

# When you are the Peacebuilder

## **Stories and Reflections on Peacebuilding from Africa**

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*Dedicated to the memory of*

*Rose Barmasai of Kenya  
and  
Norbert Kenne of Cameroon*

*whose dreams  
of a peaceful and egalitarian Africa  
we shall always cherish*

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**Conflict Transformation Program**

The Conflict Transformation Program (CTP), comprised of the Institute for Justice and Peacebuilding, the Master of Arts degree in Conflict Transformation, and the Summer Peacebuilding Institute was established at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) in 1994. The program is designed to support the personal and professional development of individuals as peacebuilders and to strengthen the peacebuilding and restorative justice capacities of the institutions they serve.

The Conflict Transformation Program builds upon EMU's particular Christian/Anabaptist faith commitments and strengths in combining the rigors of academic specialisation with practical preparation for a life of nonviolence, witness, service, and peacebuilding in the larger society and world. The program also builds on extensive Mennonite experience in domestic and international service in disaster response, humanitarian relief, socio-economic development, and restorative justice.

The program encourages the building of a just peace at all levels of society, in situations of violent or potentially violent conflict in the United States and other parts of the world. It is the premise of CTP that conflict transformation approaches must address root causes of conflict, must be developed strategically, and must promote healing of relationships and restoration of the torn fabric of the human community.

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## ***When You Are the Peacebuilder***

*“...it is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior.*

*It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and  
the exploits of brave fighters.*

*It is the story...*

*that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars  
into the spikes of the cactus fence.*

*The story is our escort; without it, we are blind.*

*Does the blind man own his escort?*

*No, neither do we the story;*

*rather it is the story that owns us and directs us.”*

*—Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987)*

## **Preface**

*When You Are the Peacebuilder* affirms the work of grassroots peacebuilders in Africa. It seeks to validate and strengthen the hopes being built by many courageous community-based people walking the rough road in search of peace and justice. It is therefore not the intention of the authors that this work be viewed or used as a manual. Rather it should propel us to “break the silence” and conceptualise our experiences so that other people in similar situations can draw learning and inspiration.

The production of this book has been a journey of over two years, perhaps more. The journey did not start with us; we are the storytellers standing at the gap—between those who lit the fire and those who continue to add the firewood. We offer these stories to our Creator, to those who have walked before us, to those who walk with us, and to those who will walk after us.

Many people have accompanied us on the journey, shared the burdens, gave us laughter and encouragement, urged us forward when we hesitated. For all of these fellow travellers, we are very grateful.

Very many good things have happened and are happening in Africa. Our fables, proverbs and parables—some of which are consulted in this book—indicate this. Peacebuilding efforts are numerous, creative, and courageous. The wisdom of these experiences is rarely recorded. The modern African peacebuilder is forced to look too far for inspiration and guidance. This book provides the space for the redesigning of Africa’s narrative in the dialogue of justice and peace. We hope it will challenge African peacebuilders to docu-

ment their experiences, for when we tell our stories we deepen our reflections and build our future.

In many ways the African narrative has not occupied its rightful place in history. The colonial and post-colonial experiences seem to have removed Africa from history. The time has come for Africans to cease being spectators of history, or at best reactionaries of history. It is time we began directing history. This book is a modest attempt at making us begin directing our narrative of peacebuilding.

***Let him speak who has  
seen with his eyes.***

***—Congo***

Let us remind ourselves that throughout the generations, Africans have come to terms with the challenges of nature and their experiences by telling stories and reflecting on them together. The Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe has correctly observed that

the storyteller weaves the fabric of memory so life takes on meaning. We shape our world through stories. We transform not just the narrative but also the world around us. Listen to the stories of a people and you will hear the music of their triumphs, failures, frustrations, and despair in the quest to make the world more human. And it is by telling stories that we become makers of history rather than objects of it. It is through storytelling that we enhance a culture of peace.

While we believe that there is no “right” approach to building peace, our experiences suggest that many grassroots peacebuilders have the passion or “heart” for peacebuilding. For such people, peacebuilding skills are easily learned. All they need is the time and space to reflect on their experiences in order to develop their peacebuilding theory. We hope this book will challenge peacebuilders to further reflection. That is why we have included questions to consider and peacebuilding theory and skills that are not directly derived from the African experience. In this book, therefore, you will listen to stories of select peacebuilders from Africa. You will be called upon to participate in a dialogue about the learning, concepts and skills that can be drawn from the stories and experiences.

***Having a good discussion  
is like having riches.***

***—Kenya***

This work does not pretend to be representative of the vastness of the African experience. While we struggled to present a wide array of experiences from around the continent, we are very aware of our limitations and of the gaps in this work. We hope the stories and

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reflections in this book will inspire others to fill those gaps.

We have clustered the stories around certain themes. The classifications are neither exclusive nor exhaustive. Many of the stories cut across several or all of the themes that we identified. The classification was made to facilitate discussion around common themes.

As we walked the paths of putting together this work we were inspired by the work of community peacebuilders, NGO workers, teachers, human rights activists, social workers and others. Naturally, we wrote with them in mind. However, like any work of art, we are convinced that these experiences will be relevant to anyone from any part of the world seeking a more egalitarian and peaceful society.

Finally, this book is not an attempt to parade successful peacebuilding activities or programs. This book is about learning. We aspire to validate all efforts of building peace so that, together, we can all learn and improve our peacebuilding theory and practice.

# 1

## The Authors' Personal Journeys

The three authors met while all were students at the Conflict Transformation Program at Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia, USA in early 1997. Each of us followed a different path that led to our studying together, and talking together about the need for a book like *When You Are the Peacebuilder*. In the following paragraphs, each of us traces our own journey.

### **Sam Gbaydee Doe**

I am third amongst eight children from my mother's side and second among three children from my father's. I am the only child of my parents. At the second month of conception, so I was told, my father, a Christian convert, requested a divorce from my mother to "put things right with God." According to the missionaries, polygamy was incompatible with Christianity. My mother moved to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where I was born and lived the first six years of my life.

Perhaps because of the poverty my parents experienced, I prayed to become a banker. At about age 14, I recall my father taking me with him to a bank to deposit money. The elegance of the building and the seemingly happy faces of the tellers impressed me. "These people," I imagined, "never go hungry." My mind was made up about what I wanted to do with my life "when I grew up."

After secondary school, I enrolled in the Department of Business at the University of Liberia majoring in Economics and Accounting. In December of 1989, I was only two semesters away from achieving my dream when the Liberian civil war began. By May of 1990, the rebels had captured every part of the country except the Executive Mansion where the president was hiding.

My journey in peacebuilding began in earnest during this civil war. By July, 1990 we had gone without food for nearly three months and were hiding under beds and between concrete corners most of the day. One day there was a temporary cease-fire and I decided to take a walk, just to flex my muscles. While walking around this slum community, I came



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across a young boy, lying under the eaves of a public school. I remember his face like it was yesterday. He was just skin and bones.

I stood over him for quite a while. His mouth was open. Flies were feeding on his saliva. In a surreal moment, I raced to a nearby community to find something edible. I found some popcorn being sold for fifty cents. I bought some and dashed back to this child. I stooped over him, slipped a few pieces of the popcorn into his mouth, and waited anxiously to see him chew the popcorn and regain his strength. “Chew your popcorn, you innocent child” I said to myself, “God has answered your prayer.”

About ten minutes passed by but his little mouth remained frozen. It must have been half an hour later when, with a last rush of energy, he opened his eyes wide and looked at me. Our eyes locked. He shook his head, and closed his eyes. After several minutes, his movements slowed and eventually stopped. The child had given up the ghost. I began to cry profusely. I asked myself, “How many children like you are dying right now throughout this country? How many have been swallowed in the madness of adults?”

I made a pledge to that boy, that I would work for peace so that children could live. I have been on this journey for ten years now. Presently, I work for justice and peace throughout West Africa. I completed my undergraduate studies, graduating with honours in finance. I have never turned my back on the promise I made to that nameless and faceless child.

## **Babu Ayindo**

My father worked as a postal messenger in Kenya’s capital city, Nairobi. Enoka Ayindo Odera lived with his polygamous family of seven children in a two-roomed staff house in a ghetto in Nairobi’s Eastlands. My dad had no formal schooling but he gave me critical education I never found inside the classroom.

My siblings and I referred to our “matchbox” house as “check point number one.” The Railways Station was about 30 minutes walk from our house. Since my childhood there has been a huge migration of people from my ancestral home in Gem, Siaya, to the city in search of jobs or the “good” life. It seemed to us that every relative or friend who arrived at the railway station with a vague idea about where we lived would pass by for a cup of tea, or for a day’s rest, or sometimes for a week stopover...or for a year’s hibernation!

***No one teaches a leopard’s  
cub how to spring.***

***—Kenya***

Most of the visitors would arrive early in the morning, a few minutes after my dad had left for work. They would share our breakfast. We would leave for school hoping that we would return to find the visitor gone. This rarely happened. Instead, we would find our father having a spirited conversation with the visitor. As soon as we entered, my dad would reintroduce the visitor to us and declare that he or she was our “wat” (relative). If our dad found no evidence in the family or clan history of relation then he would simply decide that the visitor was a relative. As children, we believed that our dad had the ability to chat with anybody until they became relatives.

Our dad would meticulously walk us through the relationship tree and finally conclude that the visitor was actually our “small father” (uncle) or “small mother” (aunt). Later in life, I discovered that most of these people were not blood relatives. Of course, this meant agony. It meant being displaced from our usual sleeping space for an unspecified period, sharing our limited food. Above all, the visitor-turned-relative had the power to discipline us. My stepmother protested several times but she soon realised she was wasting her energies. I wondered why my dad always had his hands open instead of being “realistic” with these “strangers.”

Looking back, I realise that a lesson sank in. I learned to share and accept virtually everyone into my life. Nowhere have I felt this need to open my space more than through my work in drama and theatre. During my time in Chelepe Arts—a community theatre group based at Our Lady of Visitation Church in Nairobi—I deepened my sense and ability to encounter new people – real and imagined. And in all these encounters, I realised that the world was created good for all of us. Like my father—whom we fondly referred to as Museveni—I believe that there is space for us all.

Many people have pointed out to me that my “biggest problem” is that I trust other people too easily. I have had to endure my fair share of pain for this. However, I tenaciously hold onto the wisdom of the old postal messenger: that all of us are called upon to not only take the risk and trust the stranger, but also talk and walk together till we become relatives.

## **Janice Jenner**

My concern for peace and justice goes back to the Vietnam War era, when I was a university student in the United States. Following the end of that war, I worked at various issues relating to militarism, nuclear disarmament, and environmental justice.

In 1989, my husband and I moved to Kenya to work with the Mennonite Central Committee, a small, church-based NGO. In the first several years, we focused on community development in several areas of Kenya.

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Then in 1992, following the move toward multi-party democracy, fighting broke out in a number of areas of Kenya. My husband and I travelled with church leaders to several of the areas that experienced violence. For the first time, I saw the results of large-scale violence.

I particularly remember one day when we visited a village in the Rift Valley Province destroyed a few weeks previously. The only building left standing was the church. Homes, shops, the only school—everything was gone. The normally busy rural area almost deserted. We saw few people, but many burned and deserted homesteads and fields.

About a dozen women were at the village. They had returned to harvest some crops that had been too green to burn. We talked to the women, heard their stories, and saw their destroyed homes, shops, fields, and lives. We saw and experienced the fear, sadness, and

***It is peace that has a breast  
to suck.***

***—Somalia***

lack of hope in their eyes. At a destroyed homestead, I was struck by the burned lumps of aluminium in the middle of the three-stone fireplace, as I realised that the violence had come so quickly that the woman who lived there had left something cooking as she fled.

After that experience and others, I became convinced that working on development without working on peace issues did not make sense, because in that village 30 years of development had been destroyed in one terrible night. I came to understand how closely peace and development are linked.

I began to seek out people who were working on peace and reconciliation in Kenya. I met many courageous, creative people working to bring about stability, an end to violence, and a re-establishment of healthy relationships among people. I became friends with Kenyans who risked their lives in their work for peace. These people worked without publicity, quietly and faithfully feeling their way on the path to peace, justice, and security. During this time, I struggled with my role—as an American—in the work for peace and justice in Kenya. One Kenyan colleague told me, “This is our journey, and we must walk it. But we welcome you to walk alongside us for a while and be with us.” I was honoured and blessed to walk alongside these Kenyan peacebuilders for four more years, until my family and I returned to the United States.

In the US, I enrolled in the Conflict Transformation Program at Eastern Mennonite University, in part to reflect on my time in Kenya and to continue my learning about the work of peacebuilding in the world. It was during that time that Sam, Babu, and I first talked about how to support the quiet peacebuilders we had met in Kenya, Liberia, and throughout the continent. This book is one outgrowth of those discussions.

# 2 Conflict and Identity

Following are three stories that explore issues in conflict and identity. The first story is adapted from an Arabian fable while the second is an African indigenous folktale. The third story is a real life experience from Nigeria. Following the stories are questions to enhance dialogue. At the end of the chapter, a commentary on key issues emerging from the stories attempts to knit together the discussion on identity issues and peacebuilding.

## ***The Caravan***

*The caravan of African culture set out on a journey. The caravan meandered peacefully towards its destination under the stars of history.*

*One night a major interruption took place. Strangers hijacked the caravan. The strangers diverted the caravan from its original route, taking it to an alluring but alien destination. Then many moons later the original owners of the caravan overpowered most of the captors. At last, the caravan was once again substantially under indigenous control. The question arose about the direction in which the caravan should proceed. The strangers had taken it a considerable distance from its original route. Should the caravan continue in the path of diversion? Should it return to the place where it was hijacked and from there once more seek its destiny? Or should the caravan locate its bearings from this point without necessarily going to the original point of diversion?*

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Which way should the caravan follow?
2. Is it necessary for the caravan of African culture to go back to the point of diversion?
3. List three words that describe who you are. How do we define ourselves?
4. Reflect on the statement, "African culture has nothing to offer to modern life."
5. What are some traditions or cultural practices that Africans cannot afford to lose?

## **The Day of the Cobra**

Once upon a time, Caterpillar and Cobra were intimate friends. Their relationship became strong when they discovered that both shared a similar plight—humans hated and feared them. Caterpillar and Cobra were jealous of Dog and Cat who were gladly welcomed by humans. One day, the two friends decided to resolve their conflict with the human community. Caterpillar was the first to attempt his new strategy. After much self-reflection, Caterpillar discovered that he needed to transform himself to win the admiration of humans.

At sunset, on the first day of harvest festival, Caterpillar transformed into a beautiful, colourful Butterfly. He flew gracefully to the place where the children were playing. Suddenly, every child wanted to befriend Butterfly. Until dark, Butterfly played with the children and was invited to the homes of others. Dog and Cat became envious of Butterfly whose colour and beauty captured the attention of everyone at the festival and became the centre of discussion in every home. In the evening, Butterfly happily returned to Cobra with the good news. “I was the friend to everybody when I returned to the big town with my new personality. It was the greatest day of my life,” Butterfly exclaimed.

Cobra decided to try the new strategy of his friend. When the sun was directly overhead, at mid-day, Cobra took off his old skin and wore a beautiful, sparkling dark skin. He went to his good friend to get his opinion on his new look before setting off on the adventure. “You are beautiful in your new skin,” Caterpillar (now Butterfly) told his friend. At sunset, Cobra set off for his adventure. It was the third day of the festival. The women and children wore their best clothes. The joy of that day cannot be described. Cobra was carried away by the jubilation. Little by little, he approached the town. Like Butterfly, Cobra decided to start with the children. Suddenly, screams, sticks, cutlasses, and a great pandemonium greeted Cobra as he appeared on the children’s playground. The festivity came to a standstill. Humans used weapons to chase Cobra out of their community.

Cobra ran frantically out of the community, to his friend. He was outraged and accused Butterfly of betraying him. Despite his new skin, humans still hated him. Exhausted and out of breath, he could barely talk. When everything was quiet and Butterfly had reflected over the

*complaint of his friend, he looked in the eyes of his long time friend and said, "Cobra, I agree you have changed your skin to a beautiful, sparkling skin, but you are still Cobra, a snake."*

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Why did humans accept Butterfly but apparently feel threatened by Cobra?
2. Work in groups and attempt completing the story.
3. Was it necessary for Cobra to attempt changing his colour?
4. What lessons does this story suggest for identity issues facing African people?
5. What should the Cobra do now? What should Butterfly do?

## ***A Marriage of Three***

*John Yakubu came with his wife Hannah to the parish office of an urban Nigerian church to register for a marriage blessing. Yakubu had attempted the registration earlier, but could not because of allegations that he had another wife, Margaret, who lived in his house at his ancestral home. He admitted having children with Margaret, but was emphatic that he had since called it quits with her since their relationship had been that of concubine. I registered Yakubu and Hannah and sent the marriage banns to his village church and to the parish of their present domicile. Three reactions were received:*

*A woman from the parish claimed that when Yakubu came to register the first time, she was one of three people sent to his hometown for inquiry. Yakubu's father told the committee that Yakubu was legally married to Margaret and so there should be no marriage blessing between Yakubu and Hannah. It was noted here that Yakubu had been married to Hannah as far back as 1975 and blessed with five children.*

*The second response came from two of the children Yakubu had with Margaret, Philip (12 years) and Jane (18 years). The two inquired if I was going to bless their father's marriage with their stepmother. As far as they were concerned, their mother was the first wife, so if there were to be a marriage blessing, it should be between Yakubu and their mother.*

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*The third reaction came from Yakubu's church in his village. They wrote to tell me that Yakubu had two wives, so there could be no marriage blessing between him and Hannah. Yakubu's uncle wrote a letter stating that Yakubu was legally married to Margaret.*

*I called Yakubu and told him of the developments. He denied everything and asked me to see his senior sister, Rose, for clarification. Rose admitted that there had been a marriage between Yakubu and Margaret and they had three children. Yakubu and Margaret had separated, and Margaret had left the house. She later begged to be allowed to stay in the house for the sake of the children and not as a wife again. Rose then allowed her into the house.*

*I narrated this to the priest in charge of the diocesan marriage tribunal. The tribunal's response was that Yakubu could have his marriage with Hannah blessed. However, because of the surrounding situation, they said the church council should further investigate and bring their recommendations. Meanwhile the marriage should be delayed pending reconciliation.*

*The Church council sent two persons to meet Margaret's relatives who said the two were married, but had no evidence to prove their point.*

*I convened a meeting in Yakubu's house in their village. At the meeting were members of his village church, his relatives, and two members of the parish council. We were told that after Margaret was served with the divorce letter, two other men married her before she returned to Yakubu's house. Margaret denied ever being served with a divorce letter or being married by someone other than Yakubu. We also discovered that Yakubu had gone back to the intimate life with Margaret without anybody knowing. At this point, we suspended everything because Yakubu had an obligation to Margaret. Yakubu was asked to resolve everything with Margaret and the children, especially Philip and Jane.*

***The family is like a forest.  
If you are outside, it is  
dense. If you are inside,  
you see that each tree has  
its own position.***

***—Ghana***

*Margaret and her first son refused all attempts from church and local communities for discussion towards reconciliation. This made Yakubu take legal action. Margaret was served with a divorce letter that she refused to accept.*

*I went to the marriage tribunal office and briefed them on the development. They said that if one party is seen to be an obstacle for no just reason, such should be ignored. By implication therefore, the marriage blessing should take place. On hearing this, Margaret's relations reported to home parish priests and gave their own side of the story. The priest called this to my attention. Having told him all that had transpired, he ruled that the marriage between Yakubu and Hannah should hold, but that Yakubu should settle with Margaret by building a house for her. Margaret and her relatives rejected the decision. However, with permission from the Bishop, the marriage between Yakubu and Hannah was blessed.*

### **Questions to Consider**

1. In this story, there is no conflict at all. Would you agree?
2. How are marriage and family defined in your community?
3. In a group, take different roles of the various people involved the conflict and act out the story. How does it feel to play these roles? What other possible solutions did you explore?
4. How are social relationships defined and which authority and/or institutions determines these definitions?
5. If you were asked to intervene in this conflict, what would you do? What are the steps you would take to come up with a solution?



