

Africa: Ethics and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

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Abstract. *Peacebuilding in post-conflict societies in Africa has been a major challenge in the continent since the end of the Cold War. What could be responsible for this? One of the greatest challenges of peacebuilding in post-conflict societies in Africa is making ex-combatants and victims of the conflict live peacefully by upholding the fundamental ethics of their societies. This problem arises because armed conflicts often erode cherished ethics in an attempt to subjugate an enemy. Most peacebuilding projects basically achieve negative peace (cessation of direct and physical violence) rather than positive peace i.e. the transformation of the inherent conflictual relationships, structures, practices and interactions in society). This article examines how reviving fundamental ethics (especially within the African context) in post-conflict peacebuilding process can help people live together peacefully. It begins with the conceptualization of ethics within the African context and how it contributes to peace. It further examines how reawakening fundamental human ethics in post-conflict societies in Africa can help to bring about sustainable peace. The article concludes with a discussion of how African ethics education can contribute to effective post-conflict peacebuilding.*

Keywords: *Africa, African Ethics, Conflict, Peacebuilding.*

Introduction

The restoration of sustainable peace after violent conflict remains one of the major challenges worth taking up in post-conflict peacebuilding. The analysis of multiple experiments at peacebuilding reveal frequent failures or mixed results at best (Dobbins, Jones, Crane, & Cole, 2007; Paris, 2004; Duffield, 2007; Ismail, 2008). That is why Krause and Jutersonke (2005) concludes that “not only do about half of all peace support operations (including both peace-keeping and more expensive peacebuilding operations) fail after around five years, but

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there also seems to be no clear idea of what 'success' or 'failure' actually means, nor of what an appropriate timeframe for measuring success might be" (p. 448). One of the impediments to the restoration of sustainable peace is that conflicting parties are separated from one another. Fear, suspicion, mistrust, hatred and misperception set in, as relationships that had been friendly, open and trusting, no longer are so. Walls go up, and negative stereotypes, hostility and the change in communication patterns set in, as people move farther and farther apart (Burgess, 2003).

Post-conflict Peacebuilding has assumed a significant place on the international agenda since the end of the Cold War. It is particularly important to Africa, where almost half of the 51 UN peacekeeping missions have been deployed in the post-Cold War era. That is why the chairperson of the African Union Commission, Jean Ping, said that "of the many challenges facing the African Union (AU) and Africa, the quest for peace and security is the most pressing". Several countries in Africa have been involved in internal armed conflicts resulting in human losses and suffering. For example, over 800,000 people were killed in the genocide in Rwanda in three months in 1994, and over 200,000 people killed in Burundi when violence erupted in 1993, in addition to the 200,000 people that lost their lives in what the United Nations described as "genocidal repression" in 1972 (Ngaruko & Nkurinziza, 2000). In Uganda, an estimated 800,000 people lost their lives over a 20-year period (1966-1986) of political autocracy, repression, and civil war (Museveni, 1992). Furthermore, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), formerly Zaire, has witnessed the mother of all complex violent conflicts since the mid-1990s with an estimated 3.5 million lives lost in this continuing tragedy. It is estimated in 2000 that about 14 million people have been uprooted from their homes by conflict in Africa.

Violent conflicts in Africa have resulted in the destruction of human and physical capital and the interruption of economic activities by the war; the losses of stocks and related income flows are obvious direct costs. Direct costs also include the enormous amounts spent by the belligerents on military activities, effectively to destroy the countries human and physical capital. The large amounts spent on relief and eventual rehabilitation efforts by the government and the donor community essentially crowd out development spending. The damage to social capital, the weakening of the institutional infrastructure, and damage to the environment have an adverse impact on long-term economic growth and poverty reduction. Violent conflicts also damage the trust between individuals and the legitimacy of social institutions (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002). By engendering impunity and thus condoning serious crimes (murder, banditry, and rape), violent conflicts corrupts the fabric of the society, with the overall effect of lowering of ethical standards, creating an environment that breeds crime and corruption.

The severity and consequences of violent conflicts in Africa have necessitated the priority given to peacekeeping and peacebuilding by international agencies. Indeed, Africa has been the site of a large number of international and continental projects to promote

peace. In 2011, Africa hosted seven of the sixteen United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions in the world. Also, the first five countries on the agenda of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, established in December 2005, are all African: Sierra Leone, Burundi, the Central African Republic (CAR), Guinea-Bissau, and Liberia. The first four cases before the International Criminal Court (ICC) are also all African: Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sudan and the Central African Republic.

