

**CONFLICT  
RESOLUTION  
WISDOM  
FROM  
AFRICA**

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## CONTENTS

FOREWORD .....	4
1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.....	6
2. THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF PERSPECTIVES IN AFRICA.....	9
2.1 Ancient beginnings .....	9
2.2 A general survey .....	11
2.3 Conflict and conflict resolution.....	13
2.4 A significant frame of reference .....	17
3. CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE OF AFRICA.....	19
3.1 Taking the social context of conflicts seriously.....	19
3.2 Making political structures more conducive to conflict resolution .....	31
3.3 Finding ways of addressing and eventually satisfying real economic needs .....	42
3.4 Taking ethnic loyalties into consideration.....	47
3.5 Counteracting imported religious fundamentalism.....	57
3.6 Practising life-related ways of educating .....	67
4. PRACTICAL AND ATTITUDINAL APPROACHES EMPHASISED IN AFRICA .....	74
4.1 The practical orientation to human conflict .....	74
4.2 The relational orientation to human togetherness .....	87
5. CONCLUDING COMMENTS .....	92
5.1 Comprehensive wisdom!.....	92
5.2 Corresponding willingness?.....	96
5.3 Continuing discussion... ..	100
SOURCES REFERRED TO.....	102
REVIEWS .....	113
NOTES .....	115

## FOREWORD

In his concluding remarks our author reminds us that "...the shape of our continent (like a question mark) can serve as a continual reminder to all of us to keep asking penetrating questions in our search for conflict resolution wisdom." ACCORD's entire existence has been characterised by this attitude of searching and researching for old and new ways of dealing with conflict. Our latest contribution to this ongoing process of searching is *Conflict Resolution Wisdom from Africa*.

We have held a firm belief, for a long time, that Africa has a rich heritage and history, supplemented by a colourful oral tradition that is pregnant with knowledge and expertise. We do not therefore have to look far for the answers to our challenges. Our problem today is that the intrusion of modernity and its attendant features, especially the gravitation of communities to urban life, has robbed the oral tradition of its utility as a tool for transferring centuries of useful life experiences and communal approaches to problem solving.

It is in this context that we make our modest contribution by recording in writing some of Africa's wisdom. We hope that this will encourage others to join us in capturing the richness of our continent's knowledge and making it accessible, not just in Africa, but for the entire world. *Conflict Resolution Wisdom from Africa* is being released at an important juncture in the history of Africa. This is a period that is increasingly being referred to as the *African Renaissance*. The popular and historical renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries refers to, among other things, a period of unprecedented accumulation of knowledge, spurred on by innovations in the printing industry. In many ways our renaissance at this juncture should also celebrate an accumulation of our inner knowledge and its unprecedented dissemination through the written word.

The author of this excellent contribution, Professor Jannie Malan, is Head of Research at ACCORD. His contribution emanates from tireless, meticulous and thorough research. More importantly, his research is complemented by a dedicated and deep commitment to the greater values that underpin conflict resolution wisdom from Africa. In the process of his search, he has made an enormous contribution to the struggle for freedom in South Africa. His reflections in this book are therefore a combination of skilled academic research and inner wisdom.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Tata Jannie for his contribution to peace in Africa. I would also like to thank our dear friends, Professor Francis Deng and Dr. Alioune Sall, for taking time to read and review *Conflict Resolution Wisdom from Africa*. Finally, let me record our sincere appreciation to our friend and brother, Dr. Chris Bakwesegha (Head of the Conflict Resolution Department of the Organisation of African Unity), for all his supportive, constructive and amplifying editorial comments, which could indeed be incorporated.