## Reflecting on the Concepts

The greatest challenge African people face may be that of identity. In the interplay of African traditions, Westernisation, Islam and Christianity, the African finds the question of identity a delicate one. It would seem that colonisation has left indelible marks. It is not uncommon to meet Africans who do not want to look at the past, who feel their traditions have nothing to offer in the modern world, or who view their traditions and culture as irrelevant. Yet peacebuilding must be rooted in our traditions and culture. No one will build peace for us. We must do it ourselves. We must develop the confidence to do so. We must look back, not to be fixated on what has come before us, but to draw inspiration and learning from those traditions.

In *The Religious Sense*, Luigi Giussani argues that people cannot abandon their tradition. If we do so, we become incapable of creatively transforming the world and ourselves. Tradition is not handed to us so that we become fossilised with it. It is up to us to develop it as our ancestors did over many years. We should feel creative enough to change tradition—its meaning, structure, and perspective—in order to respond to current realities and challenges.

Put differently, abandoning African traditions would be like refusing to take up the baton in a relay race and still hope to win. Luigi is emphatic that “...using tradition critically does not doubt its value—even if this is what is suggested by the current mentality. Rather it means using these incredibly rich working hypotheses by filtering it through the critical principal which is inherent within us: experience.” The peacebuilder cannot avoid this task.

In the caravan fable, is it necessary—or possible—to go back to the point at which the caravan was diverted? Did our ancestors know what the destination of the journey is? Many Africans believe that making a movement back would actually mean a movement forward.

***Those who abandon their traditions are slaves.***

***—Tanzania***

With the bombardment of Westernisation, does African culture have anything solid to offer? Should we struggle like the Cobra to seek acceptance in a world created by other people or is it possible for us to build our own values?

Let us examine this interplay in the story of Yakubu and his wives. This is the story of a clash between two different moral understandings. In this particular case, the clash is between Yakubu’s traditional culture and Christianity. In other stories in this book, the

clash comes between traditional elder-led governance and the governance of the nation-state, or even between two very different traditional cultures. Regardless of which cultures are in collision, the result is a question of values and ethics—and ultimately, of identity.

The conflict in this story swirls around the central issue of the definition of marriage and family. Every culture has its own norms for determining what constitutes a marriage, and

***A lamp does not shine in  
another hut.***

***—Ethiopia***

what rules govern the behaviour of people within families. In this case, two very different sets of rules are in sharp contrast with each other. This is not a case of one set of rules being “right” and the other “wrong,” but a situation in which, at least on the surface, the rules and definitions of the two groups are incompatible.

In much of traditional African culture, the issue of “who is the real wife” would be meaningless. Mr. Yakubu, his two wives, and all of the children would together make up the family unit, and the question of who is the “rightful” wife would never come up. While traditional cultures vary widely in their definitions of marriage, it is clear that in this story, the families and villages of the two women accepted that each had been married by Yakubu.

In the context of the moral understanding of the church, the issue of “who is the legitimate wife” is of great importance. The people in the story who identify themselves with this moral understanding made great efforts to determine Yakubu’s rightful wife.

The difference in the understanding of marriage and family results in a conflict which eventually includes many people: members of the families of both women as well as Yakubu, his children, the village

church parish, the urban church council, and the diocesan marriage tribunal. Each of these people had their own understandings of the situation.

Many people tried hard to find a way to reconcile all the parties. Each acted with integrity, based on his or her understanding of “marriage.” In the

end, a solution was found, but it was not a solution that pleased everyone involved.

***The sore is cured but the  
scar remains.***

***—Congo***

The basic question remains: who “decides” issues of family and marriage, as well as all the other social bonds that weave a community together, and what happens when new institutions come into a community with understandings quite different from that of traditions and cultures already in place?

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It has been said that Africans demonstrate the capacity to easily accept differing realities. The Ibo of Nigeria have a proverb that says, “Wherever a big tree stands a small tree will stand beside it.” This implies that there are not absolutes; that even good things have other things existing alongside them. This acceptance of differing realities can be an asset in our response to conflict. Peace may be about accepting other realities and other ways of viewing things. Accepting that other people have different ways of looking at the world is most important. Above all, it is helpful to develop the capacity to empathise with other views, even though they are not those we ourselves hold.

However, we cannot deny the crisis of identity that many Africans experience. With suffocating urbanisation and modernisation new conflicts seem to emerge that touch on our identity, religion, and culture. What is it in our African traditions that we must cling to tenaciously? What are those things that must change in the same way that our ancestors changed with their times? What parts of the influences coming from outside our continent can we embrace as life-enhancing, and what must we resist?

Some Africans seem to have developed a very static sense of their culture. In *I Write What I Like*, Steve Biko says, “A culture is society’s composite answer to the varied problems of life. We are experiencing new problems everyday and whatever we do adds to the richness of that culture as long as we have [humans] at the centre of it.”

One way of resolving much of the conflict we face is by building a strong identity as African people, being conscious and proud of our history. It calls for a deep sense of our ability to create history rather than be objects of it. We must believe we are able to create culture—a culture of peace, in contrast to the culture of violence we have created in the past decades.

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# 3 Conflict and Power

Following are two stories that explore issues in conflict and power. The first story is adapted from an African indigenous folktale. The second is a real life experience from Liberia. Following the stories are questions to consider to enhance dialogue with the reader. At the end of the chapter, a brief commentary on some key issues emerging from the narratives attempts to knit together the discussion on issues of power and peacebuilding.

## ***The Power of Man***

*Once upon a time, the animals used to hold an annual power celebration. Recently, the celebration had become very competitive. New winners emerged because of new techniques. Last year Monkey was the winner. Imagine! All the animals agreed that the monkey had succeeded in demonstrating new techniques of power and merited the first place.*

*This year the competition was a little different. A new animal joined the race—Man. Most animals had not given him any chance but he had sailed through the preliminaries. The finals were held up the hill of Kwetu Forest overlooking the waterfall of hope. The five finalists were the Lion, Elephant, Monkey, Giraffe, and Man.*

*As usual, the competitors arrived with their supporters. Monkey was the first to arrive. No one quite saw how Monkey arrived because he was jumping from branch to branch. It looked spectacular as the entire Monkey family arrived like a well-choreographed circus. Next was Lion who dislikes ceremony and arrived with only his wife. He looked around proudly as he stepped into the arena. Elephant and Giraffe are rather close friends and arrived almost at the same time. Elephant arrived chewing a branch while Giraffe nibbled some sweet leaves. Man arrived last. He came alone, with an object dangling from his waist.*

*The master of ceremony, Squirrel, announced that the competition should begin. According to the rules, the competitors could step into*

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*the arena as soon as they felt ready. Elephant went first and demonstrated his power by digging a large hole, throwing lots of dust and making a lot of noise. Giraffe came next and did a poor modification of her dance of power but the melody sounded nice. She danced around gracefully then sat down. Monkey weighed in with his acrobatic jumps from branch to branch but few animals seemed impressed. Lion roared to demonstrate his power. Few animals were afraid since they had heard this roar many times before.*

*Last came the new competitor, Man. He stepped into the arena and looked around. The animals fell silent. Slowly he untied something from his waist and raised it to his shoulder. Loud bangs followed. Suddenly almost every other competitor was bleeding. Lion was limping, and Monkey scampered with blood oozing from his ear. Even Elephant seemed helpless! He sat there with a bleeding trunk doing something that was between laughing and crying. Man laughed and slowly walked back into the forest.*

*That night all the animals met. Man was not invited. The animals wondered what had become of Man. Why did he attempt to kill the animals even when he did not want to eat them? Some animals thought Man is different because he walks on his two feet, while others said he could be suffering from that rare disease, “superiority simplex.” The animals decided to investigate Man further. Dog and Cat were given the task to investigate Man and bring back a report. However, since then, no other competitions have been held. Dog and Cat seem to enjoy living with Man, once they accepted to be subject to Man’s control. They have not brought back a report.*

### **Questions to Consider**

1. How did the animals define power?
2. “All conflict is about power.” Would you agree?
3. Who is most powerful amongst the following? The president of the United States, the Pope, your president, Mother Teresa, your local shopkeeper and you? Explain the source of power of each.
4. Is violence the same as power? Discuss the statement: “Violent leaders are powerless individuals.”
5. “Everyone is powerful but not everyone notices it.” What is your response to this statement?

## **Liberian Women Step Forward**

*By 1995, the Liberian Civil War had dragged on for a few years with no resolution in sight. There were seven Liberian warring factions. More than ten peace accords had been signed, but none had been implemented. The Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS] had planned another negotiation meeting to be held in Abuja, Nigeria in a few weeks' time.*

*Some Liberian women's organisations decided to try a new strategy: to bring leaders of the various warring factions together before the Abuja meeting. They hoped the meeting would lead to a consensus on the ideas, decisions, or agenda in Abuja. The women had two critical tasks: to convince the faction leaders to attend the meeting; and to get the leaders to accept that women would be the facilitators.*

*The women's organisations made daily contacts with leaders of the warring factions. They found a secure venue, obtained a security clearance from the Economic Community Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), and negotiated an agreement that ECOMOG troops would provide security. The women assured the faction leaders that the meetings would be completely confidential, and that the women were not looking for political gain for themselves.*

*Two Liberian women, neither of whom were part of these women groups nor prominent in the political life of Liberia, agreed after much prayer to facilitate the meeting. Both had long experience working at community level peacebuilding. They were briefed on the purpose of the meeting and promised to keep their intervention confidential.*

*The day of the workshop, the facilitators asked their co-workers to keep the event in prayers, a usual practice in their organisation. When the facilitators arrived at the venue, everything appeared normal by the standard of Liberia at that time. The participants arrived dressed in the finest African and European clothing. One of the women jokingly said, "Why are you all so dressed?" One of the leaders replied, "Because we are meeting with some of the most distinguished ladies in the world." This changed the entire atmosphere of the room; the tension in the room fell as everyone laughed. Each faction had four high-level representatives.*

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*One of the women welcomed everyone, saying the only thing that the organisers wanted was peace in Liberia. During the introductions, many of the participants indicated their respect for women, whom they believed were symbols of their mothers. Some said they came only because the women called them.*

*Then the facilitators explained the process for conducting the meeting. They said that the participants would develop ground rules and the agenda. This startled the participants; however they decided to proceed. They developed ground rules, including confidentiality. They identified the important conflict issues that needed to be on the agenda.*

*The facilitators told a peace story. The participants discussed the story and outlined what they had heard so that all would have a common understanding. They discussed conflict issues and interventions raised by the story. The facilitators recorded all points made by participants on newsprint. The facilitators asked many questions but made no suggestions or decisions. The participants understood the issues better than the facilitators did.*

*The workshop was planned to last one day. After the first day the participants asked to return for a second day. After the second day, they requested two more days. Each day the workshop lasted until after 9:00 p.m. Since nobody was prepared for more than a one-day meeting, the venue and security had to be rearranged. During the workshop, participants decided several times to break out of the larger meeting, so that there could be small consultations, either within one faction or between two or more of the factions.*

***The strength of the  
crocodile is in the water.***

***—Zambia***

*The facilitators used stories, active listening exercises, games, and other peacebuilding exercises drawn from a variety of resources. Everyone had an opportunity to express how he felt and any lessons learned. The facilitators wrote the comments from the participants on newsprint. The participants became very involved and active in the process. They expressed their total satisfaction with the workshop.*

*They appreciated the newsprint because it showed their discussion and accomplishments.*

*The participants said that at first, they did not think the facilitators were serious when they asked them to read stories and play games. However, they learned so much that the first recommendation they proposed for the ECOWAS meeting was that the process used should allow them to think and make suggestions. They said they would encourage setting ground rules and agenda by participants, the use of newsprint, and self-evaluation each day.*

*By 5:00 p.m. on the third day, everyone felt rushed because the ECOWAS meeting was only two days away. There were still five of the fifteen issues on the agenda, developed during that first day, that had not yet been discussed. By the end of the third day only two of these five issues had been dispensed. Participants knew they had only one more day because they needed that time to prepare for the ECOWAS meeting.*

*On the final day, all arrived early and three more issues still had to be addressed. This was the most heated of the four days. By 5:00p.m., two issues were still unsolved. By 10:30p.m., no more progress had been made. The organisers were discouraged but their courage soon returned. They told the participants that the progress was remarkable. The faction leaders had agreed to attend the workshop, stayed through all of it, identified the issues, and come to agreement on most of them.*

*The participants agreed to write up all decisions made and include the two that were not resolved. They each signed the document. Completing the document took time as it had to be in a language exactly as the participants wanted it to be. The signing procedure was a very moving experience. Participants were amazed but pleased with themselves.*



### **Questions to Consider**

1. Musamaali Nangoli has written that in Africa women are always regarded as peacemakers. Would you agree?
2. Are there women in your community that you would name as peacemakers? Why?
3. Ali Mazrui has observed that in Africa “we have loved woman as daughter, revered her as mother, held her as wife, but we have not learned to respect her as a human being.” Discuss.
4. What power did the faction leaders hold? What power did the women have?
5. Critically review the process the women followed in organising the meeting. What did they do well? What could they have done better?
6. What do you think are the main reasons behind the women’s success?

## **Reflecting on the Concepts**

In many African societies, power is equated to strength or ability. For example the word for power in Tiv, a Middle-Belt Nigerian dialect, is “Tahar,” meaning power or might. In the same Nigerian society, there are the Berom who perceive power as authority. The Hausa of West Africa have three words that illustrate various aspects of power. “Karfi” means ability or strength; “iko” means authority, and “kam” means strength or good health. No one word captures all the meanings of this concept.

In the modern state system that most African states adopted at independence, power is equated with violence. The state is seen as monopolising power and violence. In turn, the global system views power in terms of domination through violence.

The “Power of Man” illustrates that beyond the power of violence are other forms of power, including might, strength, and authority, to mention a few. Traditionally, Africans have had a profound sense of power, although it may not have been recognised as power. The animals came together to celebrate their natural talents in a festival. Their competition was not about controlling or dominating the other. Instead, they demonstrated their gifts so that the community could know what each was able to contribute to it. The power that the animals displayed was not the power of domination, but the power of working togeth-

er, each with his/her own unique skills and abilities. When another animal—man—entered the competition and brought a new form of power—violence—into the competition, the joyous sharing of power ended.

Before we consider power in detail, let us follow on the footsteps of the Liberian women. The story of Liberia, like that of many other African countries, is a modern dilemma for the peacebuilder. In *The Africans*, Ali Mazrui has pointed out that “you can teach other people the English language; you can teach them how to practice Christianity but you cannot teach them how to govern themselves. That, they must learn themselves.” The crisis we

***Though the palm tree in  
the jungle is big, who  
knows how big its yield  
will be?***

***—Liberia***

face in Africa may well be a consequence of our search of the most appropriate way to govern ourselves. The nation-state model inherited at independence seems to be a fragile system that hardly takes care of the needs and aspirations of African people. Global forces of greed and violence make the nation-state model both fragile and able to be manipulated easily.

Conflict, according to the logic of the nation-state, is best resolved through violence. Since the State possesses the monopoly on violence, this appears like a quick and viable solution to conflict. Dialogue is only necessary when it is to the advantage of the State. The ruling elite have not only criminalised the nation-state model but have also criminalised ethnic differences. We now fight violent conflicts with imaginary enemies. How does the peacebuilder operate within such a fragile arrangement? Generations of peacebuilding work can be destroyed in less than a day through the careless words of national leaders. The peacebuilder rarely takes part in decision-making in the nation-state model or is more often never consulted. Perhaps it is time we began talking about justice and peace as right relationships with people and systems. How does the peacebuilder ensure that her work is linked with those of others at different levels? How does the peacebuilder search for alternative sources of power to transform violent conflicts occurring within the nation-state model?

The Liberian story focuses on the role of women in peacebuilding. In traditional Africa, women have been the custodians of life. Traditionally, women were never killed in inter-ethnic wars or cattle rustling. However, we now have many cases where women and children are killed, or participate in killings themselves. African conflicts are killing the custodians of life as well as the future. Perhaps it will take women, the very custodians of life, to take Africa to a situation of equilibrium. The women of Liberia may not have been “suc-

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cessful” in stopping the war, but they have demonstrated two things: that there is hope and that they have the power.

Let us now return to the discussion on power.

*Personal Power* is the full awareness of one’s existence. To have personal power is **to be**. The power of *being* is the full awareness of the existence of oneself in a given place with a given people. It is about...

*Generativity*: the knowledge of one’s responsibility to perpetuate his/her world by producing resources that will promote life and well being.

*Connectivity*: the knowledge of one’s interdependence on his social, ecological, and spiritual spaces.

*Integration*: the power to create space in oneself for the harmonious existence of all the various components and conditions in life.

*Positional Power* is based on the role an individual has in a society. The president of a country, the headmistress of a school, and the village headman all have great power that is inherent in the position, not in their individual characteristics. When a president retires, the headmistress is transferred to another school, or the village headman dies, the power is transferred to the next person occupying that position. It doesn’t even matter very much whether the person has the characteristics needed for the position. The headmistress may be a competent, caring person who is concerned about her students. On the other hand, she may be an unqualified, mean-hearted person who has little concern about the welfare of the staff or students. In either case, she has the power of her position to make decisions about the school, the staff, and the students.

***In the great river there are  
large and small fish.***

***—Ghana***

Positional power is also a function of social status—how much power an individual has depends in part on characteristics of an entire group. For example, in much of Africa, men hold more power than women, elders more than youth, members of certain ethnic groups more than members of other ethnic groups. Again, this power tends to be independent of the personal characteristics of the person. A parent may be good or bad, but that parent still has authority over his/her child.

*Relational Power* may be measured by how much an individual is dependent upon by another person. It could be social, economic, or political dependence. We have traditionally defined a powerful person as one on whom others depend for a given resource. However, power in relationships is actually dependent on all the people within the relationships. Power is derived from relationships; it does not exist in a vacuum.

