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## REVIEWS

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### ***The Ethics of Peacebuilding***

Tim Murithi

Edinburgh University Press 2009

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#### **Review: Teresia Wamuyu Wachira**

Peace scholar and practitioner Tim Murithi challenges the reader to re-enter the forbidden garden of our time, the ethical realm, specifically as it relates to peacebuilding.<sup>1</sup> He argues that in the practice of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, an ethical posture should be above content and personal or group interests, and he shows succinctly how difficult it is today to resolve conflicts without engaging with the values and virtues of victims, perpetrators and peacemakers. Misapplied justice can lead to a situation where perpetrators become victims and vice versa, and the conflict becomes self-perpetuating, like the Israel-Palestinian conflict. An understanding of the ethics of peacebuilding is therefore essential for conceiving and implementing an effective process for building peace.

Ethics is a system of knowledge that invites caution in all spheres of life. Derived from the Greek *ethikos*, a term used by Aristotle and translated by Cicero as *moralis*, it encompasses both character and disposition; it questions meaning of right and wrong in human action and whether there is a 'highest good'. By answering these fundamental questions, one constructs 'moral parameters' for action. In the context of peacebuilding, Murithi says, it is necessary to build peace in a 'moral space' where 'disputants can coexist rebuilding their relationships and healing their lives'.

The author is a senior research fellow with the Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, United Kingdom. He has been a programme officer in the Programme in

Peacemaking and Preventive Diplomacy of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research in Geneva and a consultant on conflict resolution for the Organisation of African Unity and the United Nations Development Programme in Sierra Leone.

Drawing on the literature of international relations, peace studies and moral philosophy to engage with the ethical predisposition, or lack of it, among victims, perpetrators and facilitators of peacebuilding, he argues the need for peacebuilding processes based on ethics. He examines a range of conflicts in the aftermath of the Cold War, a period which has witnessed the worst atrocities committed in the history of humanity, and highlights the growth in sub-national conflicts. Unlike international or inter-state conflicts, sub-national conflicts have proved to be highly resistant to the intervention of the United Nations and regional organisations such as the European Union and African Union. Such conflicts illustrate the need for a different approach to peacebuilding.

Murithi cites the 1992 'Agenda for Peace' of the then United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros Ghali – who defined peacebuilding as the 'medium- to long-term process of rebuilding war-affected communities' – and finds the definition too limiting. Indeed, the notion of peacebuilding has acquired a degree of elasticity. He introduces as a working definition the 'maximal/broad' notion of peacebuilding, which favours a 'bottom-up' approach' by which local actors take ownership of peacebuilding initiatives. He points out the importance of adapting peace processes to specific country or regional contexts.

After exploring different approaches to peacebuilding, he questions whether all peace processes are moral and whether all actors in peace processes have moral

objectives given that all knowledge is value-laden and generated by self-interest. Moreover, although conflicts are undesirable, they may be the only means for sub-regional groups or minorities who are politically or socially excluded to make themselves heard. Sub-national conflicts tend to be 'morally excluded' by the practices of the international state system; the international mechanisms for conflict resolution and peacebuilding need to create a moral space where non-state actors and sub-national groups can address their grievances; moral inclusion is *sine qua non* for the promotion of lasting peace.

Murithi examines the ethics of negotiation and mediation in peacebuilding in the light of the experiences of international organisations such as the UN and the extent to which they manage to institutionalise ethical processes in peacemaking and peacebuilding and the approaches adopted and applied by faith-based organisations like the Quakers and Mennonites.

Proceeding from the assumption that in order to acquire lasting peace, the victim – real or perceived – must be able to forgive, Murithi argues that forgiveness depends on the moral development of both the victim and perpetrator. This development leads to what he calls the 'virtue of forgiveness', which is a sacrifice of self for the sake of the other. Without the 'moral development' of the perpetrator and the willingness of the victim to morally include his or her victimiser, institutionalised forgiveness may not be real and lasting. A prerequisite of forgiveness, which lays the foundation for reconciliation, is that the perpetrators need to acknowledge their faults, show repentance and compensate their victims. Where possible, perpetrators should ask forgiveness from the victims; the victims, if ready to adopt a posture of moral inclusion, can grant mercy and accept an ongoing process of healing.

Murithi recognises that one of the major challenges for peacebuilding in this century is the 'importance of promoting healing,

reconciliation and justice' for past atrocities within traumatised societies. For this reason, he poses the dilemma that the formal courts or commissions face in the application of transitional justice when aspects of cultural systems of justice are not incorporated. He discusses the potential role that indigenous value systems such *ubuntu* – the notion that 'a person is a person through other persons' – can contribute to reconciliation as an alternative approach to peacebuilding.

Is violence morally wrong when it is the only means of communication for groups who believe their grievances are not being heard or addressed? Murithi points to the example of Northern Ireland and highlights the processes of moral inclusion that were necessary in order to forge the Good Friday peace agreement of 1998. This reinforces his argument that to achieve lasting peace, an ethics of inclusion needs to be encouraged and supported.

