Lower House, which comprises a total of 80 seats, women were able to garner 39 seats. The Rwandan women, in actual fact, got more votes than what was expected and it even surprised their male counterparts (Ayot, in press).

The Rwandan tragedy was a wake-up call for the women, as many of them took up new professions just to keep the country running. Women constituted an overwhelming majority in the aftermath of the conflict. At the end of the ethnic warfare of the 1990s, women greatly outnumbered men. Some of the existing estimates have put it at the ratio seven to one, and this is because of the wanton killing of so many men and the escape of so many others involved in the carnage. During the rebuilding of the country, the women’s anguished voices were difficult not to hear, and they became a powerful and credible force for reconciliation (Ayot, in press).

Some of the prominent women in Rwandan civil society include Donnah Kamashazi, the representative in Rwanda for the United Nations Development Fund for Women. Others include the Chief of Justice of the Supreme Court, the Head of National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, Deputy Police Chief, and those who hold ministerial posts in the government. Like any other world community, gender imbalance is still a major issue in much of the African continent; nevertheless, when it comes to parliamentary representation, Rwanda and South Africa as well as Mozambique have deliberately shown a great stride towards the political empowerment of women. This was just the foundation, the beginning, not suggesting that the problems in Rwanda are already solved just because of the presence of women in that August house (Ayot, in press).

One of the major achievements on the part of women in Rwanda has to do with the land issues where women and girls had been excluded from inheriting land. According to the July 19, 2000 report by the Secretary General to the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, under Rwandan legal system, girls could not inherit land. But as a result of the visit to Rwanda in February of 1999, and building on the earlier work of several non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies, the special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict engaged in a dialogue with the government of Rwanda, urging it to introduce legislation that would allow girls to inherit farms and other properties. These consultative meetings led to the enactment of legislation in November of 1999 by the government which embodied, among others, the rights of girls to inherit land and other properties. The other area of concern that has received significant attention of the international community is the issue of rape as it is perpetuated against girls and women. It was the disturbing and chilling accounts of the plight of the girls and women that led to the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court which defined rape and sexual slavery as both war crimes and crimes against humanity (Ayot, in press).

Perhaps the following testimony about the use of *Gacaca* provided by a Rwandese man who works for a non-governmental agency may serve as a poignant conclusion to this case study on Rwanda:

My impressions are the following. The period now (mid-April) is one of mourning. Each year, we feel the weight of contention. We are in a period of wake. It is now that you feel that the population's traumas are coming out in the open. This year is worse than 1994. As time goes on, the trauma is being released. We, the NGOs and the government, do not have adequate tools to deal with this.

For twelve years, we have preached the message, “we can live together.” That was the first step. Now we are in the phase of Reconciliation and Justice. Should we forget the past and build a future or punish the culprits? This is a dilemma. We should combine the two. But this has its set of challenges. Classic justice [as we know it in the West] cannot solve these conflicts. We would like to recognize the blame but also reinstate populations. We use *Gacaca* Justice. It’s a participatory process allowing us to talk. We are amongst ourselves, in the community. This is how we can deal.

It has been a genocide by proxy—the neighbor, the friend, the family, (and) the spectator denounce the other—so the level of participation [in the genocide] was significant. *Gacaca* is a compromise between forgetting and justice. We were not accustomed to law terms of the formal system of laws; *Gacaca* is a traditional method. You sit under the tree and deal with your problems. We had to add laws, teach formal procedures to the judges. This has not been easy. Now, we have train(ed) the judges. We have 80,000 prisoners of the Genocide. We may have 800,000 to 1.5 million prisoners [by the end of this process]. This is a large portion of the population.

We have made progress since 1995, 1996, 1997. Now fear/distrust have decreased, even if it still exists (sic). The social climate is good. But with *Gacaca*, we are going to talk about the dead. There is a “resistance movement” that would like to prevent the Justice process. Since *Gacaca* is based on informal chats, there will be no definitives (sic). But it seems to be a good system.

The question of the survivors is very delicate: how do we repair, deal with the trauma? We do not have enough systems for that.

Good governance is a topic that worries us. There would be no genocide without the state’s influence. What type of power do we want to prevent a similar genocide? Past-genocidal society is very fragile. We have put in place basic institutions but citizen participation is low, governing is not very strong.

Poverty is caused by many factors. But the fact remains that the population is poor—there are official differences. For we who work in reconciliation, poverty has never been a cause of the genocide. It was not the poor that were the people undertaking the genocide. We must be clear: poverty was not the cause of the genocide.