For example, think about the illustrations above of positional power. The headmistress holds power because of her position, but if the staff and students refuse to respect her authority, her ability to lead the school is diminished. A president can govern a country only as long as the citizens of the country agree to be governed by the president.

In many places in Africa, imbalances and shifts in power relationships cause much conflict. Think of the village headman in the example above. Traditionally, power resided in him because of his age, his family connections, and his personal wisdom and characteristics. When he was young, he recognised the leadership of traditional leaders with those same characteristics.

***A puppy must not confront  
a large animal.***

***—Cameroon***

However, today many of the young people in his village have received modern education, perhaps are even university educated. They speak the national language, are able to hold jobs in the city and send money home to their families. They may have different understandings of governance and power than the traditional village view. Young women may have different understandings of their role in the family and the community than their mothers and grandmothers did. This changes the relationship between the young people and the elders, and can easily lead to conflict within the community.

This principle of relational power is often downplayed in power relationships. Those with the resources often forget that their satisfaction depends on the demand for their resource and that they desperately need something from the other. One almost indisputable principle of relational power is not **dependency** but **interdependency** or *mutuality*.

John Paul Lederach, in the *Mediation and Facilitation Training Manual*, has suggested important principles of relational power:

- Power does not reside in the individual, but is the property of the social relationship. Power lies in the relationship.
- Power is present in all social relationships and can be used for destructive or productive purposes.

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- We all need power for self-esteem and fulfilment. Power is necessary for a sense of personal significance, not in an external opportunistic way, but in a fundamental internal manner. We all need to feel that we count; that we are valued.
- Power is a necessary ingredient of communication. Inevitably, all interaction and communication carries with it an unconscious assessment of personal significance, mutual influence, and power.
- Power is not a finite resource.
- Given a relational base, power is fluid and difficult to measure in precise terms. Power can be expanded or limited.
- Over time, significant and static power imbalances harm and destroy individuals and relationships.
- By productive or destructive means, people will seek to balance perceived and real power inequities.

The women of Liberia demonstrated both personal and relational power. The positional power in this story was held by the faction leaders. However, the women were able to use their personal power (their own self-awareness) and their relationship with the faction leaders to exercise a great deal of power. It is our view that in most of traditional Africa, the power of *being* takes precedence over positional power. In fact, authority was given to people who possessed personal power. However, modern society with its “winner takes all” tenets seems to value positional power (the power over other people) more than relational or personal power (power with others). Many vicious leaders live with the illusion that since they are “respected” by their subjects they are therefore powerful. They are mistaking fear for respect and powerlessness for power.

***The skin of a leopard is  
beautiful but not his heart.***

***—Congo***

Many outsiders often equate respect for elders to a power imbalance in Africa. Respecting elders is not based on an unjust power relationship. Instead, it is a demonstration of reverence for community harmony that is tied to our spirituality. All humans deserve respect but elders must not be shamed in public because this would bring a curse upon the land.

To summarise, we view power first as the awareness of one's existence. No relationship can produce power if the individuals in that relationship are not aware of their power. Second, people hold power by virtue of their positions in society. However, all power exists in relationships, and everyone within a relationship has power. When individuals do not have a clear sense of their own power, fear, low self-esteem, violence, and delusion often characterise their relationships. In other words, relationships do not produce power. At best, relationships affirm power. And last, people who are aware of their power have high levels of self-esteem. One does not need power for self-esteem. One is powerful because one has self-esteem.

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# 4 Peace and Justice

The three stories in this section explore issues of peace and justice. All are real life experiences from Sudan and Kenya. Following the stories are questions to consider to enhance our dialogue with the reader. The commentary following the stories attempts to knit together the discussion on peace and justice.

## ***A Call to Peace!***

*Because of a marriage, conflict developed between two of the Hawazma clans in Sudan. A young man from the Awlad Shallango clan proposed to a girl from Dar Niella. As is customary, the father of the girl informed the men of his clan, to discover if any of them were interested in marrying his daughter. None of the young men wanted to marry the young woman. The father consented to the marriage of his daughter to the young man from Awlad Shallango, and the wedding took place. Afterwards, the girl's cousins from Dar Niella were unhappy with this marriage and decided to kill the young Shallango man. After one of the evening dances, some of the Dar Niella young men killed the young Shallango man outside the village. Thus, conflict developed between the two clans. The Shallango intended to revenge the death of their clan member. The meeting described here is one of a series of "Ajaweed" to resolve the conflict caused by the murder. The Ajaweed is a mediation council, a traditional Sudanese way of dealing with conflicts. It was the fourth round of meetings to solve this conflict.*

*The Ajaweed consisted of dignitaries, Amers, Meks, and Omdas, in addition to the provincial governor and a representative of the Association of the African Muslims. These officials attended the Ajaweed in their personal capacities.*

*The meeting was held in an open space near the home of the deceased man's family. The representatives of the deceased sat on one side.*

*Adjacent to them sat the offenders. Then came neutral members, the chairman, and high officials.*

*The session was opened by a recitation from the Holy Qu'ran. Amer Mohamed Elzaki chaired the session. The provincial governor addressed the meeting. The governor stated that he and the other government officials were attending the meeting in their personal capacities, and that they were impartial and completely neutral. The purpose of the meeting was to reconcile the families. The chairman also emphasised these same points.*

*Dr. Makeem, the representative of the Association of the African Muslims, called for mutual reconciliation using recitations from the Holy Qu'ran, the Hadith, and customary wisdom. Examples of successful resolutions and reconciliation were given. Dr. Makeem said, "On the occasion of the natural death of my own child I was sad and much grieved, so I surely know how sorrowful and painful it is to have your beloved son killed in such a savage and cruel manner. However, as Muslims, we have an example of forgiveness in Prophet Mohammed. He forgave Hind, the woman who chewed a piece of liver of Hamza, the prophet's uncle. He forgave her and made her son one of the men who recorded the verses of the Holy Qu'ran, a highly honoured position. Although it is difficult to forgive those who quarrel and are unjust to you, as good Muslims we have to follow the example set by the prophet. We expect the father of the deceased to forgive the offenders, love them, and leave them to God's will. We hope and pray that the deceased and his family will meet in Heaven."*

*Many speakers delivered their speeches to the effect that reconciliation, forgiveness, mercy, and justice should be the happy ending to this conflict.*

*A young man from the deceased man's clan addressed the meeting and gave a graphic description of how the murder was committed and how badly the authorities had treated his clan. He closed his speech by stating that the matter should be left to the court of law. The father of the deceased also spoke and agreed with this.*

*The various parties had different ideas about how to resolve the conflict. The clan of the deceased man wanted to refer the matter to the courts of law. They thought that payment of blood money (diyya) would not be a strong enough deterrent. If the settlement were in*



*accordance with customary law, the offender and his clan would pay the diyya and suffer no further punishment.*

*The offender's side wanted settlement by payment of the diyya to avoid the possibility of the death penalty if the dispute were referred to the law courts. The neutral and official sides preferred reconciliation along the customary lines to promote peace in the area.*

*That meeting was adjourned, as it was clear that resolution and reconciliation was still not yet possible. Another meeting was planned. The request was clearly made that future meetings would be fruitful and that the deceased man's clans should co-operate and be more lenient.*

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Consider the process of reconciliation from an African indigenous perspective and the perspective of the modern nation/state. What are the similarities and differences? Give an example of this from your own perspective.
2. How could the needs of those deeply hurt in the conflict be addressed?
3. Divide into groups and role-play the next meeting of the Ajaweed. How does it feel take on the various roles?
4. Talk about the role of religion/spirituality in conflict resolution. How have you seen religion used in conflicts in your experience? Has the role of religion been positive, negative, or mixed?
5. This conflict is not yet resolved. What do you think will happen? Will this process lead to a successful solution to this situation?
6. Is it possible to integrate traditional and modern systems of justice? How would you suggest that the two systems be included in this case?

### **Meet 'Justice' Kilele**

*At 75, Mr. Ali Kilele walks tall among his tribesmen. He is responsible for overseeing the administration of justice in his hometown. The community gave him legal powers to preside over cases in the area. He is popularly known as "Justice" Kilele. A respected Garreh elder, Justice Kilele handles cases brought before him with the authority and dili-*

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gence of a trained lawyer. He claims to be guided by the popular judicial phrase “Justice delayed is justice denied.”

*At 30, Kilele was the youngest member of Garreh elders’ court in Tabaka division. Through hard work, he climbed the ranks to his current position of a “judge.” The soft-spoken man quoted the Qu’ran extensively through his personal assistant Abass, who also doubles as the court clerk and interpreter. “For the last 25 years, I have sat under this roof to determine the fate of the accused people brought before me. I believe in the administration of justice, and as I always tell my assistants in court, justice delayed is justice denied.”*

*“Those involved in determining cases should borrow a leaf from this wise phrase,” said Kilele as he welcomed us into his “chambers”. The majority of his cases involve rape and assault. Once all details and facts have been put together, the court immediately convenes. It is expected to last not more than a day. This however depends on the magnitude of the case. In his 25 years of his active service to the community, Kilele has handled only one case of sodomy and five cases of murder. Of all the cases, one case proved most difficult. A young woman had accused a man for having made her pregnant. “This young woman came to complain to the court after having good time with this young man from the village. They had a secret affair for several months. No one in the community witnessed them together.”*

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Have you ever attempted to resolve a conflict through the courts? How did it feel?
2. Would you agree with the statement, “Africans value peace more than justice”?
3. Do you know of any case of people practising an alternative to the courts? In small groups, discuss the merits and demerits of such alternatives.
4. Dramatise a situation of conflict in the traditional style and in the modern court style. Pay attention to the principles that guide the search for resolution. Compare in a panel.
5. Does Justice Kilele take care of the victims? How could the work of Justice Kilele be improved?

## **Whose Land?**

*Nuhu had a piece of land that he loaned to Fela's late father, Bature. Bature admired Nuhu's farm and begged him for a piece of land to settle on. Since Nuhu had many pieces of land, he willingly loaned out the piece that was far away from his home. Nuhu encouraged Bature to take as much land as he needed. However, Nuhu stipulated that he and his family would retain the right to harvest the locust bean trees. Bature agreed to inform Nuhu each time the trees were ready to be harvested.*

*Bature kept faith with the agreement until his death. On his deathbed, he instructed his son, Fela, about the details of the arrangement.*

*Trouble erupted 27 years after Bature's death. Nuhu had left the village for a while and instructed his stepson to harvest the produce of the locust beans trees. After a few years, Fela returned home and took custody of all his father's purported property including the locust bean trees. Fela prevented Nuhu's stepson from harvesting this produce. Nuhu's stepson did not pursue the matter until some 15 years later.*

*Nuhu, whose health was now failing, took his children round the farm. Trouble erupted when Nuhu took his sons to Fela's house and told them in the presence of Fela's children that their houses were situated on his land. Nuhu instructed his children to keep harvesting the locust bean trees. He instructed them that when Fela's children eventually relocated, his children were to take the entire farm.*

*After these pronouncements, trouble erupted. It took the combined effort of the village head and the entire village community to prevent war. Nuhu's relatives took sides with him while Fela's family did the same. Nuhu and his sons took the case to the village head. The village head felt incompetent to try the case because of his dual relationship with both families. The case was then transferred to the district head who took almost a month trying the case.*

***Ashes fly back in the face  
of the one who threw them.***

***—Niger***

## **When You Are the Peacebuilder**

*While Nuhu was prepared to take on oath to reclaim his birthright and entrust some of his children, Fela was equally prepared to take the oath to prove Nuhu was a liar and thief. Fela's sons brought witnesses who said the land rightfully belonged to them. When asked why he had allowed Nuhu's children to harvest the locust bean trees, Fela responded that it was because he had been gone from the community for a while. After he had returned, he went into action because his people were ignorant of the law that says a person can claim land that he settled on for 20 years.*

*After all was said and done, an oath was administered but the gods seemed to be angry with both parties since both Fela and Nuhu died a fortnight and a month respectively after the oath. People concluded that Fela was in the wrong and as such the oath had taken effect. Afterwards when Nuhu also died they became convinced that the ancestral spirits were angry at something in the whole village. The matter was resolved by calling on all the community to partake in a ritual of reconciliation involving not just the parties but also the whole village.*

### **Questions to Consider**

1. To whom does the land belong?
2. "For African people land is life." What is your response to this statement?
3. How has the concept of land ownership changed?
4. Are land conflicts special requiring special methods of resolution?
5. "The ancestors were angry with the manner the matter was first resolved." What is your response?

## Reflecting on the Concepts

These may be stories of conflicts not yet resolved. They illustrate a number of important issues in thinking about conflict in African communities, and raise several important questions.

African communities today continually negotiate between traditional methods of resolving conflict and the more modern “nation-state” methods. Both are powerful, and cannot—and should not—be ignored. Often they seem to be in conflict with each other. The Sudanese story illustrates this principle very well. Parties in disputes can manipulate conflict to their own ends—opting for traditional resolution when it suits their ends better, or the nation-state system when that appears to favour their side.

A second observation is how quickly conflicts can occur, and how long it takes to resolve them. In the story, the killing itself probably took less than 10 minutes; resolving the conflict that resulted from the violence may take weeks, months, or generations. At some point, some way of dealing with this specific conflict—whether through payment of the *diyya* or through court procedures—will be agreed upon. Rebuilding trust and healing the relationships will take much longer.

A third observation includes the demands put upon the family of the murdered young man. They are told to “co-operate and be more lenient.” In many conflicts, victims are burdened additionally by being told it is their responsibility to “forgive and forget,” or to “move on with their lives.” Victims of violence, whether individual victims of crime like in this story, or communities, societies, and nations traumatised by wide-scale violence, need to have their needs taken seriously. Paths to healing following violence can be long, twisting, and very painful. As peacebuilders, standing with the victims in their pain and making sure their voices are heard is vital to ensure real healing and sustainable peace.

The role of religion is emphasised in this story. In this case, the participants are Muslim. In other stories in this book, the participants are Christian or practitioners of traditional religion. We Africans are a spiritual people; separating our spirituality from our everyday lives would be like cutting off an arm or a leg. We need to recognise the place and role of our spirituality in the work we do. What really motivates us especially in times of crisis?

Laurenti Magesa in *African Religion: The Moral Tradition of Abundant Life*, argues that African religion is alive and well and should be counted amongst the world religions. In times of crisis, he argues, the response of the African is more likely to be guided by the precepts of African religion.

All religions do share some “fundamentals.” One of them is the call to peace. This is a

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resource that we may build on in our search for peace across religious lines. The story demonstrates the Islamic call to peace and nonviolence as opposed to violence and revenge.

Let us now consider the efforts of Justice Kilele. One question that this story provokes is: From where does Justice Kilele, who is neither a government appointee nor trained lawyer, derive his authority? The answer is, of course, from the people.

Let us take a step back. Traditional Africa had courts where elders sat to listen and pass judgement on cases involving all manners of transgression. The people knew the laws, even though those laws were unwritten. The courts, like that of Kilele, had immense moral authority derived from the people. Magesa states that among the Barotse of Zimbabwe the judges strove to ensure that relationships between the conflicting parties were not broken. In other words, the judgement was intended to promote reconciliation and healing. The same can be said for many African communities.

***When elephants fight, it is  
the grass that suffers.***

*—Uganda*

In modern times, the court systems remain the primary process through which we attempt to resolve conflicts. How do the principles that guided the enduring traditional process of justice compare with our modern courts? Many people would say that the last place one can hope to get justice is in

the modern court where the offender and victim are turned into spectators. The process looks alien right from the language to the dress. Victims are most often not granted time to lament about the pains they have gone through. Very few people in conflict leave the courts feeling reconciliation has occurred.

In many parts of Africa, people have noticed this gap in our search for life enhancing and reconciliatory justice. In spite of the government, many people are practising the kind of justice that would promote right relationships with fellow humans, God, the ancestors, and right relationships with the systems within which we live. Justice Kilele is fulfilling a need.

Howard Zehr in the book *Changing Lenses* has reflected on the issue of crime and justice and proposes a new focus. He argues that governmental judicial systems are too concerned about punishment that breaks relationships and promotes enmity between people. These systems traumatise victims further. In many cases, it is as if victims, rather than offenders, are on trial. It does not promote accountability on the part of victims and offenders. Offenders never get to understand what is it they did to other human beings. It leaves the community out of the whole equation of the search for justice.

Zehr leads us to re-examine our definition of justice. Some people say that Africans value peace more than justice. Others say that for many Africans justice is done when relationships are restored. Some go further to say justice is right relationships with fellow humans and the systems within which they live. In other words, justice is restoring the balance destroyed by conflict.

Justice in Tiv, a local language in Nigeria, is *mimi*, meaning uprightness. In Igala, another language in Nigeria, justice is called *Etoru*, meaning equity. In a third Nigerian language, Anpaga, justice is *Pipang*, meaning trustfulness or truthfulness. For the Luo, the Luhya, and the Abagussii in East Africa, justice means truth. Long before Africa was infiltrated by outside values, beliefs and culture, justice was central to the maintenance of community. Every person in a community felt a part of it and was given the space to impact community as well. The goal of justice is **right relationship**.

Within our inclusive and comprehensive worldview, of central importance in African justice systems was the restoration and/or maintenance of right relationships. The focus was not individual justice but community justice where the individual was respected in relationship with others. To perceive justice within community or relationship is to emphasise “right and responsibility” equally. Justice is only defined in relationship. Justice may well be defined as right relationships between people and between people and systems.

*Distributive Justice* focuses on the just and equitable distribution of society’s resources so that the basic human needs of all are adequately met. Distributive justice assumes that society is organised in ways that allow leaders of the society to ensure that no person is disenfranchised or deprived.

Distributive justice is a *political justice*. It places the responsibility of equitably distributing community’s resources in the hands of leaders. The disadvantage of the distributive justice system is that people are reduced to statistics. They become the weak and unproductive of society. Even the moral values that demanded caring for others no longer exist in distributive justice. This too has become justice for the strong and “powerful.”

Before the concept of “State” and the large organisation of society, African societies were often small and relatively homogeneous. Hence, the emphasis was more on commutative justice.

*Commutative Justice* assumes that each individual in society takes responsibility for the other. It says that all must be carried along in the generation and distribution of resources within the society. It does not delegate the responsibility of distributing wealth to organised groups. For example, I am obliged by the values of commutative justice to help my neighbour work his farm and vice versa. I am obliged to care for the livestock and other properties of my neighbour. If my neighbour is hungry, I am obliged to share my food with him. Commutative justice is a social justice system.

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The shift from commutative justice to distributive justice came as a result of the expansion and diversification of communities. It also was a consequence of a change in values. Individual affluence through competition took over from community affluence through cooperation. Being one's neighbour's keeper is now becoming obsolete in many African communities, especially urban communities.

*Retributive Justice* intends to guarantee the protection of the freedom and unalienable right of individuals, communities, peoples, and nations. With the expansion of communities to include people with various moral and spiritual backgrounds, the compromise was the shift from spiritual and moral values to "social contract."