Managing the complexities of post-conflict peacebuilding in Africa continues to be a major potential trigger of relapse to violent conflict. This possibility has become realer because of the minimal success that attended the demobilization and reintegration exercises in some countries. Consequently, this paper seeks to examine the relevance of African ethics in peacebuilding and how the inclusion of African ethics education in post-conflict peacebuilding activities can help ensure sustainable peace. The paper begins with the conceptualization of African ethics and post-conflict peacebuilding. Thereafter, it considers the challenges associated with post-conflict peacebuilding in Africa including the reintegrating and rehabilitating of ex-combatants who have committed atrocities during the conflict.

Conceptual Clarification

As rightly noted by Chafe (1994), “the primary requirement for debating anything is to understand first and foremost the critical thing being talked about” (p. 131). Consequently, this paper begins with the clarification of the concept of African ethics and post-conflict peacebuilding.

African Ethics

African societies, as organized and functioning human communities, have undoubtedly evolved ethical systems—ethical values, principles and rules intended to guide social and moral behavior. The ethics of a society is embedded in the ideas and beliefs about what is right or wrong, what is a good or bad character. It is also embedded in the conceptions of satisfactory social relations and attitudes held by the members of the society. It also manifests in the forms or patterns of behavior that are considered by the members of the society to bring about social harmony and cooperative living, justice, and fairness (Gyekye, 2010). Generally, the term African ethics’ is used to refer both to the moral beliefs and presuppositions of the sub-Saharan African people and the philosophical clarification and interpretation of those beliefs and presuppositions.

African ethics before the colonial period encapsulates moral conduct in terms of attitude toward life, issues of human dignity and respect, and the understanding that an individual’s humanity interconnects with the dignity and humanity of others (Mabovula, 2011; Muyingi, 2013). African ethics is defined by Wiredu (1995) “as the observance of rules for the harmonious adjustment of the interest of the individual to those of others

in society. It is the conceptualization, appropriation, contextualization and analysis of values within the African cultural experience" (p. 210). African ethics presupposes a regional ethics (Gyekye, 2010). For example, it is unethical for someone to rape, prostitute, commit suicide, or engage in homosexuality.

There are of course other moral concepts in the African moral language and thought. The concepts of good, bad (or, evil), right and wrong feature prominently in African moral thought, as they do in the moral systems of other peoples and cultures. In Africa, a person would be judged as having a bad *character* if he is considered dishonest, wicked, or cruel. In most moral evaluations, reference is made to the character of a person; thus, character is basic—the crucial element—in African, ethics generally (Gbadegesin, 1991). African ethics is, thus, a character-based ethics that maintains that the quality of the individual's character is most fundamental in moral life. Good character is the essence of the African moral system, the linchpin of the moral wheel. The justification for a character-based ethics is not far to seek. For, all that a society can do, regarding moral conduct, is to impart moral knowledge to its members, making them aware of the moral values and principles of that society (Gyekye, 2010).

Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

The notion of post-conflict peacebuilding is based on the philosophy that violent conflicts can recur after a short period of peace or even when conflict seems to have ended. Although the term 'peacebuilding' was coined by Johan Galtung in 1975 with the publication of *Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding*, it first became part of the official discourse at the United Nations (UN) in 1992 when former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali used the term in his *Agenda for Peace*. For Boutros-Ghali (1992), post-conflict peacebuilding was an activity to be undertaken immediately after the cessation of violence. He asserted that post-conflict peacebuilding was "an action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" (Boutros-Ghali, 1992, p. 11). What Boutros-Ghali had identified as 'post-conflict peacebuilding' was not new. Similar post-conflict strategies, or interventions, were applied in the past. For instance, at the end of World War II, the United States, through its Marshall Plan, played a major role in the reconstruction of war-torn Europe and Japan. But what was novel in Boutros-Ghali's reformulation of the concept was the realization that the demise of the Cold War had, in fact, opened up new possibilities for the UN system to play a major interventionist role in bringing both short-term and long-term resolution to outstanding conflicts. Indeed, Boutros-Ghali was the first to suggest that contemporary peacebuilding ought to be integrally linked to other more traditional UN peace support activities, such as preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping (Boutros-Ghali, 1995). Post-conflict peacebuilding involves a wide range of activities that both precede and follow formal peace accords (Lederach, 1997).