The church is very important in Rwandan society. A difficult past since there have been clashes with the government. The Catholic [C]hurch lost its moral clout and credibility—it is said that the church did not have a good role to play in the genocide. The church is in a phase of recovery. We can see an effort at self-examination—a “Christian *Gacaca*.”

The church talks, insists on basic ecclesiastical communities as a vehicle of reconciliation and listening. The bishops support the state *Gacaca*. Justice and Peace commissions are closely involved in the *Gacaca* process. The Catholic [C]hurch has chosen a more discreet profile; it does not involve itself as much in the government. Personally, I think this separation is important so that the church can reflect. There aren't even any religious writings about the genocide. Today, the Catholic [C]hurch has accepted to become a part of the society—before that, it was superior. This is a success.

It is better to talk than to ignore. It is painful, but we must talk (007 in Africa April 27, 2006).

Indeed, as Christian Sherrer has argued, the importance of customary law for dealing with the overwhelming consequences of genocide is widely underestimated. Thus, Sherrer suggests that in the context of future reconciliation, the genuine revival and “autonomization” of the traditional *Gacaca* system as arbitration needs more support by civil actors, local and foreign as well. He adds that the spontaneous reactivation of this grassroots scheme for arbitration and communal justice in over 20 of Rwanda's 47 communes has given rise to hopes. He believes that *Gacaca*, like the *Abashigantahe* being used in Burundi, may greatly contribute to restore the moral order. He is also convinced that self-healing forces can be revived in every society, if needed against the will of politicians and conflict actors (Sherrer 1999).

### *Ka Pahla in Mozambique*

The more than 15-year civil war in Mozambique resulted in wide-scale destruction of the public service infrastructure and the economy. The country also paid a heavy social price, as almost one million people were killed, millions became refugees, thousands were disabled, and thousands of children under 16 years old became combatants (Honwana 1997:293).

Since the majority of the population affected by the war was rural and that the great destruction of the social fabric took place in the countryside, the process of social reconstruction and community building needed to take into account the worldview of the people living in the rural areas. A great deal of expertise exists in the rural communities where “traditional” institutions such as chiefs, diviners, healers, spirit media and the family had long been dealing with social reconstruction and conflict resolution at their own level. They possess mechanisms of self-renewal and reorganization after a crisis, and these traditional institutions had to be utilized in restoring social stability in Mozambique because they are embedded in a shared system of meanings that regulate the social life of rural communities. This was equally important for certain sectors of the urban and semi-urban communities (Honwana 1997:294).

A commonly held belief in Southern Mozambique is that when an individual dies and is buried, the spirit remains as the effective manifestation of his/her power and personality. As such, death does not mean the end of an individual's existence; instead, death is perceived as marking a transition to a new dimension of life. The spirit of the dead is believed to take possession of a person's body to exercise a powerful influence over the living. *Xikwembu* (the supreme-being) or *Nkulukumba* (the Creator) constitute a remote divinity that lacks a direct relationship with the community. People relate directly to the ancestral spirits with whom they share a combined existence and interact in daily life. The ancestral spirits are perceived to be real entities that influence the lives of the living. They are believed to protect communities from misfortune, promote fertility among women and the land, ensure good hunting, and promote harmony in society. They are said to protect people against misfortune, disease, ecological disasters, and evil such as witchcraft and sorcery. They are also believed to withdraw their protection, creating a state of vulnerability to misfortune and evil when their descendants cause them displeasure by failing to follow community norms and venerate them (Honwana 1997:296).

Special rituals must be performed to venerate ancestral spirits. One such ritual is the *ka pahla*, which means "to honor" the ancestral spirits. It is performed on many occasions such as the birth of a child or before harvesting. It provides a sense of security because it is believed to be a permanent liaison between the living and the dead that gives meaning to the existence of both the spirits and the community. *Tinyanga* (*nyamga*—singular), who are intermediaries between the living world and that of the ancestral spirits, are another means of establishing contact with the spirits. Some people may be possessed by spirits. Therefore, *Tinyanga* are all those who deal with illness and misfortune. They can be healers, diviners, or spirit-media. Through the *tinyangas*, people make recourse to the spirits to cure illness, seek protection from danger, discover the cause of a death in the family, or discover why the harvest is poor (Honwana 1997:296-207).