Vasu Gounden  
Director, ACCORD  
August 1997

## 1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Conflict: wanted or unwanted	<p>As human beings on this planet we enjoy a very interesting existence in a fascinating environment. One of the most gripping elements of human life is the everywhere-present phenomenon of conflict (cf Assefa 1993:4). We dislike it, but we also need it.</p> <p>It can be compared to friction in the physical world. Where a wheel revolves on an axle we try to reduce friction as much as possible. But between wheels and the road there has to be enough friction. If a surface is too slippery, like ice, it is difficult to start moving, to change direction, and to stop.</p> <p>Friction between human beings also has its disadvantages and advantages, and our response is either to eliminate or to promote it. Where emotional heat and violent interaction are generated between people who ought to get along together, we tend to work toward the removal of the cause of the friction. But where movement in the direction of necessary change is not yet evident, or still too slow, we may make valid use of friction to call attention to the matter.</p> <p>Conflict, as always prevalent, often inevitable, but usually resolvable, is remarkably interesting indeed. It cannot be ignored or wished away. It calls for open-minded investigation, and challenges us to become as involved as possible in honest, creative and effective problem solving.</p>
Broad and narrow approaches	<p>That conflict is always caused by a problem may of course be regarded as a truism. It is, however, a concise way of emphasising three useful insights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>the obvious truth that every conflict is caused by a particular difficulty;</li><li>the acknowledgement that conflict may arise as a valid way of highlighting a basic problem; and</li><li>the prospect of solving the problem concerned and thereby resolving the conflict.</li></ul>

Not all people in the world, nor in Africa, will agree with such a broad approach. Some do not take root causes seriously and try to get away with superficial measures. Others regard it as their responsibility to instigate and propagate conflict wherever injustice can be identified. Then there are those who label all conflict as undesirable and strive to curb conflictual behaviour and its unpleasant consequences as far as possible.

If we bear in mind, however, the limitless variety and extreme complexity of conflict situations, we should not be afraid to be flexible. We should be prepared to accept learning from any source. Quite obviously, we may expect the most significant insights from comprehensive, contextual approaches to the role and the resolution of conflict. But from limited, even one-track-minded, approaches most useful bits of understanding might also be derived.

Critical open-mindedness - What could be strongly recommended, therefore, is an unprejudiced, yet critical, receptiveness. Such a readiness to assess and learn may prove to be surprisingly rewarding in the vast and still expanding field of conflict studies.

Literature: scope and focus - We are dealing with an area which is so relevant that its literature has grown into staggering proportions. A few decades ago an individual could still have tried to read everything, but today a lifetime may hardly be enough for such an undertaking. Selection has become inevitable. A random choice may of course lead to isolated but interesting findings. A well-planned search may produce more coherent and structured results. Also possible, of course, is a meaningful combination of material from generally recommended publications, and insights obtained from perhaps less known but probably very relevant perspectives.

In all settings there are cultural and contextual perspectives that must self-evidently be included. This is one, quite obvious reason for studying the cultural context of our closer and wider environment. A second and even more pressing reason is that the insights that have developed and are still developing in Africa deserve to be studied for their own sake.

Such a rationale lends a specific focus to our interest in the instigation and resolution of conflict. While taking note of world-wide developments in the

field of Conflict Studies, we should also pay special attention to the valuable contributions from our own continent. At the same time this rationale provides some justification for another publication in a field with an escalating proliferation of literature.

Africa's wisdom: variety and unanimity

What is presented on the following pages is a modest but concerted attempt to share ACCORD's<sup>1</sup> enthusiasm about Africa's expertise in the dimension of human relations. Our conviction is that Africa's practical and relational wisdom, both in its tremendous diversity and its elemental commonality, deserves to be taken seriously.

A demanding but imperative task

To put such a conviction into practice is obviously no simple matter. Anyone, or any organisation, undertaking such a project may be criticised for presumptuously tackling an impossible task.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, to venture saying something about previous and present conflict and conflict resolution in Africa means taking on an almost unmanageable assignment. But those of us who feel challenged by the relevancy and urgency of this responsibility, may just as well make some contribution, without being deterred by the overwhelmingness and riskiness of the task.

What follows is therefore shared as just one such a contribution to the debating and especially to the implementation of conflict resolution insights and skills from Africa. Not at all does it claim to be comprehensive. It only tries to compile salient and stimulating ideas and practices that have emerged in Africa, and may prove useful - not only in Africa but also in the rest of the world.