Challenges of Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa

Post-conflict peacebuilding is one of the major concerns of the international community since the end of the cold war. The results of these operations in Africa have been rather paltry, particularly as regards the establishment of self-sustaining institutions. In most cases, former belligerent youths remained marginalized with economic mismanagement rampant. In Burundi, for example, pockets of violence endured in 2007. In Côte d'Ivoire, the international community was unable to put an end to the conflict and reunite the country despite UN and French military deployments. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the UN's largest state reconstruction mission, 17,000 peacekeepers and 2,500 European Union troops were unable to prevent violence in the wake of the 2006 elections, and conflict in the eastern region actually increased after the transition (International Crisis Group, 2007).

In Africa, corruption is the major challenge militating against post-conflict peacebuilding efforts. It undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of state institutions and compromises key peacebuilding tasks such as disarmament and reconstruction. Corruption undermines the long-term goals of peacebuilding (Goodhand, 2001). As the international community has grown more involved in post-conflict peacebuilding, it has also become apparent that corruption deeply affects all aspects of the recovery process, including activities such as institution building, DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration), reconstruction, and economic development (Kaufmann & Kraay, 2002). Corruption also encourages the perpetuation of war-time power structures and the unjust distribution of public resources.

Creating sustainable peace requires the disarmament of combatants and their reintegration into society. Corruption can easily undermine this process, especially if military and rebel commanders (in their capacity as official representatives) embezzle funds for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants (Ghani, Claire, Nargis, & Baqer, 2007; Swarbrick, 2007). In some instances, the international presence has even been accused of being complicit in corrupt behavior, as in the Congo's DDR program where Pakistani peacekeepers allegedly traded weapons in exchange for gold mined by the local militias (A UN enquiry later found evidence of gold smuggling, but no evidence of gun-running (BBC News, 2007).

Why African Ethics in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

Violent conflicts often result in activities that erode societal ethics. For example, children born during periods of violent conflicts may think that acts such as stealing, rape and killing are normal norms of society. This can be buttressed with the assertion of Save the Children (2005) that "whoever wins the war children are always the losers and their lost childhood never comes back". Violent conflict is often a result of the breakdown of a society's mechanisms for dealing with change and mediating between

different groups. However, conflict may serve a variety of political, social and economic functions for individuals or groups. Many actors may have a stake in the continuation of conflict. Consequently, the idea that conflict will end as soon as a peace agreement is signed is unrealistic. Building peace is a process which needs to involve not just the leaders of rebel groups and the government, but representatives of all those who are involved or caught up, in a voluntary or involuntary manner, in the conflict. Building viable peace involves addressing the causes or 'drivers' of conflict so that conflicts do not re-emerge at a later date.

The persistence of conflicts in many places where peacebuilding has been carried out is an indication of both the overwhelming need for and significant difficulties in establishing conditions for sustainable peace (Keating & Knight, 2004). A plethora of actors is involved in such interventions, ranging from sub-regional and regional organizations to the United Nations. The goal of these institutions is not only to stem the upsurge in civil conflicts but also to prevent relapse when those conflicts are over (Stedman, 2002). Primarily, the challenge for these peacebuilding intervention measures is to find a way to dismantle conflict nurturing institutions and replace them with institutions that are capable of sustaining peace.

African Ethics is essential to post-conflict peacebuilding because of the effects of violent conflicts in African societies especially children, "the leaders of tomorrow". Many children in countries where violent conflicts have become a way of life are growing up without ever having known peace. They live in a world where schools have been destroyed and where dialogue takes place through the mouths of guns. For example, children born during periods of violent conflicts may think that acts such as stealing, rape and killing are normal norms of society. The following chilling conversation between a social worker and an ex-child soldier in Africa buttresses this assertion:

DID YOU KILL? "No."
DID YOU HAVE A GUN? "Yes."
DID YOU AIM THE GUN? "Yes."
DID YOU FIRE IT? "Yes."
WHAT HAPPENED? "They just fell down."

—*World Press Review, January 1996.*

The conversation above highlights the challenge associated with the involvement of children in warfare. In the past, when armies fought with spears and swords, a child had little chance of standing in battle against an adult wielding a similar weapon. But this is an era of lightweight weapons. Today, a child equipped with an assault rifle—a Soviet-made AK-47 or an American-made M16—is a match for an adult.

African ethics is essential for the promotion of reconciliation and co-existence. It also helps to ensure consideration for the socially vulnerable and marginalized groups such

as people with disabilities by conflict or landmines, orphans, widows, child soldiers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). IDPs are sometimes prone to receive fewer peace dividends from post-conflict reconstruction, while these groups can make an active contribution to the process of reconciliation in the post-conflict as well as building fair and impartial societies (Obidegwu, 2004).