Laws and their consequences were intended to deter those who would attempt to violate others. Ultimately, the goal of retributive justice is to protect and foster healthy and positive relationships (whether between humans or humans and their ecology).

In traditional African societies, violation of social contracts or laws is still perceived as a violation of relationship and/or community. Communities have their own unique ways of responding to violations. Unfortunately, consequences (imprisonment, execution, and other prosecutory measures) available in contemporary societies have lost sight of the ultimate goal of justice—"uprightness and just relationship." Retributive justice evolved with the growth of society. In the process, it left behind the need to restore relationships after violation.

*Restorative Justice* addresses violations, just like retributive justice. However, restorative justice is a process by which the broken relationship after violation is healed and restored. The principles of restorative justice include *reparation*, *restitution*, *accountability*, *reconciliation*, *transformation*, and *re-socialisation*. There are ceremonies and rituals that are performed in Africa that restore human relationships. When one breaches a social contract or law, it is not necessarily a crime against the state, (that abstract entity that now governs society). It is "a violation of people." Zehr states, "Restorative justice, unlike retributive justice, identifies needs and obligations so that things can be made right through a process that encourages dialogue and involves both victims and offenders." The principles of restorative justice still influence the justice system in a number of African communities.

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# 5 Nonviolence

Following are four stories that explore issues in violence and nonviolence. The first is an indigenous folktale, while the second comes from Uganda. The third story in this section is a famous nonviolent action by young children from the slums of Soweto in South Africa. The final story relates the nonviolent action by a group of Southern Sudanese women. Following the stories are questions to enhance our dialogue with the reader, followed by a commentary on violence and nonviolence.

## ***The Three Bulls***

*Once upon a time in a Loma village, three bulls lived. The three bulls, Red Bull, Black Bull and White Bull, agreed to live together to help each other in times of trouble. One cold evening during the rainy season, the three bulls sat near the fire enjoying the sounds of the forest around them. Suddenly they were startled by the sound of heavy footsteps. Immediately a thunderstorm poured, making it impossible for them to detect the sounds of the approaching footsteps.*

*Not knowing what to do, they all looked in the direction from where the sound had come. Finally, Red Bull said they could not continue to look in one direction. "Each of us must look in different directions since we cannot see what is happening." The others agreed. Each watched in a different direction. They were alert and ready to fight.*

*After a long silence, Black Bull announced in a low but forceful voice that expressed fear, "It is the long awaited enemy, Leopard." Red and White Bull hurried to their friend's side. Although Leopard was an expert warrior, he came to a stop when he saw the three big bulls standing together. Leopard realised that he could not kill the bulls when they were together. He needed to find a way to kill them one at a time. He finally came up with a plan of action.*

*Leopard began moving toward the bulls with calm confident steps. The three bulls did not trust his calmness. They asked, "How is it that you*

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are about to fight without any investigation?" Leopard replied, "I have never been here before and would not be here now except for one reason. A few days ago, Black Bull completely destroyed my garden and everything I have worked for over months, so please excuse me and let me do what is right." Red Bull and White Bull allowed their friend, Black Bull, to be murdered and eaten by Leopard.

Later Leopard returned. This time, he stated that White Bull had offended him. Again, Red Bull let him have his will, and Leopard killed White Bull. Finally during the dry season while Red Bull was cleaning up, he heard someone calling from outside: "Come out here you fool, or else I will break in. You are my dinner tonight." Before Red Bull could think, Leopard broke through the unlocked door and began his feast.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. "Leopard took advantage of the Bulls nonviolent approach." What is your response?
2. What would have been alternative approach to the conflict by all the animals?
3. "People who use violence seem more creative and clever than those who use nonviolence." Do you agree?

***The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.***

***—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.***

## ***A March Against Prejudice***

*Following the 7 August 1998 bomb blasts in the East African cities of Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, the city of Kampala, Uganda went on full alert suspecting that a bomb of similar magnitude might hit the city. In fact, Kampala appeared more vulnerable since there had been a spate of small-scale bomb blasts in Kampala and other parts of Uganda. In the frenzy, it was suspected that Muslims were responsible not only for the blasts in Nairobi and Dar, but also of previous blasts in Uganda. The armed forces seem to have gone into paranoia about Islam and adherents of the faith. A number of Muslim men disappeared. As families began the search for the “lost” men, it was soon discovered that they had been arrested as suspects in the explosions.*

*A group of women met and decided to take peace action against the arrests that they felt were unfair as only Muslims were targeted. Dressed in bui bui [the traditional Arabic dress for women] and waving banners, a number of Muslim women mobilised and marched to parliament. At parliament, they made their point clear. Soon after, the government denied responsibility and later released several of the suspects.*

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Make a list of stories, proverbs and prejudices we hold about other people. Discuss their origins and how they affect us.
2. Make a list of stereotypes that you may have heard through the media and discuss their origins and how they affect or thinking and responses to conflict.
3. Discuss the statement: “the genocide in Rwanda was not about ethnicity but power.”
4. How do some of the prejudices “help” us to respond to the challenges of life?
5. List activities that would help us overcome some of the challenges posed by stereotypes and prejudices?

## **Soweto: The Children of Nonviolence**

On June 16, 1976, hundreds of children took to the dusty streets of Soweto to protest against the imposition of Afrikaans as a language of instruction. It was a demonstration of pride and identity by a generation determined to shape their destiny. The history of South Africa has changed dramatically since then. The death of over 1,000 children shot in cold blood by apartheid police rekindled the spirit of freedom. Hector Peterson, a 13-year-old pupil at Orlando West School, was the first to sacrifice his soul in the world's most phenomenal nonviolent action.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Make a list of African heroes you know. Discuss why they should appear in your lists.
2. The Chinese have a proverb that says if one wants to be wise then they would better listen to the children. Any comparison with the Soweto event?
3. What was the protest all about?
4. How has the life of children changed in modern times?
5. "Soweto should never have happened." What is your response to this statement?

***If we are to have real peace, we must begin with the children.***

***—Mahatma Gandhi***

***It is the action, not the fruit of the action, that is important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there will be any fruit. But that doesn't mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result.***

***—Mahatma Gandhi.***

## **Women United!**

*A Southern Sudanese women's group realised that one of their members had become silent, depressed, and was obviously troubled. Upon questioning, they learned that her husband was physically abusing her. Almost every day, he beat her immediately after he arrived home in the evening. The woman felt powerless to stop the beatings.*

*The women decided to intervene to assist their sister. One afternoon, twenty of them went to the small house where the woman and her husband lived. The husband had not yet arrived home. The women sat silently until the husband arrived.*

*When the husband arrived, the women did not speak to the man, but continued to sit quietly. He looked at them, then went to his bed without speaking. After a time the women left, saying to the man as they left, "if necessary, we will return." The man never beat his wife again.*

***Much silence has a mighty noise.***

***—Tanzania***

### **Questions to Consider**

1. What are the signs in your community that indicate that humans are in balance, or out of balance, with each other?
2. Translate the word "nonviolence" into African languages. Discuss the images that emerge from the reflections. Then translate the terms back into English. Are there any variations? What do these mean?
3. Simulate the women's actions. Discuss how it feels to play each role. How does this relate to modern challenges in Africa?
4. Talk to someone who has been a victim of violence (in a domestic situation, as the result of a crime, or in war). What was the experience like for this person? What have been the effects on his/her life?
5. Write a letter to someone you consider your enemy. How did it feel writing the letter?

## Reflecting on the Concepts

Before we discuss violence in detail, let us examine an issue that has been used to fan violent conflicts in Africa as demonstrated by the Muslim women in Kampala, that of stereotypes and prejudices.

It seems almost natural that we all bear prejudices and stereotypes. Some psychologists argue that the human mind forms categories to help us understand the world in a manner that is predictable. Some stereotypes start as jokes. However, history tells us that stereotypes and prejudices may lead to discrimination and violence.

All over the world, it is common to hear people describing other groups of people in prejudicial and stereotypical language, if not derogative. For example, many people tend to think of all Muslims as being “fundamentalists” bent on burning down the earth. You may have heard one being as “silly as a young girl” or as “drunk as an Irish.”

Prejudices that seem harmless and even humorous can assume dangerous proportions when we feel our power and security is threatened. Stereotypical images, myths, proverbs or stories can assume dangerous proportions. Some of them assume a life of their own and are passed from generation to generation as “truths.” Black people and women have been oppressed because of prejudices others had about them.

Prejudices and stereotypes impair our ability to look at issues soberly and with a clear mind. Many times, as the Ugandan story illustrates, innocent people have been injured because of our lack of clear-mindedness, a desire to blame, and an attempt to find quick solutions to problems.

Most stereotypes are based on illusions; they are lies. Repeated over many years, stereotypes are believed not just by those who spread them but even their victims. In other words, a young Muslim may justify using violence on the “fact” that Muslims are believed to be violent. A woman may remain silently in an abusive marriage, without exposing the violence, because she believes “women are inferior.” Many conflicts we face in Africa are substantially a product of stereotypes and images. Stereotypes are used to dehumanise. When we begin describing other people in zoological terms—when we call fellow human beings cockroaches or rats—then the process of dehumanisation has begun and violence is on our doorstep.

***A camel does not tease  
another camel about his  
hump.***

***—Egypt***

The challenge to eliminate stereotypes and prejudices is at the core of building peaceful societies—the process aims at making the world more human. Groups of people may resemble each other in behaviour patterns but above all each individual is unique. This uniqueness of individuals and groups should call for celebration not division.

Conflict and violence seem to be as old as humankind. Violence is the deliberate infliction of suffering or injury on another. The unprecedented increase in violence, especially group violence, in recent decades urges us to ask the following questions:

Is violence innate to the human nature or is it socially conditioned? What turns a perfectly gentle and humane person into a horrible killer? Why do people act more hostile in a group than when they act as individuals? Why do groups with long histories of co-operation and mutual co-existence become hostile to the point of exterminating each other? What emotional elements are critical to violence?

***He who denies the sound  
of the living will hear the  
sound of the dead.***

***—Kenya***

Violence is a force that inflicts harm on others. Violence intends to suppress and/or resolve conflict. Violence takes on many forms:

*Physical violence* is a direct assault of an individual or group. This type of violence may cause physical and emotional injuries. Wars and social vio-

lence in Africa are subjecting millions to physical injury. We can also physically assault our children, wives or husbands, and others whom we find to be physically weaker than ourselves.

*Deprivation* is an economic form of violence. When resources of society are unjustly distributed so that others are deprived, it is a structural or an economic violence. While the world pretends to be fighting human right violations, it pays “lip service” to the violence that is unleashed on two-thirds of the world’s peoples because of power imbalances between the North and South. Such pretence demonstrates a woeful manifestation of human’s inhumanity to his fellow human beings.

*Emotional Violence* or psychic violence is an assault that destroys a person’s self-concept and self-worth. For more than 700 years now, Africans have been told over and over again that they are inferior to white Anglo-Saxon Europeans and Americans. Slavery, colonisation, the debt burden, the heartless projection of Africans through Western media all unleash psychic violence on Africans.

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*Recently, I went through a border of a West African country and became victim of what has become a normal border terror. While being harassed I saw a young white girl who came, passed by without any interrogation, and entered the other country with ease. This experience forced me to ask the immigration officer why he chose to molest me while allowing a white person to move easily. He had no answer. I looked at him and said, "I hope some day you will experience decolonisation of your mind." Certainly, he did not understand me, but I felt good that I made my point.*

Violence can be institutional and sanctioned by society or the state. Institutionalised social violence is often found in cultural beliefs, structural policies and practices. No society is immune from institutionalised violence. For example, some groups in Africa practice genital mutilation, and the suppression of women. Military and paramilitary terror and guerrilla acts have added to the misery in Africa.

Violence begins to destroy by creating conditions of unsafety. Once this unsafe condition is created and the victim is subjected to anxiety, the perpetrator goes further by inflicting injury to reinforce unpredictability. From unpredictability, violence extends to rewriting the story of the victim. It strips the victim of his/her previous life story and attempts to write a new one, one based on fear, a contaminated sense of self, or hatred. Robert Schreiter has noted, "by being attacked we are reminded of how vulnerable we are. Continuing attacks may cause us to doubt and even abandon the narratives (or stories) that encode our senses of safety and selfhood, since they do not seem to offer the assurance we seek in the midst of these onslaughts."

The nonviolent work and philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi was rooted in the Hindu culture of India. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., drew his inspiration from his deep Christian faith and from the African-American culture of the US. His speeches, writings, and life demonstrate his understanding of the Bible and the place of his faith and his culture in his nonviolent work. The actions of these two men and their followers were not identical. Each grew out of, and validated, the culture and religion in which it was rooted, giving nonviolence a creative, powerful expression appropriate for the challenges of the specific time and place.

One of the key questions of these four stories is whether nonviolence in Africa, is an invention or a heritage. How can we embody our traditions of peaceful resistance to injustice? Gerald Wanjohi tells us that "among the Gikuyu of central Kenya, the idea of peace or nonviolence is valued so highly that it is part of their language."



The proverbs of many African ethnic groups make a strong call to peace and nonviolence. For example, the Gikuyu say “Fire is not put out by fire,” while the Ankole of Uganda say “A spear is happy when at home in its place.”

What insights can we draw from these stories? First, human beings are important and should be treated with the highest regard whether they are poor or even if we consider them our enemies. The gifts of life are God-given for all to share. To deny other people the enjoyment of these gifts denies the spirit of sharing—the spirit of community.

Second, women who have been the custodians of life—earth, water, fire, and birth—are being called upon to play their rightful role in a changing world. Humanity, and Africa in particular, have yet to benefit from the talents and abilities of their women.

Like all other cultures, African culture is evolving and women have to create a new story in light of the emerging challenges.

Third, Africans have had strong peace traditions even when protesting injustice. We must reflect on what are the appropriate methods and tactics of responding to injustice in Africa.

***When a woman is hungry,  
she says, “Roast something  
for the children to eat.”***

***—Congo***

The children of Soweto who should have been benefiting from adult care and nourishment took to the streets to seek change. And, they paid the ultimate price. The blood nourished the struggle for freedom, justice, and peace. Something must have gone terribly wrong for children to feel compelled to make the ultimate sacrifice. In our communities, all is not well if children have to protest. We are not necessarily being called to go to the streets. But we are certainly called to do something for today and tomorrow.

In summary, therefore, nonviolence is a deliberate and calculated effort to raise structural and/or covert conflict to the consciousness of parties involved while renouncing violence at the same time. Nonviolence perceives conflict as a product of unjust structures in relationships and societies.

*Principled Nonviolence* is based on faith or moral values. It is the way of life. It cannot be analysed or rationalised. Some values of principled nonviolence observed in Africa include love, mutuality, inclusivity, truth, justice, and respect for strangers, respect for women, the elderly, children, and the vulnerable of society.

Conversion is central to principled nonviolence. Its strategy is to challenge the moral strength of the perpetrator. This is where principled nonviolence is criticised. What hap-

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pens when the perpetrator is deluded and is incapable of listening to his/her conscience? Principled nonviolence is painfully slow. It hopes that someday the perpetrator will be converted to the side of the universe where truth, justice, freedom, and peace, are absolute.

*In Northern Ghana, when violent conflict occurred between families or groups of the Frafra people, a Frafra woman married outside of the group's community could enforce the peace once she told Frafras to stop all hostility. She did not need to explain why. When she says, "In my capacity as flopah, (a women married outside of the group), I insist that you cease all hostility," the group will stop all hostility immediately. Amongst some groups in Liberia, a group of women could stop any aggression by threatening to strip themselves naked. To see the nakedness of mothers was an abomination to the community.*

*Strategic Nonviolence* applies techniques and skills to effect change. Strategic nonviolence persuades through social, economic, and political acts. The major element that is employed in strategic nonviolence is relational power. Strategies include persuasion, manipulation, and coercion. Practitioners of strategic nonviolence believe that in the end, these tactics are more powerful than violence in achieving their goals.

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# 6 The Challenge of Transformation

Virtually all stories in this book are about transformation of conflicts. The three stories included here are not to be viewed as best examples. They only serve to provoke dialogue of issues in transformation of conflicts. The first involves pastoralist conflict in Kenya while the second is drawn from a real life experience in Nigeria. The third story illustrates a creative approach to conflict transformation by a group of young artistes based in Kenya. Questions follow each story. A brief commentary attempts to knit together the discussion on conflict transformation.

## ***Rapid Response in Wajir***

*On 6 July 1998, the Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC) in Northeastern Kenya received a report that there was a conflict between two Somali clans. The Fai clan had refused the Murrulle access to a water pan. On receiving this information, the WPDC's Rapid Response Team of three elders, two women, and a government representative left to visit the area and investigate the problem. There had been previous conflict between these two clans so any small dispute report was taken seriously by WPDC because it could escalate into bigger conflict and lead to violence. The team travelled east about 90 miles to the village of Ber Janai, where they met with the area chief and councillor.*

*After an opening prayer, Chief Ali Yallahow of WPDC explained the purpose of the visit and asked if village leaders were aware of the problem. The area Chief explained that the problem was not a clan problem. Instead, a Murrulle family had sick camels. The Water Management Committee demanded that the camels move to the area designated for sick animals. However, the family did not accept the decision. The other leaders agreed with the Chief.*

*Mzee Mahat Golija of WPDC said that this information was quite different from that learned in Wajir. He said, "Let us investigate further*

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*and meet with the family and their herders.” He emphasised the importance of honesty and truth in resolving this problem. He concluded his remarks with these words of wisdom:*

*Three things will end,  
But let them end in a good way.  
Life will end, but let it end with piety;  
Food will end, but let it end with alms;  
Words are many and they will end;  
But let them end with Truth.*

*Mrs. Oray Aden of WPDC agreed that all needed to work together to solve the problem. She asked the Rapid Response Team to add the Ber Janai elders to work with them to solve the problem. The chairman agreed. The chairman sent a message to the nomadic family asking them to meet the group at the herding site. The next morning, the group visited the family and the camels. They all checked the animals for disease.*

*The camel owners stated their belief that the camels were healthy. The representatives disagreed with the findings, saying they believed these animals were sick. They wanted a qualified veterinarian to give them a second opinion. They were shocked when the WPDC team told them that Mrs. Nuria Abdi of WPDC is a veterinarian. Mrs. Nuria stated her opinion that the camels were healthy.*

*The representatives were not satisfied, even with that professional opinion. The WPDC chairman asked each group to sit down and discuss strategies and solutions: the family; the representatives of the Fai clans; and the Rapid Response Team. Each group discussed the situation and then came back with their results.*

*The family with the camels decided that, in the interest of peace, they would move, since there was no scarcity of water and pasture. They would remain in the area for four days, until they were ready to move. All their livestock would be given water while in transit. Ber Janai elders would be responsible to ensure the family’s safety as they leave the area.*

*The Rapid Response members agreed with the suggestion of the family. They suggested that, for the sake of the future peace, a member of the*

*Murrulle clan be added to the Water and Peace Committee, so that they would feel part of Ber Janai. The representatives agreed with the decision.*

*The chairman of the Rapid Response Team requested a public meeting, so the resolution could be made public to everyone in Ber Janai. The area chief convened the meeting, and the people were informed about the agreement. Chief Ali thanked everyone for agreeing to solve the matter in a nonviolent way. The session ended with a public prayer.*

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Are there situations where you have felt like intervening in a conflict but were restrained by traditions, culture, or religion? How did you feel?
2. Compare the mediation session with a mediation model from another culture. What are some of the things that we can borrow to enhance our process of peacemaking?
3. How could one person have responded to this conflict alone?
4. What are the qualities of a good mediator?
5. In your culture, are women accepted as mediators? Why? Give some examples of women mediators.