## 2. THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF PERSPECTIVES IN AFRICA

### 2.1 ANCIENT BEGINNINGS

Imagining ancient life-situations

It is usually helpful to approach the understanding of a phenomenon by attempting to envisage its very beginning. When dealing with a phenomenon of human interaction this roundabout way may lead to important insights. But, when the origin apparently lies in the remotest past, we have to rely on imaginative reconstructions based on interpretations of available archaeological evidence.

Retracing Africa's ancient history is further complicated by a relative scarcity of archaeological data, and by prejudiced interpretations. Fortunately, however, ongoing investigations are dislodging mistaken assumptions, even the tenacious preconception that remarkable early achievements could not have been the work of Africans and have to be attributed to foreign skill. We therefore find ourselves at a juncture where several established ideas about hypothetical migrations, cultural labels and ethnic distinctions are being questioned and revised (cf Garlake 1990:28-40).

Still, in spite of inevitable uncertainties and errors, a worthwhile amount of understanding can usually be derived from such a probing into the past. With regard to conflict and conflict resolution in Africa we may therefore make the best possible use of the findings and conjectures at our disposal. As a preparatory exercise before the next few chapters, we could make use of a *tentative* survey and think ourselves into the postulated situations.

Typical sources of conflict

We can surely assume that the earliest human inhabitants of Africa, just as human beings across the globe, experienced communicational difficulties and volitional differences. *Misunderstanding* could have happened more frequently when languages were still in their rudimentary stages (although body language must have been as communicative as it still is). *Disagreement* could have taken place very often, in spite of, or precisely because of, attempts to instil conformity with the traditions, decisions and behaviour of the groups concerned. *Greed* could have been manifested whenever there was competition for a scarce resource, like food.

Seeing that those early communities were inevitably made up of the two genders, as well as of age sets, family clusters and ethnic groups, they could have experienced all sorts of relational problems. Out of incidents and attitudes of daily interaction *prejudice* and *intolerance* could have developed easily.

During the stages of human existence when the primary objectives were (initially) mere survival and (later) tribal strength (cf Beck & Cowan 1990:[1], 1992:[2]), power began playing its never-ending role on the human scene. Almost always, however, power brings with it the misuse of power and, consequently also, various manifestations of *injustice*, *domination* and *aggression*.

Although we have no means of proving it, we have every reason to suppose that these conflict-generating forces were already operative among the earliest peoples of Africa. If our early ancestors were as humanly human as we are, in spite of the great cultural differences between those ancient eras and our present age, they must have experienced these same sources of interhuman discord and conflict.

Typical types of conflict      It is not far-fetched therefore to form a mental picture of resulting tensions and clashes between individuals and groups. In terms of the convenient adjectives we use nowadays, we may think of interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup conflicts since the earliest times, and of intranational and international conflicts since the emergence of nations.

Conflict resolution by fighting or talking      At the same time we may confidently include another aspect in our picture: the resolution of conflict. Here, however, we definitely have to add the adjectives *violent* or *non-violent*. We may imagine that in ancient times the predominant method of conflict resolution was some form of fighting. But it is not impossible, in fact it is highly probable, that the alternative method, of talking, was discovered in the earliest times of human existence, and was used ever since (cf Ury 1990:229).

All these conjectures about typical causes and types of conflict, and typical ways of resolving conflict, are of course so general that they can apply to

more than just early Africa. They may serve as an elementary model for approaching the world-wide phenomenon of conflict. We therefore have to focus more attention on the history of Africa, first in general terms, and then from a Conflict Studies perspective.

## 2.2 A GENERAL SURVEY

History in Africa north and south of the Sahara

It is an over-simplification, however - even when attempting a brief survey -, to think in terms of *the* history of Africa. On such a vast continent there will obviously be various histories of different cultural and/or geographical regions. For the purposes of an overview, however, the geography of Africa provides us with a major dividing belt: the Sahara desert. It has become customary to distinguish between the histories of Africa north of the Sahara and Africa south of the Sahara.<sup>3</sup>

North Africa and the Mediterranean world

Geography also presents us with an interesting ambiguity regarding the way of looking at Africa. On account of its size and situation it is usually seen as a continent. But it really is a peninsula (or rather an "almost continent") attached to Eurasia (just as South America is attached to North America). Africa may indeed be called the largest peninsula on earth (cf Vincent 1906:21b).