African ethics also promotes communalism as opposed to individualism. The heart of traditional African thinking about humanity is the idea of community. Many African proverbs express this idea. An example is the Shona proverb: 'A thumb working on its own is useless. It has to work collectively with the other fingers to get strength and to be able to achieve anything.' Collectivism is a community-based society where people are united, ideally among themselves, even to the very core of their being.

Post-Conflict Peacebuilding through African Ethics Education

African Ethics Education is essential for the re-orientation of victims of armed conflict, especially children. Education is perhaps the most important tool for engendering peaceful coexistence. It is the means by which successive generations develop the values, knowledge and skills for future political, economic, social and cultural development. African ethics education is important in post-conflict peacebuilding because of the negative effects of prolonged violent conflicts on education and societal ethics. For certain forms of conflict, educational institutions become part of the battleground of the conflict and often, the purposes of education become dislocated by war as students, and teachers, are recruited in conflict, interrupting their studies and significantly altering their lives. In Liberia, for example, one-fifth of those affected by the civil war were children, and children have been recruited into armed forces in Burundi and Sudan (Epstein & Limage, 2008). The most distorting effects of violence in education happen when school-age children are recruited as child soldiers to perpetrate violence.

African ethics education can be viewed as a socialization strategy after violent conflict. It is a form of education for peace. Brock-Utne (1989) defines the concept of education for peace as "education or socialization that results in more peace in the world or that at least has as a result the greater likelihood that peace will be the existing condition than the case would have been without that education" (p. 78). As a sociological term, socialization is defined as "the process whereby individuals become members of society or members of sectors of society. It is concerned with how individuals adopt the values, customs, and perspectives of the surrounding culture or subcultures" (Sturman, 1997, p. 528). It is through the socialization process that children learn about the society in which they live, the norms of that society, and how to effectively interact with others (Giddens, 2001; Goslin, 1969).

The inclusion of African ethics education in the curriculum of schools could help prevent violent socialization process. Violent socialization processes within the school

context might not only provide people with motivation and/or opportunities to use violence against other individuals and groups, but also make it more likely that such use of violence will be acceptable to them (Sugnami, 1996; Harber, 2004). Violent school socialization processes not only teach children about the acceptable use of violence, but can also play a role in the formulation of feelings of humiliation, shame, and revenge that may motivate and thus mobilize people to join rebel groups and participate in armed conflict (Davies, 2004). Such feelings may also push and keep young people out of schools, providing opportunities for individuals to engage in armed conflict (Dupuy, 2008).

African ethics education can also help to promote reconciliation. It involves the changing of destructive patterns of interaction between former enemies into constructive relationships, in attitudes and behavior. Reconciliation is a fundamental requirement in post-conflict peacebuilding. That is why Bar-Tal (2002), postulates that reconciliation “a psychological process for the formation of lasting peace”. In this process, past rivals come to mutual recognition and acceptance, have invested interests and goals in developing peaceful relations, feel mutual trust, positive attitudes as well as sensitivity and consideration of the other party’s needs and interests. According to Hayner (1996), “reconciliation implies building or rebuilding relationships today that are not haunted by the conflicts and hatreds of yesterday”. To ascertain whether a process of reconciliation is under way in a post-conflict society, Hayner suggests that three areas can be observed: how the past is integrated and spoken about between former enemies; if relationships are based on the present or past; and if contradictory versions of the past have been reconciled – not into one truth of the past but to versions not based on lies and denial. Reconciliation can also be seen as “all initiatives which bring together, or engage, both sides in a pursuit of changing identity, values regarding interaction, attitudes, and patterns of interaction that move them to a more cooperative relationship (Merwe, 1999).

Conclusion

Violent conflicts usually damage the trust between individuals and the legitimacy of social institutions (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002). This poses a serious challenge for post-conflict peacebuilding. By engendering impunity and thus condoning serious crimes (murder, banditry, and rape), violent conflicts corrupts the fabric of the society, with the overall effect of lowering of ethical standards, creating an environment that breeds crime and corruption.

African ethics helps to promote peaceful coexistence. It encourages people to avoid actions that can lead to acrimony and violence. African ethics is usually inculcated in children through the socialization process. The situation is often different during periods of armed conflict. Children born during prolonged armed conflict, grow up to view

violence and other social vices as normal activities. This makes it necessary for African ethics education to be included as part of post-conflict peacebuilding. This can be done by including African ethics education in the curriculum of basic and high schools. The inclusion of African ethics education in schools will serve as a socialization strategy.

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