## **“Witch” Hunting**

*Mrs. Laraba Dauda accused her widowed neighbour, Mrs. Tani Buba, of witchcraft. Mrs. Buba had left a gourd containing some black substance by the gate of her neighbour’s house in a rush to get to a neighbouring house. In her hurry, she ran into Mrs. Dauda’s child who fell down and sustained a very deep cut on her ankle.*

*Mrs. Dauda came back a few minutes after the episode. She was angry when Mrs. Buba came back to pick up her gourd. A neighbour prevented the women from fighting. Mrs. Dauda took the case to the village head who summoned Mrs. Buba. Mrs. Dauda said that Mrs. Buba had tried to kill her daughter.*

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*For some time, the villagers had suspected that a witch initiated some of their children into a secret cult. Thus, Mrs. Dauda, because of her anger at her daughter's injuries, insisted that Mrs. Buba was a witch, and a member of the secret cult. When the village head asked Mrs. Dauda to give proof of her allegations, she went berserk and rushed out shouting, "Witch! Witch! I will not stay near that witch!"*

*When the villagers heard the shouts, they rushed out to find the witch themselves. Mrs. Dauda directed them to the house of the village head. They ran there, picking up stones, sticks and whatever they could lay their hands on.*

*They stoned and beat Mrs. Buba mercilessly. They would have killed her but for the timely intervention of members of her family. The village head was beaten for harbouring a witch. The entire village armed themselves. Mrs. Buba's relatives forcefully rescued their daughter. Even the primary school children got involved.*

*The conflict kept escalating until the District Commissioner (DC) heard about it and attempted to arbitrate between the warring factions. The DC summoned the elders separately and later together. Later he called the principal parties and discussed the matter with them. The members of their immediate families were also called and treated to a sumptuous meal and counselled on good neighbourliness. Next were the pastors, parishioners, and congregation. Lastly, the whole village was summoned to a general meeting where all superstitions were laid bare. They were enjoined to mend fences and live as good neighbours.*

### **Questions to Consider**

1. How could Mrs. Buba have prevented the conflict from escalating?
2. List conflicts you know that arose from very "small things."
3. What are some of the things that "change" as a conflict escalates?
4. In the process of resolving the conflict, would you have followed a different process from that of the DC? How and why?
5. Give some examples of people you know who resolve conflicts in communities and how they do it. How is it different from the District Commissioner's process?
6. What are the difficulties now? Have they been overcome?

## **Drama as Transformation**

*The students at a secondary school near Nairobi had gone on strike and as is characteristic in many Kenyan schools, the response was heavy handed. The students were suspended and their parents fined heavily for the damages caused by the “undisciplined” girls. However, two weeks after being re-admitted, and in spite of going through some tough disciplinary measures, it was evident that the young girls were plotting yet another strike!*

*The school administration invited a group of artiste-peacebuilders, Amani People’s Theatre (APT), to “teach the girls ways of living with the authority.” The APT strategy was to work with the students and staff separately and then to assess whether it would be advisable to bring the two groups together in a reconciliation process.*

*The role-plays revealed that tension in the school was high. With energy, enthusiasm, and humour, the students caricatured their teachers in the role-plays and showed the absurdity of being suspended over “small” issues. The group work took most of the morning.*

*In the afternoon, the plan included a process of challenging the perspectives of the students in a dramatic process that would encourage broader reflections in response to conflict and a search for alternatives to violence. During this session, a few APT facilitators became emotional in the process of discussion and play building. It was apparent that for them, the boundary between theatre and reality was very thin.*

*As APT began role-playing alternatives to violence as a response to conflicts, students went from jeering to focussed discussion and character creation. The school cateress, who had been watching the process from a distance, was invited to join the drama as the mother of a suspended student. Her participation added a hue of soberness on the process.*

*Without warning, the headmistress decided to “gate-crash” into the students’ drama at a point when the facilitator was asking the girls to volunteer playing several roles including that of a headmistress. The students were silent. It seemed no student was ready to do that when the headmistress was present.*

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*Then, the headmistress volunteered to play the role. APT rarely encourages people to play themselves because of the psychological effect it is likely to have. However, the central facilitator decided to break the principle and invited the headmistress to play herself.*

*There was hesitation but the drama continued. What followed looked surreal. In the safe environment of the people's theatre process, the students, prefects, and headmistress in the drama revealed the key issues they faced – lack of communication, frustration by prefects, and an administration not ready to listen to them. As the drama built to a climax, the students and headmistress hugged and promised to make the school a community for all of them. As they hugged, it was not clear where the boundary between drama and reality began or ended, or whether there was any boundary at all.*

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Have you ever told someone a story? How did it feel?
2. Have you wanted to tell a story and did not get the chance? How did that feel?
3. In what other creative ways can Africans respond to their conflicts?
4. What stories do Africans need to tell the world?
5. Compare African traditional art and “modern” African art. What is the difference in function?

***Things are not likely to be the same tomorrow as they are today. That is why the priest consults the oracle every five days.***

***—Niger***



## Reflecting on the Concepts

Many large-scale violent conflicts begin with very “small” things. Peacebuilders must learn the right time to intervene and the right types of intervention at specific points.

In these stories, “simple” misunderstandings escalated within a very short time. When conflict escalated, the people involved in the conflict became insignificant and the issues in the conflict became clouded. Old concerns were inflamed, and violence erupted quickly.

In “Witch Hunting,” the District Commissioner seemed keenly aware of the scale of the conflict. He worked in stages, following the path of escalation. He involved virtually everyone who participated in the conflict. In the end, he conducted a ritual of reconciliation. The communal dimension was taken seriously by the mediator. He illustrated that the process of dealing with conflict must be an inclusive one.

The image of an onion has been used to discuss conflict. As you peel an onion, the colour changes from purple to white. As you “peel” a conflict, you find many layers, previously unseen, which are part of the conflict.

The Rapid Response team from Wajir raises issues on whether the peacebuilder’s approach should be “crisis-driven” or “response-driven.” To be driven by crisis implies an attitude that only waits for things to happen before reacting. A short-term mentality assumes peacebuilding only follows a crisis. In this story, the mediators responded to the immediate crisis, but also worked to set up systems to prevent further crises (by adding a member of the minority clan to the local Water Committee).

***To make preparations does not spoil the trip.***

***—Guinea***

Second, peacebuilding may need to be redefined to include all that we do daily to make this world a better place. Indeed, many people do many good things without necessarily defining it as peacebuilding. “Prevention,” the old adage goes, “is better than a cure.” In other words, in the building of the house of peace, there is no man or woman, child or adult, rulers and the led. Peacebuilding is not one of those things we can do alone. We must involve all people, even those we do not like. That may be the greatest call to building peaceful societies.

In the Wajir story, we see a mixed group of people working together to resolve conflict

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regardless of age, gender and status. Modern challenges of peace call for a collective response. We must remember that we may never see the fruits of our efforts today but we must hold onto the dream that peace is possible for our grandchildren.

Our responses to conflict should be well timed not just in terms of responding quickly before it escalates into violence but also in terms of what kind of response is most useful as specific points in the process. This mediation probably would not have been successful had only government officials been involved. Local people and government officials working together with the people involved in the conflict were able to resolve it successfully.

The builders of the house of peace must win the trust of the people. It can take quite a while for people to trust others. The peacebuilders must respect the traditions and culture of the people. In this case, the peacebuilders were able to gain the trust of the people by respecting and participating in the important cultural rituals—prayers, poetry, and public discussions. The mediators sought accurate information and the truth. The process was participatory so that all parties were allowed to take part equally in the process. The mediators used people with special expertise when needed. A veterinarian was included in the team.

Let us consider the creative approach used by the artistes before discussing in detail some concepts of transformation. Drama has its origins in rituals. Our ancestors engaged in ritualistic performances in response to the enigmas of nature, the supernatural, and fellow beings. African people, perform rituals to restore balance following events that disturb stability. Ritualistic drama is therefore an attempt to find harmony and equilibrium in life.

In *Social Interaction as Drama: Applications from Conflict Resolution*, A. Paul Hare tells us that conflict resolution practitioners will continue relying on the artiste for a long time to come since the artiste pays considerable attention to the dynamics in conflict. The Ugandan poet, Okot p'Bitek once pointed out that artistes respond deeply and intuitively to what has happened, what is happening, and what shall happen.

Robert Benjamin also suggests that the modern mediator can learn values from the traditional folkloric trickster. The resolution of conflict, Benjamin tells us cannot be limited to the cerebral. It involves the whole person and that is why the artiste, working more at a feeling level, becomes important.

What is peacebuilding about? Is it not about challenging our perceptions and empathising with others? In peacebuilding, we reflectively encounter our experiences and prejudices, knowledge, and emotions and evolve a new culture, a culture of peace. Challenging our perceptions and empathising is perhaps the biggest task of the peace worker. In the process, the mediator tries to help others envision a new future where peo-

ple see each other as interdependent. Changing perspectives is extremely empowering in the process of conflict transformation.

A culture of peace is possible when we are allowed to share stories. The traditional mediators emphasised the need for conflicting parties to be given the space to share their stories, their truths. Modern life often takes stories away from people.

The artist helps us retell our own stories and empathise with the stories of others. When that happens, conflicting parties can meet each other, as happened in the school community, and make peace possible.

Transformation is about change, not just cosmetic change, but change of the whole person, relationship, culture, and structure. Transformation can be positive or negative: good relationships can become bad; destructive relationships can be healed.

### ***Strategies for Transformation***

In situations of conflict, people often feel dehumanised and without power. They feel that others are not understanding or caring about their concerns, fears, and hopes. The task of transformation, therefore, is to foster empowerment and recognition.

*Empowerment*, according to Bush and Folger, is achieved when people in conflict experience a strengthened awareness of their own self-worth and their own ability to deal with the difficulties they face. “Doing for” others will only keep them from realising their potential to face the conflicts they experience and making the changes needed to sustain themselves and their communities. Every society experiences conflicts. When there is no opportunity to learn from the conflict, the result is increased powerlessness and consequently more violence.

*Recognition*: During conflict, disputing parties typically work towards invalidating each other. In the process, all parties tend to dehumanise each other. In the state of dehumanisation, parties often want to destroy each other. Recognition is the process that allows parties to recognise both their own needs and humanity, as well as the needs and humanity of the enemy. By facilitating open dialogue, parties may be attentive, sympathetic, and responsive to the situation of the other.

Transformation is only sustainable if it affects the following elements in any society: Personal, Relational, Cultural and Structural.

*Personal Transformation* is the process of moral change or development in an individual. This affects the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours of the person in the conflict. Personal transformation is key to the transformation paradigm. Personal change can influ-

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ence change in others. The process maximises the human potential for growth and well being. In the story of the secondary school, personal transformation happened as the students and headmistress realised how their individual attitudes and behaviours had played a part in the conflict.

*Relational Transformation* builds on personal transformation. When individuals are able to recognise the humanity and needs of the other parties through communication; dialogue, and addressing mutual fears and hatred, relationships and community can be re-established. Building trust is not an easy process. It calls for patience, courage, and willingness to risk. Again, the story of the secondary school shows the relational transformation that occurred when the students and headmistress began to understand each other and promised to work together to make the school a community.

***If the drumbeat changes,  
the dancer must adapt.***

***—Burkina Faso***

*Cultural Transformation* recognises that cultural values, beliefs, and practices are sometimes resources for violent conflicts. By exploring and understanding the cultural patterns that contribute to the rise of violent expressions, people can identify and build on resources and mechanisms within

a cultural setting for responding to conflict. In the story of Mrs. Dauda and Mrs. Buba, if the community wants to lessen the possibilities of violent conflict, they must understand the cultural patterns that contributed to the very quick rise in violence, and to build on resources within the community to prevent this from happening in other events.

*Structural Transformation* addresses change within social systems and the way they function. An understanding of political, economic, social and religious structures that perpetuate conflicts is vital. Concrete activities must be put in place to influence positive change of these institutions so that they support individual and societal change. The story of the sick camels illustrates that the mediators understood the complexities that led up to this conflict. They worked on transforming the specific conflict (water for the camels) and also worked to set up social structures to strengthen the possibility of future peace (adding a minority member to the local Water and Peace Committee).

### **Select Bibliography** (complete citations in Chapter 9)

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# 7 Reconciliation

The two stories in this section explore issues in reconciliation. Both are real life experiences from Uganda and Kenya. Following the stories are questions to consider to enhance our dialogue with the reader. A brief commentary attempts to knit together the concepts on reconciliation.

## ***Gumisiriza's Return***

*Gumisiriza was fifteen years old when he joined the army of Uganda in 1987. He had very little formal education, just five years of primary school. Coming from a poor peasant family, he could see few opportunities for improving his life. He hoped that if he joined the army he would make a lot of money. He wanted to be able to build a better house for his parents and for himself, buy a piece of land, and then marry.*

*Gumisiriza joined the army, and for five years was a bodyguard for one of the high-ranking officers. The army did not bring him the life he had wanted, and he left the army when he was twenty years old. He was disappointed; his expectations for a good life had not been met. He felt he had been treated unfairly, having heard rumours that some young soldiers – from certain groups—had been given opportunity to go back to school, something he wanted but was not offered.*

*Gumisiriza was already at odds with his parents and some village members because he had impregnated a 14-year old girl two years before his leaving the army. The young woman often went to his parents to ask for help. The last time Gumisiriza was at home, he had ordered her not to visit his parents' home again or he would shoot her. He hated himself. People did not seem to mean much anymore. They did not bring him any happiness; they only added misery.*

*Gumisiriza fled from the army with his gun. He said the gun was “his father and his job.” As long as he had it, he was secure. He used it to*

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rob people, convincing himself he was revenging the state and civil society that had let him down.

After living a terrorist life for three years, Gumisiriza said that one day he heard that one of his brothers had died and the burial had already taken place. His family had no way to notify him of the death. He was very depressed and felt very alienated. "I no longer belonged to my own family. I was sure my family loved me, although my father was not friendly. My brothers missed me and the last time I was home, we spent a whole night talking. I also heard that my grandfather was still alive, and if I went to see him before going to my parents' home, he would help me gain favour with my father. I had not made much money through robberies and I used the little money I got for food, drinking and smoking.

"I started my journey back home. I stayed at a friend's house five kilometres from home. He told me army men had searched my home for the gun. I decided to turn the gun in the following day, even though I risked being arrested by doing so. I was tired of the gun. It had become a burden. It had not given me the glamour I expected. I was not arrested because I returned the gun through another army officer.

"I felt free and eager to go back home. I went to my grandfather who was very happy to see me. He asked my cousins to cook some good food for me. It was millet and fish, my favourite dish. I felt human again. My cousin reported my arrival to my mother later in the evening. She

came running to my grandfather's home, embraced me and started crying, telling me how my brother had died. She could not hide her happiness that I had come home.

"I have decided not to join a terrorist group or rebel fighters because I have already suffered a lot. Terrorism or rebellion cannot save me. My parents have land and I want to try to develop that. I brought my wife to our home as my mother asked me to do. Life is not easy, but it is better to be forgiven and live with your own people than with people who only use you."

**Family names are like flowers. They blossom in clusters.**

**—Nigeria**

### **Questions to Consider**

1. The gun seemed to satisfy certain needs that Gumisiriza had. Could you identify some of them?
2. Identify the various reactions of the people towards Gumisiriza. Divide into those groups and outline what your concerns are, and what you would like to see happen.
3. Let one person act as Gumisiriza. Have other people ask him what he wants what his concerns are as a human being, and what he would like the community to do.
4. What are Gumisiriza's responsibilities toward the people he terrorised and robbed? Toward his family? His community?

## **Ogwedhi Sigawa**

*The market village of Ogwedhi is located in southwestern Kenya just north of the Tanzanian border. The village is a regional trading centre. The area surrounding it is home to three ethnic groups: the Maasai, the Luo, and the Kuria. Cattle have traditionally played an important role in the lives of all these people. Cattle ownership is a way of life and a sign of wealth. Cattle ownership determines social and economic status.*

*Cattle have been a primary source of conflict between and within these ethnic groups. Young men prove their manhood, increase their credibility in society, and gain access to brides by stealing cattle. Conflict is not limited to cattle theft; limited grazing land sparks conflict also.*

*Clashes over cattle and grazing land have far ranging and deeply felt effects: families can be devastated, their means of survival taken away from them, their way of life destroyed. With all that is at stake, relations within and between tribes can at times be quite tense. One such time occurred in Ogwedhi village in 1979, between the Luo and the Maasai.*

*A local resident described the incident. "A group of Maasai women*

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were under a tree selling their milk. Suddenly a lizard fell from the tree amongst the women, who started screaming. The men at the cattle trading area across the road heard the screams and started fighting with clubs and sword, leaving a lot of people injured and dead.” This “Lizard Clash” was a startling reminder to local residents that ethnic tensions had reached dangerously high levels.

Soon after the incident occurred, Luo and Maasai elders expressed their desire to resolve their conflicts peacefully. They approached the Kenya Mennonite Church (popularly known as the ‘Peace Church’) for assistance. These discussions resulted in the formation of the Ogwedhi-Sigawa Community Development Project (OSCDP). Ogwedhi means ‘blessing’ in the Luo language and Sigawa is the Maasai word for ‘peace’.

The OSCDP started in 1979 on land donated by the Luo and Maasai communities. All parties involved agreed that community development was a necessary part of peace and reconciliation. Development and peace building, they said, cannot be conducted in isolation, but are inter-linked. One local resident said, “Coexistence between Luo and Maasai is essential for development to take place in our area, and development won’t take place if there is chaos.” Though solving human conflict was the main objective, improvement of living standards became the common denominator for a community initiative. The joint development work set the stage for peace and reconciliation initiatives to take place among the various tribes.

In early 1990, elders from the Maasai, Luo, and Kuria communities came together to work for peace and reconciliation. Tensions in the community were quite high, and many felt insecure moving around the area. Cattle theft continued unabated. Tracing stolen cattle took much time, leaving less time for development and community improvement.

A Luo elder and an Uasin Gishu Maasai elder decided to bring elders from the Luo, the Maasai, and the Kuria tribes together for a series of

**War is not milk.**

**—Kenya**



meetings. The first meeting of peace-elders was attended by two Luo, two Uasin Gishu Maasai, two Siria Maasai, and two Kuria elders. The elders discussed their immediate concerns about access to land and cattle-theft.