The early history of North Africa seems to confirm a definite linkage with the so-called (from a Eurocentric perspective) Near East, the meeting point of Asia and Europe. In ancient times the culture and kingdoms that developed along the Nile were apparently totally independent. But (in the late 4th century BCE) the arrogant Alexander the Great incorporated Egypt into his vast empire, which stretched from Greece to India, and in which he propagated a fusion of Greek and Oriental cultures. Northern Africa thus became part of the cosmopolitan Hellenistic world. It harboured the soon famous city of culture and learning, Alexandria, which bore Alexander's name and radiated the Hellenistic culture. Then, a few centuries later (1st century BCE), the northern rim of Africa became part of the Roman Empire. In this way it became more firmly embedded in the Mediterranean world. Contact with the Oriental world was maintained, however, mainly by trade links. In due time (7th century) this influence grew much stronger: the Arabs

conquered Egypt and North Africa and imported the then new religion of Islam.

- Foreign influence and exploitation in Africa south of the Sahara
- Arabic influence was not checked by the desert barrier, however. The toughness and endurance of the camel enabled the Arabs to reach the kingdoms established in West Africa (since the 8th century), both with their trade goods and their religion. Seven centuries later foreign influence of a slightly different type, and from a different direction, began reaching Africa. The seafaring Portuguese came as explorers and traders, and started settling themselves from the 15th century onwards. The Dutch followed from the 17th century and the English from the 18th century. Manufactured goods from Europe were traded for gold and ivory. Profits were made in Europe - at the terrible price of incalculable losses for Africa. The ivory trade did not only lead to the excessive killing of elephants, but also to the ravaging of the human population.
- The suffering inflicted by slavery
- Money greedy traders (including Europeans, Arabs, and also some Africans) soon discovered an additional source of income: the wretched people who were used to carry the burdens of ivory to the coast could themselves be sold as slaves! Slave dealers, unwilling to endanger their own lives, provoked intertribal warfare and even supplied weapons, in order to sell the captives of such wars as slaves. Indescribable suffering was inflicted on the slaves as they had to march, chained together, to the coast, and as they were dumped as cargo into the ships. It was not uncommon if four or five died for each one who eventually reached the slave market. Efforts to stop this detestable, beastly treatment of fellow human beings only succeeded in the 19th century. The trade between West Africa and the Americas came to an end early, and that between East Africa and the Middle East much later in that century.
- The structural violence of colonialism
- Slave trade and slavery were extreme forms of disgusting injustice inflicted upon the people of Africa. But it was not the only injustice people of Africa had to suffer. The other major iniquity was colonialism. Its offensiveness did not arouse as much attention and opposition as slavery, however. The colonial powers tried to bluff the world, and themselves, by covering up their exploitation of the people in their colonies. They produced rationalising arguments. They used European standards of "development" as frames of reference. They kept quiet about the profits they were making out of their colonies. They succeeded in inducing the so-called first and second worlds to

connive at the colonisation of the third world. This was fairly easy in times when the term *structural violence* was not yet coined, and when slavery was not yet abolished.

Two waves of independence

At last, however, during the second half of the 20th century, the structural violence and injustice of colonialism were finally brought to an apparent end. The period of suffering under colonialism differed in various parts of Africa, but from its first beginnings (the Dutch colony at the Cape of Good Hope [!], 1652, cf Vincent 1906:21b) to its final extermination (South Africa, 1994) the entire era covered about three and a half centuries. For the greatest part of Africa, however, it was less than one century: from "the scramble for Africa", mainly between 1879 and 1901 (cf Oliver & Atmore 1972:103-127; Chazan et al 1988:24) to the first and second waves of independence, 1951-1968 and 1974-1982 (cf Chazan et al 1988:5,423-435).