This innovative study seeks to bridge the gap between ethics and peacebuilding. It is a valuable tool for both international and grassroots peacebuilding practitioners alike. It is timely and complements the work Iain Attack describes in *Ethics of Peace and War*, published in the same series. While a number of studies have examined the ethics of war, there is still a dearth of literature on the ethics of peacebuilding, particularly research into the intricacies of the ethics of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Murithi's study has contributed to this debate and identified new vistas for engaging with the ethics of peacebuilding. He fails, however, to develop the significance of the metaphysics of ethics. Advancing the case for the crucial role of the actor(s) in determining whether the action is right or wrong could have complemented his argument.

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***War to Peace Transition: Conflict Intervention and Peacebuilding in Liberia***

Kenneth Omeje, editor

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**Review: Lydia Gitau**

The concept of Africa as a dark continent irredeemably ravaged by ignorance, poverty, injustice and wars has been a subject of popular discourse for years. It is based on a rather simplistic understanding of the complexities that beset the continent. *War to Peace Transition* gives a refreshing insight to the political conflicts in Africa, and ends on a note of optimism for Liberia and the entire continent. Omeje, in the introductory chapter, points to the 'considerable improvement' and the 'progressive transition' from war to peace in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s.

In its analysis of the Liberian situation in particular, the book offers a welcome departure from mainstream meta-narratives that tend to make sweeping generalisations about the nature and causes of political conflicts in Africa. It aptly captures the complexity of the transition from war, depicting the recent civil war as a 'complex political emergency', a concept used in conflict and security literature to describe the multi-dimensional nature of the reasons for and effects of war, as well as the conflict intervention and peacebuilding strategies used by various actors. Each of the authors provides a grounded contribution to the analysis of the Liberian conflict.

Several contributors highlight the significance of the historical basis of Liberia's violent conflict that spanned the years 1989 to 2003. Guannu in Chapter 2 argues that the conflict dates back to the flawed establishment of the Liberian state in 1847, a foundation that excluded the native Africans in favour of Americo-Liberians, resettled slaves from the

American continent. The marginalisation of the native Africans is implicit in what Guannu calls the 'dysfunctional symbols' of the seal and motto of the nation. Ahadzi in Chapter 3 points to the 'extreme socio-economic and political asymmetries' that characterised the interaction of the Americo-Liberians and the native Africans, and how these led to growing political agitation and ultimately war. Alie in Chapter 4 refers to Samuel Doe's leadership as 'a recipe for disaster and instability'. Doe was in fact the first and only indigenous Liberian to have ruled the country, but his regime arguably surpassed previous dictatorships in repression and corruption.

A second reason for the war to emerge in the essays is economics. Omeje calls the economic factor the 'logic of predation and greed' that tended to drive the protagonists. Alie picks up the theme, referring to 'predatory politics or vampirism'. While economics alone cannot account for a war of the magnitude of Liberia's, it is without doubt a significant factor. Tied to the 'logic of predation' is the warlord politics: Omeje's narrative of how warlordism helped prolong the war is complemented by Ahadzi's description of how warlords exploited the war economy to enrich themselves.

*War to Peace Transition* analyses two broad responses to the war: military intervention and peace support operations, both beset by unprecedented challenges. Only eight months into the civil war, the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) sent its multilateral force, ECOMOG, to Liberia to help end the violent conflict, which was beginning to take its toll on neighbouring states. ECOMOG, with the United Nations and other external actors, oversaw the signing of over a dozen peace accords that failed to deliver peace, mainly because of the entrenched positions taken by the warring parties. Ahadzi, in his insightful essay, examines ECOMOG's spirited efforts to put an end to war in Liberia and how they were obstructed by the 'conflicting agendas' of

ECOWAS member states, an annoyance characteristic of regional interventions in African conflicts.

Chapter 6 introduces the spiritual dimension of peacekeeping. Nelson's discussion of the role of the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia is somewhat shallow: the author fails to analyse the important linkages between the spirituality of a people and conflict and peacebuilding in the Liberian context with sufficient rigour.

In Chapter 7, Giddings creatively discusses the cultural dimension of peacebuilding, showing how the war eroded a number of functional cultures, including indigenous dance and music, and highlighting how indigenous music can be revived to contribute to post-conflict transformation. Gender is the subject of Jones-Demen's essay in Chapter 5. She gives practical insights into how war changed the ratio of men to women, transformed their respective roles and affected sexual violence.

Among the recommendations to guide the consolidation of the peace in Liberia are Guannu's ideals of reconciliation, political inclusion and promotion of civic education, which take hard work to realise. Indeed, Alie draws attention to the immense price of peace in Liberia in terms of 'patience, clear thinking and direction and huge resources'. Specific recommendations to sustain the gains of peace are made by Jones-Demen (incorporating gender policy), Giddings (mainstreaming music), Sayndee (the role of the civil society) and Fukuda-Parr and McCandless (factoring peacebuilding concerns into the poverty reduction strategy).

Except for the repetitive sections on the history of conflict in Liberia, the book is well written and gives profound insights into the civil war in that country, and indeed, political conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. It is an valuable resource for any student keen to understand the complex nature of conflicts and peacebuilding in sub-Saharan Africa.

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