The elders decided that ending cattle theft was the most important issue. In their opinion, solving the cattle theft problem was the first step to preventing conflict, and a necessary condition for peace and security.

As the meetings continued, the participation of elders rapidly expanded in numbers and diversified in terms of representing more and different clans. The Kuria, who experienced a high amount of inter-clan conflict related to stock theft, expressed the wish to have their four clans represented

equally by two elders each. The peace-meetings expanded over the years to a forum of 160 elders, meeting at five different places. The elders met about once a month.

Elders attended meet-

ings in their local district and in neighbouring areas to gain a broader understanding of the process as a whole.

One elder, initially a Siria clan representative, became the facilitator of the meetings. This elder speaks seven different local languages and had credibility with the various groups, placing him in a very good position to establish a network of relationships, and to assist the contending parties in finding solutions to conflicts.

The elders developed a set of guidelines concerning dealing with stock theft. The consensus was that solving conflicts is the shared responsibility of all community members and that incidences of force will not contribute to a sustainable solution. The code applied internal pressure within the community, by making each community responsible for preventing cattle theft by their own members, and dealing firmly with the perpetrators when cattle theft did occur.

Local government administration is generally sympathetic to the code

***The river swells with the contribution of small streams.***

***—Gabon***

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*and willing to implement it. In most locations, tracing stolen cattle has become a joint activity between the community and local administration. In some locations, trying cattle thieves is done entirely by elders.*

*Various points in the code are geared toward building relationships between rival parties; for example, the payment of a fine by cattle thieves is used for community development activities. Dealing with thieves, according to the code of conduct, is based on the traditional judiciary system.*

*In addition to addressing the primary problem of cattle theft, tribal elders also put their efforts towards lessening conflict through conflict prevention and problem solving. For example, a peace choir of children from the three tribes, Luo, Kuria, and Maasai, was formed. The choir has composed peace-promoting songs, which have helped foster peace and unity among their tribes. The choir participated in the annual national music festival competitions in Kenya and once placed third nationally.*

*Avoiding conflict before it occurs is an important avenue to peace. During the period that led up to Kenya's first multi-party elections in 1992, a number of community members in Ogwedhi became concerned over the possible outbreak of violence on polling day. They cited strong differences in political views and party memberships as possible sources of conflict and political intimidation. Luo and Maasai elders of the "Market Peace Committee" developed behavioural guidelines for voters, discussed this with the community, and monitored the elections themselves. Because of their efforts, the elections in Ogwedhi were a peaceful event.*

***Cross the river in a crowd  
and the crocodile won't eat  
you.***

***—Madagascar***

*When conflict cannot be prevented, it must be acted upon and resolved. This approach is reactive – responding to conflicts that already exist through problem solving. When the Luo headmaster of Ogwedhi-Sigawa primary school was to be transferred to another school, the Maasai elders protested to the Ministry of Education, result-*

*ing in the headmaster's stay. The transfer of an Ogwedhi police officer, who had been in the village for a long time and had credibility with the community, was stopped after the peace-elders drafted a plea signed by twelve elders to maintain this officer in Ogwedhi.*

*On a regular basis, elders invite district commissioners, development officers and security personnel from the local police force for meetings to exchange ideas and obtain recognition and acknowledgement of the process initiated and led by the elders.*

### **Questions to Consider**

1. What other activities would you recommend to strengthen the peacebuilding work narrated here?
2. What potential challenges and dangers does the peacebuilder face in such a process?
3. What alternatives exist in terms of providing sources of livelihood for both pastoralists and agriculturist communities?
4. What changes are likely to take place in the lifestyles of rural communities like Ogwedhi?

## **Reflecting on the Concepts**

In any given society, some people are viewed as outcasts, people the society imagines it can do without. Urbanisation in Africa has produced many more of these “undesirables.” In traditional Africa, most outcasts were adults. Now with the many violent conflicts all over Africa, we have children who are outcasts. The sight of children spilling blood has shocked African communities. Children, the future of their community, are themselves engaging in killing. Horrendous as this is, it is a challenge we must face.

What do we do with the Gumisirizas of this world? Should we simply get rid of them? Does killing those who have transgressed point the way to more stable, peaceful societies?

Traditional Africa had cases of people taking the lives of others or doing other horrendous acts. How did our ancestors respond to these challenges? In many cases, people were

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banished from the land, sent away to live in the forests or on the mountains for many years. Often, such people could return after their punishment ended. This is what happened to Okonkwo, a character in Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, who accidentally murdered a relative. Writing a few years after Kenya's independence, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in *A Grain of Wheat*, keeps reminding us not to assume a holier-than-thou attitude. He makes a loud call for understanding reconciliation at a painful time in Africa's history. Yes, people need to take responsibility, but we also need to provide space for people to take that responsibility which they fear most!

Any conflict seems to cause a situation of imbalance. In traditional Africa, rituals were designed to return the equilibrium. The spilling of blood was a serious offence for it involved the direct interference with the revered forces of life. Even the spilling of blood in a "just war" had to be redressed. Warriors returning from battle, either victorious or vanquished, had to undergo a ritual of purification to be re-accepted into the community.

There was also the question of shaming people as a form of punishment. Many authors have identified two types of shaming. There is stigmatising shame and re-integrative shame. The former, like a prison sentence, labels you almost forever. It does not give you the chance to make up, take responsibility, and be accepted back into the community. The second is the kind of shaming that allows "making up" and overcoming the shame and the act. We can see examples of this in our families. If a child is told that he is "stupid" or "bad," he has been given labels that define him; he cannot escape that shame. On the other hand, if a child is told that a specific act that she has done is "stupid" or "bad," the child may be shamed, but she has the opportunity to change that behaviour and move on.

All over Africa we are experiencing situations in which people we know very well have unleashed acts of terror.

Some of them, even children, have powerful weapons of destruction. With

rapid urbanisation, we do not seem to know how to respond to these challenges.

Sociologists would say that such events increase the social distance, so that we no longer know people by name or even greet each other! When that happens we create fertile grounds for violent conflict.

What can we do that allows these people and the community to experience justice and peace. What modern rituals must they undergo in order for the offenders and community to be ready to meet again? The Ugandan Luos define reconciliation as "dwoko wat" which translates as "returning relationship." How can this be achieved when many traditional norms have almost broken down?

***If you watch your pot,  
your food will not burn.***

***—Niger***

Perhaps Gumisiriza's grandfather brings to mind the Biblical story of the prodigal son. Some amongst us are able to accept all, even those who have erred. It is not easy. How do we accept in a manner that takes care of the needs of both the offender and the community? When we take away the gun from the Gumisirizas of this world, what needs do we create? Do we have alternatives? We might not like the way he does it but Gumisiriza is crying out that he needs us.

We also need to ask ourselves about the wider community. Gumisiriza's family has accepted him back, but the story does not tell us about what happened with the rest of his community. Gumisiriza was harmed, but he also caused great harm. What responsibility does he have towards the people that he harmed? Does his family need to accept this responsibility also? What responsibilities does the community have to re-accept this son of their village? The questions are difficult, but very real in many places we know well.

The story of Ogwedhi Sigawa poses similar challenges. John Paul Lederach compares the building of peaceful societies with the building of a house. He notes that the process involves many people, those who dream about it, those who plan it, those who actually build it, and those who live in the completed house.

***True power comes through  
cooperation and silence.***

***—Ghana***

The challenge of peacebuilding is also to ensure that whatever we do is linked with other peace initiatives. The house of peace must have a good foundation and there must be strong

pillars to sustain it while it is being built. After the house is complete, people need to care for it, keep watch, and renovate occasionally.

A stable house of peace must be deeply rooted in traditions and culture and we must have people who keep the dream. When responding to conflict we must have the capacity to respond to the immediate, guided by our dream of a peaceful society. In some societies, there is a strong belief that whatever decision we take affects seven generations to come. To avoid being reactionary, we must keep the dream alive. In summary, let us consider some concepts and definitions revolving around reconciliation.

*Reconciliation* may be viewed as...

- A process of restoring or healing broken relationships.
- The means by which we re-walk life's highways with our former enemies.
- The most important tool available to human beings by which we can rebuild broken societies.

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- A journey. It is either the moving away from or moving towards a relationship – physically, psychologically, and spiritually. The call of reconciliation is a call for a pilgrimage.
- Giving and receiving mercy.

Mercy may be viewed as...

- A process by which one releases another from a burden of wrong.
- Compassion for others.
- The act of re-opening the possibility of re-establishing a relationship with the enemy.
- A divine act which defies logical or rational concepts of cost and effect.

Mercy is an act of love that makes us look beyond the evil meted out against us to reach for the fundamental ideals with which all humanity, even our enemy is endowed. The process of mercy involves repentance and forgiveness.

Repentance is a...

- Realisation of our wrongdoing.
- Rediscovery of the victim's and one's own humanity.
- Seeking and pursuing a meeting with the victim.
- Confession of wrong.
- Willingness to make restitution.
- Change of attitude.

***The cow is as good as the  
pasture in which it grazes.***

***—Ethiopia***

Forgiveness is...

- A recognition of wrong.
- A realisation of one's right to alternative responses. "Forgiveness begins when the injured person holds the right to get even in her hands as if she is holding water, spreads her fingers and lets it drop, never to be held again." (Dr. Lewis B. Swedes).
- A rediscovering of the perpetrator's humanity.
- Change of attitude.

Both repentance and forgiveness lead to re-establishing relationships. We begin to re-socialise—to learn new or improved social skills to guarantee health in our reborn relationships. Through interaction with other people, we develop ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that are essential for effective participation within society. Violent conflicts break down the social, political, and economic ingredients that make for productive and civilised

human beings. The rebuilding of relationships, along with re-establishing laws, traditions, and basic infrastructures like schools, will help us regain our social skills.

*The Bassa ethnic group in Liberia has a ceremony for reconciliation, which includes the values we have discussed. During a ceremony of reconciliation, the perpetrator ties a string of palm leaves on his neck, kneels before his victim, and hands the end of the string to the victim. Then the perpetrator will say to the victim, "I have wronged you and this community in a shameful way. You deserve to do whatever you wish with me. I am giving you one end of the rope tied on my neck. You can choose to drag me to death or release me of the burden of guilt and shame." After this statement, the place will be silent, waiting for the answer of the victim. If the answer is to seek revenge, the victim will refuse to accept the string or remove it from the neck of the perpetrator. When the ceremony fails in this way, both the victim and the perpetrator become a disgrace to the community. However, the elders do not give up. They continue with the dialogue and the ceremony is postponed for another date. When the victim accepts the apology he will accept the string, remove it from the neck of the perpetrator, and help him to stand up on his feet. The entire community shouts with joy when the ceremony ends this way. Immediately, celebrations begin and an animal is killed, cooked, and eaten by all in the community.*

This process emphasises several principles of reconciliation:

- Only victims of violation can forgive. No third party can give absolution. The state may grant political amnesty for the violation of laws but it cannot forgive.
- Forgiveness is personal as well as communal. In many African communities, the violation and the forgiveness are family matters—the violation is a violation of the family as well as the individual, and forgiveness, restitution, and reconciliation are also communal.
- Genuine reconciliation is only possible when the victim feels s/he has the right to forgive or not to forgive, and when s/he can express the pain suffered.
- Reconciliation begins with genuine contrition and repentance. The perpetrator must demonstrate the attitude of humility and regret. This repentance and regret involve the family and community also, as well as the specific perpetrator.
- Reconciliation is a community concern. It restores balance in the community. In Africa, an unreconciled community brings a curse upon itself. Every effort is made to appease

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the gods through reconciliation with one another. The lack of restitution, forgiveness, and reconciliation holds the entire community hostage. Because of this, the entire community works to make sure the process moves toward reconciliation and restored wholeness.

- Restitution (by giving livestock, intermarrying, or exchanging children) is an essential stage in reconciliation.
- Taking responsibility is a principle in reconciliation here in Africa. To facilitate this process, families or clans announce their liability to the victimised community if one of their members commits a crime. Before the community publicly announces this, the individual is made to confess to his community and to seek their forgiveness before they vouch for him.

***Forgiveness means abandoning your right to pay back that perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim.***

***—Archbishop Desmond Tutu***

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# 8

## Thoughts for the Peacebuilder

As was stated in the preface, this book is not a “how-to” manual for peacebuilding. It is not meant to provide specific skills and methodologies. Instead, it is meant to raise questions and stimulate thinking about issues important in Africa today. The preceding chapters have included peacebuilding experiences, questions to consider, and thoughts about the issues raised by the stories. This final section focuses on ideas that you as a peacebuilder may find useful. Remember that these are just suggestions, and that culture, circumstances, your own critical thinking, and your heart are more important than any “technique” or “method” of peacebuilding.

### **Recognise that you are a Peacebuilder!**

Peacebuilding is work that each of us can do, wherever we find ourselves. Peacebuilders work at all levels in our world, from tiny villages to the United Nations. All of this work—wherever it occurs—is necessary to bring about an end to violence and injustice, and to create peaceful and just communities for our families, neighbours, and for those we consider to be our enemies.

Most of us—including the authors—will never be famous. We’ll not work at the UN, or appear on television, or be written about in history books. Neither will the people whose stories appear in this book. Think of some of the people whose stories have been told here: the women in Liberia, the Luo, Maasai and Kuria elders in Kenya, Gumisiriza’s grandfather, the Rapid Response Team in Wajir. These people are just like most of us reading this book – concerned about the situation in our homes, communities, and countries, and willing to work toward ending violence and injustice, in small and large ways.

While some aspects of peacebuilding can be highly technical and require special training and skills, peacebuilding is not simply a task for “experts.” We authors have come to believe that much more important than learning skills is developing the heart for peacebuilding. Skills can be taught, usually fairly easily. The commitment and passion for working for peace and against violence—the “heart” of peacebuilding—is something that we have found in many people in all communities, including those whose stories have been

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included here. Many of these people have had little or no training in peacebuilding skills. Many do not use the language of peacebuilding, and some would be surprised to be called peacebuilders. However, all of them share the hope that peace is possible, and the commitment to do what they can to make that hope become reality.

In the same way, if you want to have a more peaceful and just community and society, and if you are willing to work to make this happen, however it is possible for you, then you are a peacebuilder. While there are things you can learn to enhance your work, you already have the major tools you need—the heart and the will to make peace.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Think about the peacebuilders described in this book. Which ones would you like to meet? What would you like to discuss with them?
2. Who are the people in your own life whose stories could be included in this book? Write up their stories and share them with others.
3. How are you a peacebuilder? Could your story be included in this book?
4. If another book like this were written ten years from now with your biography included, what would you like it to say about your life as a peacebuilder?

## **Listen to the Voices**

In any conflict, many voices compete for attention. When people do not feel that others are listening to them, or understand their concerns, fears, and needs, the conflict can escalate quickly. Think of how many different concerns, needs, and ideas were expressed in some of the conflicts described in this book. For example, in the story of Yakubu and his family, Yakubu, each of his wives, his wives' families, his children, the priest, the villagers, and the marriage tribunal, voiced their various viewpoints. If you heard the voices of only one or two of these people, you would not have the full story, and would not be able to intervene successfully in the conflict.

One of the most important skills of a peacebuilder is listening carefully to what people involved in a conflict are saying. Listen carefully to people representing different viewpoints. When you listen to a person, you're trying to learn and understand their opinions. Think about the mediation done by the Rapid Response Team in Wajir. They heard conflicting opinions from various people, but did not at first give their own opinion. Instead,

they listened to what the various people had to say, urged that the process be honest and fair, and then went with both sets of people to find out what the situation was. They did not decide based on hearing just one set of voices.

The ways of hearing the voices varies according to culture, situation, and the conflict itself. The District Commissioner in the witchcraft story, the Liberian women, and the Amani Peoples Theatre in the school conflict all heard the voices of the people they were trying to help. They used very different methods, each suitable for the situation. It's up to you the peacebuilder to clearly and creatively hear the voices of conflict in a way that fits the place you find yourself.

In conflicts, some voices are loud and clearly heard. These are often the voices of the people who have power of one sort or another. Other voices—those of the weak and powerless—are often ignored or not even heard. It's important for peacebuilders to seek out the views of “the quiet ones,” in order to understand more fully the conflict and ways to resolve it. In South Africa, the voices of the school children were ignored—drowned out by the voices of the politicians and other powerful people. Tragically, it was only by their deaths that others paid attention to the voices of these courageous children.

***One must talk little and listen much.***

***—Mauritania***

If you are involved in the conflict yourself, it is even more important that you find a way – and the courage—to listen and understand what people on other sides of the conflict are saying.

Another factor to which we must pay attention are our own personal values

as peacebuilders. We are not neutral beings. We have our own “red flags,” values, or stories that may stop us from thinking, or force us into taking sides. We must pay attention to those red flags, acknowledge and affirm them, and work towards clearing them out of the way. All peacebuilders come to the field with moral values; sometimes they find it difficult to listen to those they see as evil and immoral. On meeting these people we are tempted to wave our red flags, to stop listening, to make up our minds. A true peacebuilder is one who transcends these barriers. It is not easy. It requires much work to see people we consider evil as human beings and not the mere embodiment of their actions.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Think of a time when you thought you understood a situation, but found out later that you didn't understand it at all. What changes could you have made to improve your understanding?
2. Think of a conflict that's going on now. How would you go about hearing the voices of the people involved in the conflict? What methods would you use?
3. In groups of two, practice listening to each other, as you share your opinions on a controversial topic. Try to learn as much as you can about the other's viewpoints.
4. Who is someone you disagree with? Can you clearly state what this person feels/thinks about the issue? How could you learn more clearly his/her position?