Since health is seen as a natural state, to be unhealthy is perceived as being abnormal and a sign that harmony is in jeopardy. From this perspective, health is approached in terms of a life process rather than just in terms of a bodily process. Harmonious relations among people, the spirits and the environment define health. The social world, comprising of the spirits and the living, and the natural world are united within a larger cosmological universe. Expectedly, rain should fall during its time, crops should grow, people should remain healthy, and children should not die. When this harmonious state fails to materialize, it is believed that it is due to the malevolent intervention of *valoyi* (witches and sorcerers) or a sanction of the ancestral spirits for bad behavior. Consequently, when relationships among humans, between humans and their ancestors, and between them and the environment are balanced and harmonious, good health ensues. When they are disrupted in any way, the community's well being is jeopardized. Thus, the maintenance of well being and fecundity in the community hinges upon a complex set of rules and practices (Honwana 1997:297).

As ill health is perceived to be a primarily social phenomenon that alters the normal course of a person's life, it is also believed that it may or may not be reflected on one's physical body. Therefore, traditional healing takes on a holistic approach that combines both the physical and social dimensions of the illness in order to treat the person as a whole. The person is not treated as an individual entity, but rather as a part of a community. The diviner always inquires about the state of the patient's social relationships in the community as one of the indicators to lead him/her to achieve a diagnosis during the divination seance. The diagnosis is established during the diviner-patient dialogue that takes place. The consultation represents a reciprocal learning activity in which a process of transference and counter-transference of information occurs that bonds the diviner and patient together. Since it encompasses both the somatic and the emotional dimensions of ill-health, traditional healing plays an extremely important role in healing war-related traumas and other social disorders (Honwana 1997:297).

During the war, the respect and use of traditional religion by both military and civilian populations in Mozambique was widespread, despite the fact that after independence the ruling Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) government rejected tradition as a gerontocracy that was impeding modernization. The opposition guerilla army, the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO), on the other hand, even claimed that the war in which it was engaged was a "war of spirits" to return Mozambique to its ancestral traditions. Thus, traditional practitioners played a formal role in regulating daily military life for RENAMO. Major military decisions by the guerrilla group were taken after consultations with the spirits. Many reputable *tinyanga* were even kidnapped and forced to work for RENAMO (Honwana 1997:298).

While the FRELIMO government did not officially encourage the use of the traditional religious institutions in the war, it did not discourage its officers and soldiers who on an individual or group basis consulted the *tinyanga*. Over time, RENAMO even became more tolerant of the practice. Some military commanders consulted *tinyanga* for protection and to be victorious on the battlefield. Some soldiers even preferred to serve under commanders who had consulted *tinyanga* (Honwana 1997:298).

This traditional religious aspect has persisted during the post-war period. The *Mpfhukwa* phenomenon, for example, is widespread in southern Mozambique. *Mpfhukwa* refers to the spirits of the dead that did not receive proper ritual burial; because of this, their souls are unsettled and bitter. They have the ability to cause illness and death to the families of those who killed them when they were alive and in the war. *Mpfhukwa* is a capacity that is acquired through the powers of a plant. The drink made from this plant is believed to make a person very strong and to enable him/her to return from the dead and trouble the living. Thus, Mozambicans believe that something must be done before it is too late. The specific rituals needed to deal with these spirits are generally performed by the *tinyanga* who have the ability to capture and exorcise or appease them (Honwana 1997:298).



Some of the rituals have had a problematic outcome. An example is the case of a group of Maconde soldiers who killed an Ndaou chief who they suspected to be a RENAMO supporter. After the chief's death, six of the soldiers died mysteriously, and the commander became insane. Divination revealed that the spirit wants a child to be killed with the same gun used to kill the chief. The Maconde pleaded with the spirit to accept a settlement of three goats, a bottle of brandy, and a virgin Maconde girl to take care of the spirit's hut. Apparently, the spirit has rejected the offer, and the people are sure that it will continue to kill the soldiers. The issue having become a public concern, authorities of the government, the Association of Traditional Healers and the Association of Former Combatants are involved in attempts to mediate the conflict. The spirit's desire of the death of an innocent child complicates the matter. By establishing links between the living and the dead, the *tinyanga* are trying to mediate this and other complex situations in Southern Mozambique (Honwana 1997:299).

In this context, social pollution is an important factor because most people in rural communities believe that people are potentially exposed to pollution in their contacts with other social groups and environments. Particularly in a war context, social pollution may also arise from being in contact with death and bloodshed. When soldiers, children and refugees return home to their families after war, they are perceived to be potential contaminators of the community and families. Over several centuries, rural communities have passed down from generation to generation mechanisms that promote recovery from such pollution. The knowledge is part of the community's meanings and values, which are, however, not static. They change from contacts with other groups and from economic and political developments. To be reintegrated into society after a war, men, women and children must be cleansed. The expression in Ronga (a Tsonga language) is *ku hlampsa ngati ya impi*, which means "to wash off the blood of war." If not cleansed, the blood is considered to be dangerous and can contaminate the community and cause insanity (Honwana 1997:300).