Two phases of liberation

The most recent history of Africa is that of three and a half decades of independence (taking 1960 as *the* year of African independence (Chazan et al 1988:5). A distinction has become necessary, however, between a first and a second liberation of Africa. The first was the long awaited liberation from foreign colonial powers. The second was the liberation from internal autocratic tendencies by establishing various forms of multi-party democracy (cf Assefa 1993:21). It often happened, unfortunately, that leaders who had been comrades in the liberation struggles became competitors in new power struggles. It also happened that the regained freedom and democracy were jeopardised by one-party enterprises. Such occurrences necessitated efforts to arrive at a more genuine type of independence, a type which is not only anti-colonial but also anti-autocratic.

### 2.3 CONFLICT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

After these few pages (7-9) on the history of Africa in general, we may now review Africa's past from a Conflict Studies perspective. In this regard inferences like the following may be drawn:

Indigenous fighting and talking

During the thousands of years of traditional leadership the situation outlined above (pp 4-6) could have prevailed in Africa, as elsewhere in the world: typical types of conflict arising out of typical causes, and leading to basic patterns of conflict resolution -

fighting and/or talking. For the greatest part of this very long period the setting of such conflicts and their resolution must have been predominantly local. The events took place between individuals, village communities or tribes who lived in the same or adjoining areas. The people who became involved as interveners were probably mostly local elders and/or tribal leaders. When kingdoms developed (about the 50th century BCE in Egypt, and about the 8th century BCE in West Africa) stronger and wider authority came onto the scene, but the traditional methods of instigating and resolving conflict probably underwent little change.

Foreign  
aggression  
and peace-  
making in  
North Africa

Foreign influence must have brought change, however. When Hyksos chiefs of Semitic descent ruled in Egypt (18th to 16th centuries BCE), luxury wares were introduced, but also fortifications and war chariots. When for a brief period (in the 7th Century BCE) Egypt formed part of the Assyrian Empire, the Egyptians had to experience the aggressive style of their conquerors. Later, however, as part of the Persian Empire (6th to 5th centuries BCE), Egypt could learn the value of tolerance in politics and religion. When Alexander the Great was overrunning the Persian Empire (4th century BCE), his army had to use their improved siege apparatus in Syria, but in Egypt he was almost welcomed, and praised as son of Zeus (ruler of the pantheon of Greek gods and goddesses). Without any military suffering Egypt embraced the new world culture of Hellenism which promoted cross-cultural communication and understanding.

When Egypt was incorporated into the Roman Empire (1st century BCE), the Mediterranean world began experiencing two centuries of "Roman peace". In this period of stability Roman political organisation and Roman legal expertise were absorbed by the Roman provinces. Later, however, northern Africa witnessed the decline (from the 3rd century CE) and fall (5th century CE) of the Roman Empire in the West. In the 5th century the north coast of Africa was invaded by the fierce Vandals. And in the 7th century Egypt and the rest of North Africa were conquered by Arabs who were at the same time spreading the Islamic religion. This influx of a duty-centred and submission-centred religion became a long lasting influence in North Africa

(almost unchallenged until the 19th century). Finally, some of the European countries (England and France) began exerting their influence in Egypt (19th to 20th century). For 38 centuries the people of Africa north of the Sahara were therefore exposed to a variety of foreign influences - in most cases a dominating, violent kind of pressure, but sometimes also more tolerant, peaceful types of guidance.

Foreign domination south of the Sahara

South of the Sahara the foreign influence came over a much shorter period and in a much simpler pattern. It began only five centuries ago, and it came mainly from countries in Europe. It usually consisted of the following elements: the exploits of traders who brought manufactured goods and took back natural (and human!) resources; the endeavours of missionaries to spread their Christian convictions and the European version of civilisation; the enterprises of politicians to establish settlements and later colonies which could benefit their own countries. At first this foreign invasion was restricted to the coastal regions and adjoining parts. But more recently (19th century) another element was added: the expeditions of explorers into the interior of Africa. Their findings did not only satisfy curiosity, however. It also prompted the desire of Europeans for more territory and more wealth. And in their pursuit of these tempting goals they made themselves guilty of fighting, of establishing arbitrary boundaries (either splitting nations and/or lumping together hostile groups), and of enforcing structural violence. By the beginning of the 20th century almost the entire Africa was partitioned into colonies or protectorates under European rule or supervision. The 20th century then became one in which region by region struggled for liberation, and regained the independence they were dispossessed of during the era of colonialism.