### **Analyse the conflict—what's really going on**

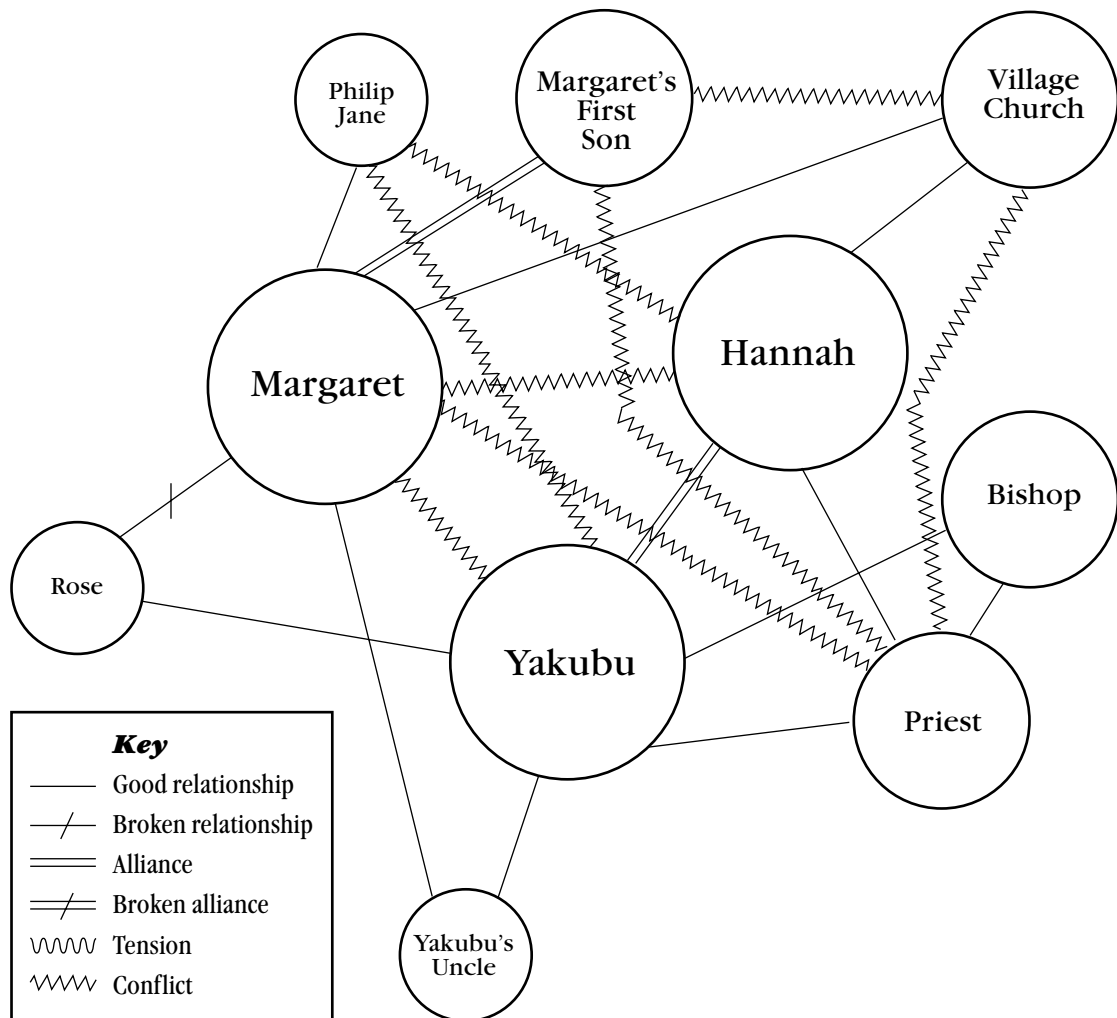
After you have listened to people talk about the conflict, you can begin to look at the conflict itself and work on a good understanding of the causes, people, and issues involved. Taking time to understand the conflict before jumping into action is very important. In the witchcraft story, many people jumped into the dispute before they knew what was really happening. This made the problem get much bigger very quickly. In the Ogwedhi Sigawa story, people ended up dying because people interpreted the response to a lizard falling from a tree as a signal to fight.

It is helpful to work with a group of other people to discuss the history of the conflict, its causes, the people involved, and so on. If you can work together with people from all sides of the conflict, that is ideal, but even if you must work alone, you can work to come to a better understanding of the often confusing conflict. The Luo, Maasai, and Kuria elders in western Kenya met together for many months working on their understandings of the conflict, what was causing the problems, and what they could do about it.

When you are involved in the conflict, it often feels very different from any other conflicts. And, in many ways, each conflict is unique. However, many similarities exist among conflicts around the world, and tools have been developed that can help you understand the conflict you're working with.

First, it may be helpful to get a picture of the conflict. Who's involved? How do they inter-

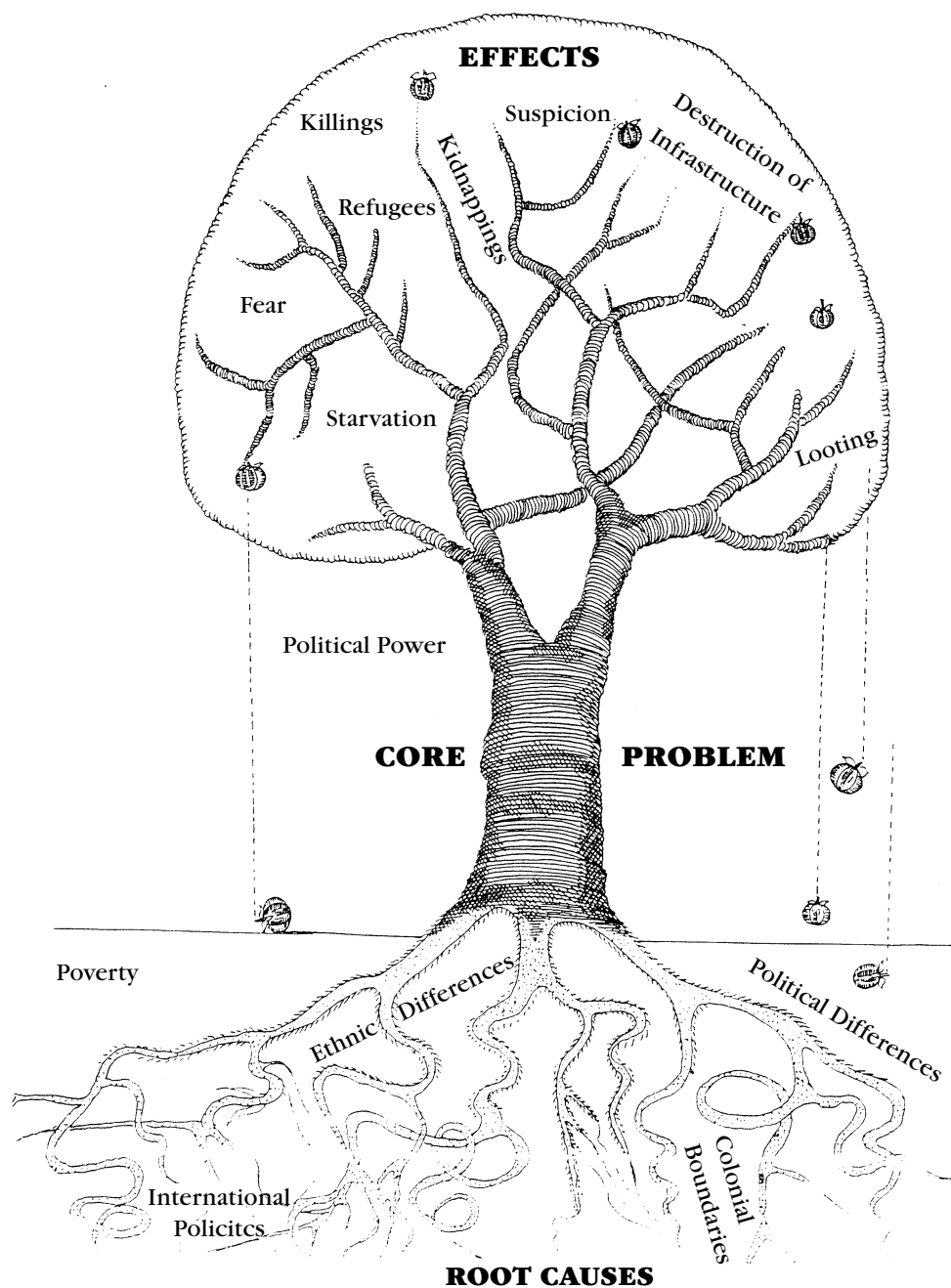
act with each other? Where is the conflict centred? What people or groups have strong positive relationships with each other? These relationships are often easier to see pictorially than in words. For example, below is a mapping of the relationships in the conflict of Yakubu, Hannah, and Margaret. While this mapping is of an interpersonal, community-based conflict, the same kind of map can be developed for larger, national, or even international conflicts.



Because the story of Yakubu related in this book does not give all the details, the map is incomplete. If you were really working in this situation, you'd want to find out more about some of the relationships. For example, what are the feelings between Hannah's and Margaret's children? Do the relatives of Yakubu, Margaret, and Hannah have interactions outside of this situation? What other conflicts exist in the village?

This type of mapping exercise gives a quick surface look at what's happening in a conflict. However, there are usually aspects of a conflict that are much more hidden, like the roots of a tree. In order to transform conflicts, it's necessary to deal with the roots of the

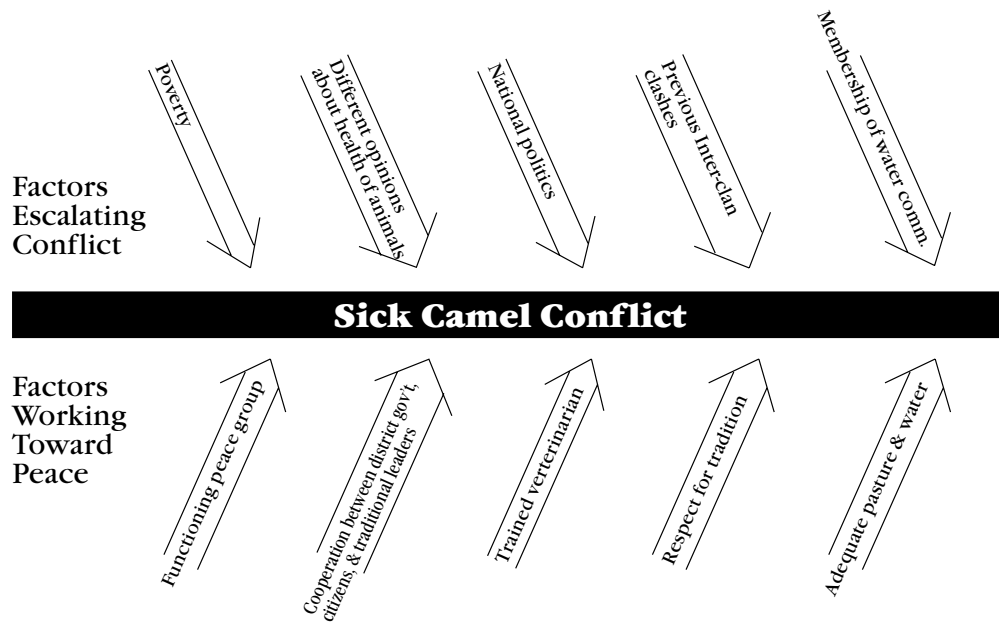
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problems, as well as the effects. Take a look at the tree pictured below. It looks at some of the issues in the Liberian war. When the Liberian women led the workshop with the faction leaders, they had to keep all of these things in mind. Again, as in the diagram of Yakubu’s conflict, this is a very simplified analysis. When you’re actually working on a conflict, your “tree” may be much more complex.

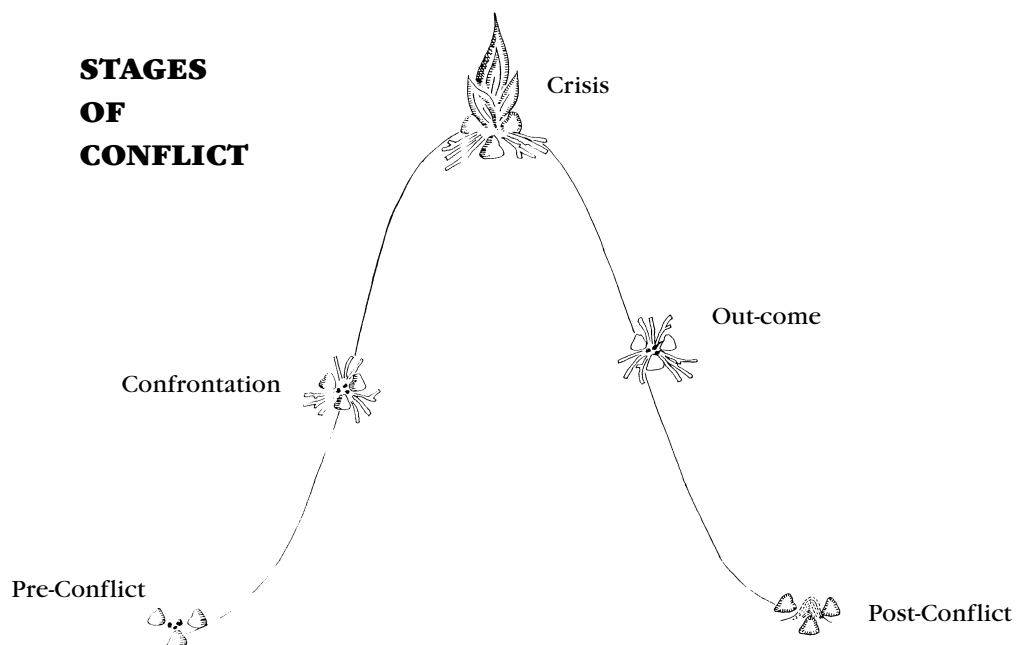
The next step that may be helpful is a picture that shows the things that are influencing the conflict—either forces that support the continuation/escalation of the conflict, or that

support reconciliation and transformation of the conflict. Below is one way to picture this, using the sick camel conflict as an example.



The conflict itself is the straight line in the middle. The arrows coming from the top are forces that contribute to escalating the conflict. The arrows coming from the bottom are forces contributing to solving the conflict. The thickness of the arrows corresponds to the importance of the influence.

Next, look at the stage of your conflict. This diagram may help you understand where in the conflict cycle your conflict falls at this time. Is your conflict in the conflict prevention stage, where fuel for the conflict is being gathered, but the fire has not yet been lit? Is it in



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the active conflict stage, where the fires are raging out of control? Is it in the post-conflict stage, where the fires are out, or at least going out, but the coals are still alive, and could burst into flame with just a bit of additional fuel? Is the fire of conflict extinguished, but you want to assure that the fields will have time to grow green again?

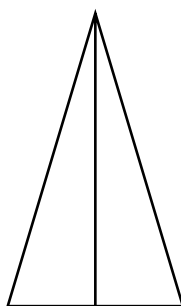
Each of these stages of a conflict requires different actions and different plans for working with. Some conflicts may have aspects of many—or even all—of these stages at the same time. Spend some time thinking about the stage of conflict, and working with the “where” of your specific conflict. Again, copy the diagram on a large sheet of paper and place the conflict along the line. If the conflict is close to the end, you might want to write dates, events, and groups associated with earlier stages. This again will help you to “see” the conflict clearly.

You’ve now looked at the “what” and the “where” of your conflict. Next, spend some time looking at the “who” of the conflict and of its resolution. Here’s one more diagram to help with this part of the analysis:

### **TYPES OF ACTORS**

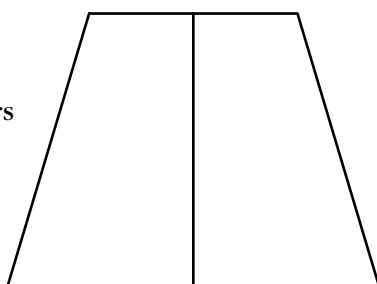
### **APPROACHES TO BUILDING PEACE**

Level 1: Top Leadership



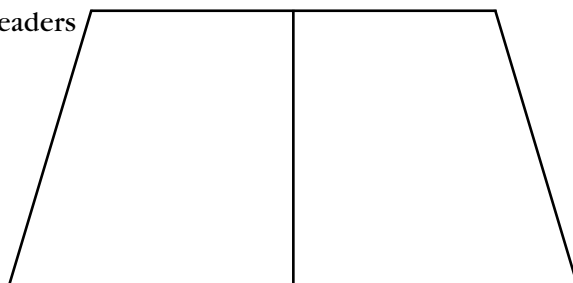
- Focus on high-level negotiations

Level 2: Middle Range Leaders



- Connection between levels
- Varieties of activities

Level 3: Grassroots Leaders



- Local peace work
- Many possibilities

– Adapted from John Paul Lederach, 1995



In any conflict, there are many different parts of the society involved. This pyramid shows one way of thinking about the different ways that different groups are involved. At the very top are the highest-level leaders who are involved in any conflict. In a countrywide conflict, these would include the head-of-state, the top military leaders, the leaders of rebel groups, international leaders, the very top religious leaders, etc. If the conflict were one within a community, the top level of the pyramid would include people with the highest level of power and decision-making within that community. It might include the village headman, the elder's council, the local church leaders, or whoever belongs to the small group that makes the top decisions.

On the bottom level are the everyday citizens, the people who often bear the weight of the conflict. They are often the poor, the working people, the ones without much ability to make decisions within the community. Even though they are often overlooked, their actions can either lead to continued conflict, or can work toward a peaceful solution.

Between the top leaders and the grassroots are mid-level leaders. They are people who do not have the visibility or power of the people at the very top, but they are respected leaders and are known by the people at the bottom. Leaders of NGOs, pastors and other

***Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.***

***—Margaret Mead***

local religious leaders, school teachers, women's leaders, and other people like this are often in this middle group. These people are often very important peacebuilders, since they can connect the people at the bottom with the people at the top. Often top leaders are unaware of what's happening in local communities, and middle-range leaders can provide valuable communication and linking services in peacebuilding.

You'll see that the pyramid is also split from top to bottom. This represents the opposing sides. Each side has people at all these levels.

Draw the pyramid on a large sheet of paper. On this paper, list specific groups and people (by name if possible), that fit these categories in your conflict. List as many as you can, on both sides of the conflict. List people on each level, and on each side whom you think might be helpful in peacebuilding.

When you've done this, you'll have a better understanding of who can help in bringing the conflict to a positive end.

## ***When You Are the Peacebuilder***

There are many other ways to analyse conflicts, but these three exercises may help you gain a better understanding of what is happening in your community. Some of these may not work well with your particular conflict. In that case, use your own knowledge and wisdom to come to an understanding of the conflict—these diagrams and exercises are tools only, not methods that must be followed.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. “Analytical tools like these are just crutches which separate you from real life.” Do you agree or disagree?
2. Choose one of the stories in this book. Try to analyse it using the above tools. Does the tools help your understanding of the conflict? Why or why not?
3. Now, choose a current conflict you know well. In small groups, work with the tools described above to analyse this conflict. Is using these tools helpful?

## **Think and act creatively—What are all the possibilities?**

You’ve recognised that you are indeed a peacebuilder, you’ve heard the stories of people involved in the conflict, and you’ve spent some time thinking about the conflict and trying to understand it more clearly. Now what?

We wish we could give you the “ten easy steps” to transforming a conflict and building peace! Unfortunately, peace is not that simple! You need to be creative, innovative, and courageous in your peacebuilding work. We can give you a few things to think about, again, drawn from the examples in this book.

First, think very broadly. In the Ogwedhi Sigawa story, as the elders looked at one specific conflict—cattle theft—they realised that they needed to look at development issues and relationship issues as well as the specific conflict. A children’s peace choir may seem far removed from solving the problem of cattle theft, but it served well to strengthen relationships among the groups, which in turn made the continued work on the specific problem easier.

Try not to give up too easily by saying, “this will never work.” Instead, try to be positive about the things that you can do. Think of the Liberian women, confronted with the task of holding a workshop for the faction leaders who were destroying their country. They

took a seemingly hopeless situation and, at least for a few days, established dialogue and understanding between the various factions. It's hard to tell what effects that one workshop had on later events in Liberia.

Take small steps, and keep walking. If your efforts don't seem to be effective, examine them again, and keep trying. Think of the Northern Sudanese mediation. The meeting described in the story was the fourth in a series of meetings to try to resolve the conflict. When the differences remained, the parties agreed to meet yet again. Perseverance – keeping on with the work in the face of obstacles – is extremely important for peacebuilders.