In addition to the preceding rituals, there is a *Mhamba*, which is a propitiatory ritual that is performed regularly by every family to honor the ancestors. Through this ritual, the communities worship *ku pahla* (the ancestral spirits). The ritual takes place at dawn. First an animal is sacrificed. In times of peace and prosperity, an ox is used; during war and hard times, a goat or a chicken would suffice. The animal is killed by piercing its neck with an assegai. The animal's blood is spread throughout the *gandzelo*—i.e. the tree of the ancestral cemetery. The meat is then prepared into a meal to be offered to the spirits and for the family's consumption. Honwana details the rest of the ritual as follows:

The senior family member speaks to the ancestors. He invokes the names of all the family's deceased ancestors, starting usually with the *hahani* or *kosezana* (the elder sister of the paternal grandfather) unless the spirits have indicated differently. After that, the officiant informs the ancestral spirits about the state of the family, thanks them for their protection and guidance, and asks them to continue to care for the family.

Other members are allowed to express their feelings to the ancestors at this moment. Then the participants can have a small portion of the remaining sacrificial meal. The children are the first to eat, and they have the front legs of the ox, because these are *mpokama* (the ramifications, the arms of the family). The *vokonwana* (the sons-in-law) eat the back legs, the best meat of the animal, as a sign of respect and consideration, for they have paid the *lobolo* (bride-wealth) to the family. The *nsikhazi* (the daughters-in-law) have the *nhlana* (the rump), for they are the ones who reproduce the group and nurse the children, taking them on their backs. The remaining parts are consumed by the other participants. In addition to the sacrificial meal, more food and drinks are available to the members of the family to celebrate the occasion. At the end of the meal and throughout the day, drums are played and people sing and dance. It is a festive occasion for the whole family (1997:302).

As an act of veneration of the spirits, *ku pahla* is not limited to *timhamba* rituals, as it is a permanent way of communicating with and paying respect to the ancestors (Honwana 1997:302).

In sum, the cleansing rituals in Southern Mozambique are geared toward liberating the individual from pollution and restoring his/her identity as a member of the family and the community. The rituals are designed to help the person to break away from the past traumatic experience, which caused the state of pollution. They also protect the group from contamination. Polluted individuals constitute a threat to the group and, therefore, must be excluded temporarily from it. During the period of separation in which they undergo cleansing, the polluted lose social interaction. After compliance with all taboos and ritual treatments, they are then accepted back into the group. In cases of pollution caused by war, the respected *tinyanga* become pivotal for cleansing the polluted in order to promote peace and community harmony.

## Conclusion

Selecting a conflict resolution approach is a process that can give the “selector” great power. Old movies about Africans often have an episode featuring a confrontation between the local “medicine man” and the “doctor” who triumphs for modern science by saving the chief or his child. The cultural agreement that supported the “medicine man” is shattered by the scientist with a microscope. Sadly, for the children of modern medicine, it turns out that there were a few tricks in the “medicine man’s” bag that were ignored or lost in the euphoria of such a “victory” for science. Even less happy was the arrogance with which many of the cultural arrangements expressed in the African language were undermined through the supposition of superiority by conquering powers. To capture meaning in conflict resolution is a profound and subtle process, indeed.

A 521-page publication of the United Nations Peace University titled *Compendium of Key Documents Relating to Peace and Security in Africa* (2006) and edited by Monica Kathina Juma, Raphael Valásquez Garcia and Brittany Kesselman documents more than 100 Western styled resolutions, protocols, declarations and treaties covering from 1963 to 2005 designed to prevent and resolve conflicts and promote peace in Africa. Yet, as Ambassador Said Djinnit who wrote the foreword of the publication laments, very few areas in the world have witnessed the diversity and intensity of conflicts that have taken place in Africa in recent years.

Thus, the impetus for African medicine to resolve the conflict in Uganda is buttressed by the failure of Westerners and their approaches to resolve conflicts in Africa—a situation that has encouraged some scholars, practitioners and policy makers to take a renewed interest in traditional African techniques for settling conflicts. These scholars, practitioners and policy makers are motivated by the belief that the implementation of African approaches to these conflicts is vital, as it allows Africans to be both the authors and the owners of the resolutions.

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