Experience of conflict

What the greater part of Africa had to experience during these last few centuries was various kinds of conflict-causing exploitation and injustice. The inevitable result was that conflict was indeed provoked. Although the method, violence and protraction of the conflict differed from country to country, it is obvious that almost every part of Africa has experienced the use of escalating conflict to highlight and oppose injustice. Leading up to the second phase of

liberation several parts of Africa also had to cope with the trauma of combating against internal iniquity.

Imported  
conflict  
resolution  
expertise

During the last few decades leaders in Africa could have benefited from another kind of input as well. The conflict resolution expertise that has developed recently (especially since the 1960s) elsewhere in the world has reached Africa. The news media do give some coverage of conflict interventions and resolutions (although they make more money out of news about violent conflict). Publications on negotiation, mediation and general problem solving are available. And conflict resolution experts from abroad have visited Africa and have made their services available.

Indigenous  
conflict  
resolution  
expertise

It is precisely this present situation that may tempt us, in Africa, to forget the complex history and the indigenous expertise of Africa. The latest news about conflicts and wars, and also, now and then, about cease-fires and agreements, grip our attention. The current methods of conflict resolution from the Americas, Europe, Asia and Australia impress us on account of their professional quality and their scientific underpinning by several human sciences. *But we should not allow the appeal of such contemporary material to make us forget the time-proven methods which originated on African soil.*

The crescent of continents on three sides of Africa has produced both ancient traditions and present-day guidelines. A good example of a very old method is the religio-philosophically based Chinese practise of neighbourhood arbitration (cf Wall & Blum [1987]:4-5). Recent examples of negotiating and mediating techniques, designed for both mono- and multi-cultural settings, are easily to be found, especially in North America, Europe and Australia. But on this global scene, and from its geographically central position, Africa may assert itself with modest pride, utilising its own unique wisdom and sharing it with fellow human beings on planet Earth.

Original  
conflict  
resolution  
traditions

After its long and eventful history Africa can indeed make most significant contributions to the field of conflict resolution. There are the original traditions, which might be as ancient as those that developed in China and Mesopotamia. Early traditions in Egypt could have



taken shape at about the same time. And the informed guess that the first distinction between right and wrong was made about ten thousand years ago (Sparks 1966:[4]), may just as well apply to our ancient African ancestors.

Insights and skills derived from suffering

Africa has much more to offer, however, than merely its earliest traditions and their modifications. Africa has undergone the tragic, widespread and prolonged experience of exploitation and subjection. (In addition to all the suffering inflicted on the people of Africa by foreigners, there was also the distress caused by intergroup conflicts, and by natural calamities, such as famine - usually due to drought or locusts - and disease - often with leprosy as a major threat.) But Africa also has its stories of empowerment and struggle, liberation and independence. The conflict resolution expertise that has developed in Africa therefore incorporates insights and skills acquired during the eras of traditional leadership, colonial rule, and new independence.

## 2.4 A SIGNIFICANT FRAME OF REFERENCE

Two basic and interwoven elements,

Even if the most intricate designs are woven into a piece of cloth, the basic structure is formed by the two interwoven sets of threads, still called by their traditional names of warp and weft. This absolutely self-evident pattern, which has been used from the very beginning of weaving right through to the present day, provides us with an apt metaphor. Throughout all the complexity and variety in Africa's history of conflict resolution, there seems to be an elemental warp and weft:

The one is **the tradition of family or neighbourhood negotiation facilitated by elders.**

And the other is **the attitude of togetherness in the spirit of humanhood (*ubuntu*).**

related to the contributions of women and men...

Both of these are clear manifestations of a committedness to the community concerned and an orientation to a comprehensive view of life. Both, as well as each separately, endorse the meaningful involvement of the two halves of humanity - men and women of all ages. This frame of reference may therefore serve as a constant reminder that the following pages should be

understood, as far as possible, as referring to both genders - co-operating with one another and complementing one another.