Step outside of what's comfortable for you. In many of the stories related in this book, people did things that were outside of their roles, or put them in uncomfortable positions. For the Ugandan Muslim women to stage a public demonstration in Kampala against the jailing of their husbands was an unexpected and probably very uncomfortable act for them. The people of Wajir all stepped out of their “assigned roles” and worked together – men, women, civil society, and government administrators, to solve a potentially serious conflict. And the children of Soweto abandoned their position of being protected by their families to that of protectors—and in the process, some even died.

Trust your heart. Peacebuilding is more about relationships and integrity than about techniques. Your instincts will often tell you which direction to take. The facilitators of the Amani Peoples Theatre allowed the headmistress to play herself, even though that was contrary to their past experiences. Gumisiriza's grandfather saw Gumisiriza's hurts and

needs in spite of his crimes, and welcomed him back to the human family.

***You do not beat a drum  
with one finger.***

*—Kenya*

**Bring others into the process.**

Peacebuilding is not often a job for individuals working alone. In most of the stories in this group, people worked together to resolve conflicts and promote peace and justice.

Bringing others into the work of peacebuilding is very important. Different groups need to be represented, even those that are responsible for the problems.

The District Commissioner in Nigeria seemed very aware of this principle. When he worked with the problem of the women accused of witchcraft, he involved all the people affected by the conflict. First he brought in the elders, then Mrs. Dauda and Mrs. Buba, their families, and the pastors and parishioners of the churches involved. Finally, he included the entire village in the process of understanding and reconciliation. He realised that peace is a community affair.

## ***When You Are the Peacebuilder***

Many times, peacebuilders need to form links with other people and groups who they wouldn't normally work with. The story of the sick camels in Wajir is a good illustration of this. In that story, traditional leaders, women, educated young people, and government administrators formed a team that worked together to resolve the conflict. Think how hard it would have been for any one part of that team to resolve the conflict on their own. The traditional leaders may not have been able to resolve the basic question "Were the camels sick?" That took the expertise of the educated young woman veterinarian. The woman, however, was respected at least in part because she came with the elders. The government officials, of different ethnicity and religion, could probably not have resolved the conflict on their own without resorting to a violent confrontation, but in the company of respected local people could bring in the legitimacy of the national government. Together these people were able to successfully do what none could have done on their own.

***When the bee comes to  
your house, let her have  
beer. You may want to visit  
the bee's house one day.***

***—Congo***

Who needs to be included in working on a conflict? Obviously, that will vary depending on the nature of the conflict, but ideally would include all the groups that are involved. If an individual or group is left out, it may be more difficult to come to a lasting solution. Think of the story of Yakubu, and all the many groups of people that felt they had an interest in the solution of the conflict. Several times new individuals or groups came forward asking that their opinions be included. Think also of the mediation over the murder of the young Sudanese man. The meetings to deal with that problem included community and religious leaders, political leaders, both the families, and clan representatives. The large number of groups and interests probably made the discussion difficult, but leaving any of those groups out would make any agreement reached more difficult to maintain.

Especially in larger scale conflicts, groups which often need to be included are: traditional leaders, government representatives, youth, women, school children, religious leaders, other local leaders (school teachers, doctors, etc.), business people, traditional people, the educated elite, the combatants themselves.

## **Think long-term as well as short-term**

*A woman had a child who was very hungry and crying for food. The woman took the last money she had and went to the market. She bought bread to take home to feed her child that night.*

*However, the mother was wise, and she didn't use all of her money for bread. She took some of it and bought beans for planting. She went home, prepared her farm, and planted the beans. She knew that these plants would not ease her child's hunger today, but she also knew that with proper care, the bean seeds would start producing in a few weeks, and the beans she harvested would feed her child for many months.*

*This mother was indeed wise, and she saved enough of her money to buy a mango. She fed the flesh to her child, and carefully planted the seed. Over the months, she tended the seed carefully, although she knew that her child would be grown before the tree produced its first mango. However, she knew that once the mango tree grew to maturity, she would feed her not only her own grandchildren but also all the children of the entire village with the fruit from that mango tree.*

*Then, this very wise mother took her very last coin, and visited the tree nursery, where she purchased a very small mahogany seedling. She took the seedling home, and carefully planted it in a corner of her homestead. She faithfully watered that small seedling, and protected it from goats and other possible harm, and she taught her child to do the same. She knew that she would tend this mahogany tree throughout her entire lifetime, and her child would do the same, without reaping any benefit from it. But she also knew that by the time her great-grandchildren were born, they would play under the shade of that mahogany tree, and her great-great grandchildren would be able to harvest that tree, and build a strong and sturdy house that would last for many more generations.*

We as peacebuilders must follow the example of this wise mother. In any conflict, there are daily crises and emergencies that call out for our attention and work. It is indeed important to take care of these immediate problems. However, it is very easy to get so caught-up in the daily emergencies that we lose sight of the need to work on long-term goals that will ensure that the peace and justice we are working for will endure for our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

## ***When You Are the Peacebuilder***

Indigenous people of North America have a vision of peace that says, “What is happening to us today is a result of decisions that were made seven generations ago, and what we decide today will affect our children seven generations into the future.” Keeping the long-view of our work can help us in the day-to-day decision making that is a part of peacebuilding.

***You must eat an elephant  
one bite at a time.***

***—Ghana***

### **Take time to reflect on your actions.**

Peacebuilding is a dynamic, ever-changing process. What may have seemed like a good idea a week ago may need to be re-thought today because of changing circumstances. It's easy to get caught up in the myriad of details in peacebuilding and

lose sight of what's really happening. Is what you are doing helpful, or may it be producing unintentional consequences which may not be helpful? Without time to reflect, it's easy to get off course.

It may be a good idea to return to your analysis of the conflict to see if it is time to sharpen or alter it because of your new learning. The elders in Ogwedhi Sigawa met monthly for years, talking about their situations, and altering their activities in light of new circumstances and understandings. They combined action with regular times for evaluating these actions and reflecting on future actions.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Take a story of conflict from today's newspaper or radio broadcast. Imagine that you are a person in that situation. What are the possibilities for working for a peaceful resolution of the conflict? If you were to be a peacebuilder in this situation, what would be your first activity?
2. In your peacebuilding, are you buying bread, harvesting beans, or planting trees? Are you aware of both the short- and long-term consequences of your actions?
3. What kind of society do you want your children and grandchildren to inherit? Are your actions moving the society (in very small steps) toward that vision?
4. “Action without reflection risks despair and reflection without action risks irrelevance.” What are your thoughts about this? How do you keep a balance between these two pulls?

## **Train others**

Peacebuilders can do important work by helping others to gain the skills and confidence that they need to do peacebuilding work also. Workshops and training sessions can be a vital part of peacebuilding work. This book is not meant to be a training manual, or to teach you how to conduct workshops. You may be able to find people and organisations in your community that can help you develop these skills. Working with a trainer skilled in peacebuilding can be extremely helpful. Not all workshops are helpful or valuable; some actually have the potential for harming peace work rather than assisting in the work.

A veteran peacebuilder and workshop trainer from Liberia, Marion Subah, offers the following suggestions for people who want to conduct workshops:

1. Be knowledgeable about peacebuilding concepts and have experience in peacebuilding.
2. Be prepared as a trainer, not as a school teacher. Be an animator and/or facilitator. During the training session, remember the words of Mao Zedong, “Present to the people in a challenging form the issues they themselves have raised in a confused form.”
3. Have reference material available.
4. Live peacebuilding concepts yourself.
5. Train with a team—peacebuilding training cannot be a one-person show.
6. Let participants be involved in determining the agenda. This can be done before the workshop or at the beginning session of the workshop.

Some training resources are included in the bibliography at the end of this chapter.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Several examples of training are illustrated in the stories in this book. Think of the issues presented by the training. Are these workshops you would like to have been a part of?
2. “People learn best by being allowed the opportunity to figure out the answer on their own, rather than being told the answer.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
3. What are the qualities of a good peacebuilding trainer?

## **Take care of yourself**

In any conflict, especially a long-running one, people can quickly lose hope, becoming discouraged and cynical. Violence can seem endless, peaceful resolution seems impossible. As was mentioned earlier, peacebuilding is a long-term, often rocky journey. Quick and easy solutions are not often possible. It can be very discouraging to work hard to bring people together, only to realise that the conflict has actually worsened.

Working as a peacebuilder often means dealing with other people's anger, fear, and pain. Peacebuilders can be seen as disloyal to their own family, ethnic group, or community by trying to work with people on various sides of a conflict. Peacebuilding requires energy and great inner strength to continue to work for peaceful solutions in the midst of swirling emotions, tensions, and violent acts. It also is important for each of us to recognise our limits, and to pull back when necessary to preserve our emotional, physical, and spiritual stability.

Peacebuilders, especially those working in situations of great violence or those in which solutions seem impossible, can become traumatised by the events, the myriad of "things to do," and the strong emotions within themselves and others. Recognising symptoms of stress in ourselves and in our fellow peacebuilders is important. Dealing with that stress by taking time out from the conflict, discussing with others, or whatever else is necessary is vital to long-term peacebuilding.

***God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot  
change, courage to  
change the things I can,  
and wisdom to know the  
difference.***

***—Reinhold Niebuhr***

Joseph Campbell, a peacebuilder who has worked in the conflict in Northern Ireland for many years says, "What gives me strength and keeps me going? I need to recognise the limits of my own ability. I need to attend to myself. I want to make a positive contribution to peace in Northern Ireland, but I need to remember I'm only one person. It's important to keep the rhythms of my life in balance. The work for peace is important, but that's not all of life. Life is bigger than work."

In situations like this, one of the most important tasks of the peacebuilder may be keeping hope alive, in yourself and in others—the hope that relationships can be transformed and that a peaceful and just society is possible.



Once again, think of some of the peacebuilders you've met through their stories in this book. How easy it would have been for the people facilitating the discussions between the Sudanese clans to simply walk away. Instead, they kept on, through several long meetings, even though the conflict was still not resolved. And the Liberian women! In the midst of a terribly violent situation, they gave a workshop for the leaders of the violent groups. They maintained the hope that their work was moving their society toward peace and justice, however unseen that might be. And finally, think of the young people of Soweto. Even at the cost of their lives, they acted on the hope that South Africa could be transformed. Who can say how much of the subsequent transformation in South Africa is attributed to their hope in the midst of despair?

***We can do no great things,  
only small things with  
great love.***

***—Mother Teresa***

But how can a peacebuilder keep hope alive? Each of us must find our own path to this. For some, it comes from religious faith. Others may find courage and hope in the company of like-minded peacebuilders. For others, it may be important to find times to be alone and reflect on our lives and activities. For many of us, it's a combination of many activities.

One thing is true for many peacebuilders—it's hard to take the time and attention to renew ourselves, and yet over and over we authors have heard from others (and experienced it in our own lives) the need to take care of ourselves in the middle of working on conflict. Exhausted, cynical, bitter, hopeless people are not often effective peacebuilders!

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Think of someone you know who remains full of hope despite circumstances. What do you think is this person's "secret?"
2. What do you do in your own life to take care of yourself? How do you keep hope alive?
3. What changes do you have to make in your own life to keep hope alive and discouragement at bay?

**Finally, recognise again that you are a peacebuilder!**

Above all, remember that peacebuilding is not a matter of technique or methodology nearly as much as it is a matter of the heart—of the commitment to right relationships between people, and to peaceful and just communities for all of us and our children.

The field of peacebuilding is very broad. The work that each of us do may look very different, depending on our situations, our cultures, our interests and skills. The work of each of us is important and challenging, and not to be separated from the work of other peacebuilders around Africa and around the world.

We hope that you have received encouragement and challenge from the stories in this volume. May your work and life for peace thrive!

**Select Bibliography** (complete citations in Chapter 9)

European Centre for Conflict Prevention: *People Building Peace: 35 Inspiring Stories from Around the World*.

European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation: *Searching for Peace in Africa: an Overview of Conflict Prevention and Management Activities*.

Fisher, Simon: *Working with Conflict: Skills and Strategies for Action*.

Freire, Paulo: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Freire, Paulo: *Pedagogy of the Heart*.

Herr, Robert, and Zimmerman Herr, Judy, eds.: *Transforming Violence: Linking Local and Global Peacemaking*,

Hope, Anne and Timmel, Sally: *Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers*.

Lederach, John Paul: *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*.

Lederach, John Paul: *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*.

Ruth-Heffelbower, Duane: *Conflict & Peacemaking Across Cultures*.

***Peace is costly, but it is  
worth the effort.***

***—Kenya***

# 9

## Resources and Acknowledgements

This final section includes a complete bibliography, a list of helpful websites, and a short list of peacebuilding organisations in Africa. None of these lists are complete. Again, it is for you the peacebuilder to use your creativity to find the resources that you need for your own work in working toward stable, just peace in your community.

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## **Useful Web Sites**

The internet has some very good resources for peacebuilders. Here are just a few.

ACCORD, Durban, South Africa

<http://www.accord.org.za/>

Conflict Research Consortium; University of Colorado, USA

<http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/>

Conflict Transformation Program, Eastern Mennonite University

<http://www.emu.edu/ctp/>

European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation, Utrecht, the Netherlands

<http://www.euconflict.org/>

Forum on Early Warning and Early Response, London, UK

<http://www.fewer.org/>

Initiative on Conflict Resolution & Ethnicity/INCORE, University of Ulster, Northern Ireland

<http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/>

Life & Peace Institute, Uppsala, Sweden

[www.life-peace.org](http://www.life-peace.org)

Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution

<http://trininstitute.org/ojpcr/>

Responding to Conflict, Birmingham, UK

<http://www.respond.org/>

United States Institute of Peace

[www.usip.org/](http://www.usip.org/)

## **Peacebuilding Organisations in Africa**

The number of peacebuilding organisations is growing daily in Africa. Included here are just a few of the organisations and NGOs working with peacebuilding and conflict transformation issues. These organisations may be able to give you information about peacebuilding organisations in your country.

ACCORD

Pvt Bag X018,

Umhlanga Rocks, 4320, South Africa

Tel: 27-31-5023908

Fax: 27-31-5024160

email: [info@accord.org.za](mailto:info@accord.org.za)

Ahfad University for Women

PO Box 167

Omdurman Khartoum, Sudan

Tel: 249-11-553363

Fax: 249-11-553363

email: [Ahfad@sudanet.net](mailto:Ahfad@sudanet.net)

Amani People's Theater

PO Box 13909

Nairobi, Kenya

Tel: 254-2-577-892

Fax: 254-2-577-892

email: [apt@maf.org](mailto:apt@maf.org)

Babiker Badri Scientific Association for Women Studies

ARDA St, PO Box 167

Omdurman Khartoum, Sudan

Tel: 249-11-564401

Fax: 249-11-775846

email:

Catholic Resource Centre

PO Box 264, 10 N Rd

Kaduna, Nigeria

Tel: 234-62-237795

Fax: 234-62-238260/235048

email:

## ***When You Are the Peacebuilder***

Centre for Conflict Resolution  
UCT, Private Bag,  
Rondebosch, 7701, South Africa  
Tel: 27-21-4222512  
Fax: 27-21-4222622  
email: mailbox@ccr.uct.ac.za

Christian Health Association of Liberia/CHAL  
PO Box 10-9056, 7th St.  
Monrovia, Liberia  
Tel: 231-226823/226187  
Fax: 231-226187  
email: chal@afmlink.com

Ecumenical Service for Peace  
PO Box 12214  
Yaounde, Cameroon  
Tel: 237-234039  
Fax: 237-234044  
email: Peace.humanus@camnet.cm

Eduardo Mondlane Foundation  
Rua Francisco Barreto No 229  
Caixa Postal 2640  
Maputo, Mozambique  
Tel: 258-1-305099  
Fax: 258-1-310623  
email: eduardo.mondlane@eduardo-mondlane.org

Nairobi Peace Initiative-Africa  
PO Box 14894  
Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel: 254-2-441444/440098  
Fax: 254-2-440097  
email: npi@africaonline.co.ke

Peace & Development Network  
PO Box 62023  
Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel: 254-2-577557/8  
Fax: 254-2-577557  
email: peacenet@nbnet.co.ke



## ***Resources and Acknowledgements***

Prison Fellowship, Uganda  
PO Box 4307  
Kampala, Uganda  
Tel: 256-41-221661  
Fax: 256-41-342601  
email: comnet@infocom.co.ug

Save Somali Women & Children  
PO Box 38887  
Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel: 254-2-744083  
Fax: 254-2-749050  
email: Shirdon@iconnect.co.ke

Wajir Peace & Development Committee  
PO Box 224  
Wajir, Kenya  
Tel: 254-136-21327  
Fax: 254-136-21161/21563  
email: hanuniye@swiftkenya.com

West Africa Network for Peacebuilding/WANEP  
Ampomah House 3rd Floor  
PO Box CT 4434 Cantonments  
Accra, Ghana  
Tel: 233-21-221318/221388  
Fax: 233-21-221735  
email: wanep@africaonline.com.gh

*In addition, several NGOs and religious organisations work in many countries of Africa on peacebuilding and conflict transformation issues. Some may have offices near you. A few of these are:*

Catholic Relief Services  
Justice and Peace Commissions of Catholic Churches  
Mennonite Central Committee  
Oxfam  
Peace Desks at National Church Councils  
World Vision

## **Authors' Information**

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“Meet Justice Kilele” used by permission of East African Standard, Nairobi, Kenya

“Whose Land?” by Fr. Peter Tanko

“A March Against Prejudice” by Rosemary Okoth

“The Children of Soweto” by Babu Ayindo

“Women United” by Tecla Wanjala

“Rapid Response in Wajir” by Nuria Abdullahi Abdi

“‘Witch’ Hunting” by Fr. Peter Tanko

“Drama as Transformation” by Babu Ayindo

“Gumisiriza’s Return” by Grace Kiconco

“Ogwedhi Sigawa” used by permission of Lutheran World Relief, East and Southern Africa office.

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## **What are your thoughts and suggestions?**

We hope that you have enjoyed reading *When You Are the Peacebuilder*, and that it will be useful to you in your work as a peacebuilder. We'd like to know your thoughts about the book. We would appreciate it if you would take a few minutes to respond to the following questions, and either post them or email them to the addresses given below. We view this as a work in progress. Your comments will help improve future editions of the book.

1. How did you receive this book? From whom?
2. What are your overall impressions of this book? Is it helpful to you in your work?
3. Do you find the use of peacebuilding stories helpful? The questions following the stories? The commentaries?
4. What, in your opinion, are the major strengths of this book?
5. What could be improved? What needs to be added? What are the significant gaps?
6. Do you have peacebuilding stories that could be added in future editions? Please send them to the addresses below.
7. Are there any other comments you'd like us to know?

Thank you! Please send your comments to:

*When You are the Peacebuilder*  
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*Harrisonburg, VA 22802*  
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*[jennerjm@emu.edu](mailto:jennerjm@emu.edu)*