...of the past and the present Both elements therefore seem to have been used at all times - times of peace and well-being, and times of unrest and suffering. Both these elements can be traced back to methods used since the earliest days of group, tribal and national leaders working together with their councils of elders (cf Amoo 1992:21; Foraker-Thompson 1990:4). But both can also be discerned in present-day methods which are used either independently of imported structures, or alternatively to such structures (cf Foraker-Thompson 1990:5).

Unity and wholeness We have to admit that some of the contemporary applications seem to contradict the spirit of togetherness when they are practised in defiance of the imported legal structures. The rationale is, however, that it is an alien environment which forces people to take refuge in such methods. Separateness or otherwiseness can in no way be detected as an inherent trait of this tradition or this attitude. The dimension in which both of them essentially operate is that of unity and wholeness (cf Deng 1996:5,45,49,56). The emphasis is on association and relationships.

Being wary of undue analysing As far as possible we should therefore resist the tendency of our left-hand brains to analyse and categorise. We should allow our under-utilised right-hand brains to meditate on our fellowship and togetherness, to sense a feeling of common humanness, to dream and sing about the miracles of our existence and co-existence.

For the purpose of properly discussing these two crucial elements, it may be helpful, however, if we look at some of the constituents of the total life context one by one. But then our mindset should not be one of analysing and classifying, but rather one of synthesising and integrating.

### 3. CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE OF AFRICA

#### 3.1 TAKING THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF CONFLICTS SERIOUSLY

The lure of real life      When Africa's ways of dealing with conflicts are studied, most of the attention of researchers is almost magnetically attracted to real life. This does not only apply to researchers from Africa itself (cf Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:15<sup>5</sup>), but also to those from abroad (cf Gulliver 1979:xvi,38).

Theoretical approaches seem to be out of place on African soil. Nothing can prevent games theorists from calculating statistical scenarios and from including Africa in their experiments.<sup>6</sup> Other theorists, like those in the fields of bargaining or decision making, may also apply their paradigms to examples from Africa. Researchers in the entire field of the human sciences may rightfully use the theoretical approaches of their various disciplines when examining relevant topics in Africa. In all these ways meaningful insights and recommendations may indeed be reached. But still, when focusing on Africa, theorists should respond as far as possible to the pull towards real life in all its vibrant practicality. Abstract ideas (whether they originate from left-hand or right-hand sectors of researchers' brains) may be harboured and explored, but preferably not in life-estranged ways.

Social thinking and living      One of the major lessons the rest of the world may learn from Africa is precisely **that social reality should be taken seriously**. To call this a mere lesson, is an understatement, however. Many people, in many parts of the world, may need a long-term course in order to unlearn their inherited and indoctrinated individualism. People who tend to opt for the line of least resistance may prefer to avoid the challenge of wider social thinking. They may therefore need persistent encouragement to take the extra "trouble" of getting themselves, or their research project, involved in a network of social complexities.

There is also the possibility, however, of learning this "lesson" in a moment of sudden insight. After all, it is not a matter of acquiring knowledge. Essentially it is a breakthrough to a social way of thinking and living. It is

like learning to swim in the sea of social life. When this skill has once been mastered, one's social orientation is no longer a duty that has to be remembered and observed from day to day. It has become a permanent ingredient of one's entire mode of thinking, speaking and acting.

Viewing  
conflicts in  
their social  
context

For Conflict Studies the obvious implication is to view conflicts as non-isolated events in their social context. Such a perspective is not narrowly focused on a conflict and its resolution. It takes into account the cultural setting and the social context. It looks at the history of preceding events which have led up to the conflict concerned. And while concentrating on the conflict itself and the process of resolving it, it takes possible implications for the future seriously. A wider look is taken than one which just includes the disputing parties. Possible consequences for others in their families and social networks are also taken into consideration. Potential effects on relationships and interests are envisaged.

This way of viewing conflicts and their resolution as events in the comprehensive continuum of social life is definitely distinctive of Africa. When Africans sit down to talk about a conflict, the talking usually covers all sorts of relevant background. It also explores the thoughts and intentions of others. Those taking part in the talks normally try to gauge how others are perceiving and interpreting their own actions (Roberts 1979:67). When an elder from a family, village or clan becomes involved in the talks, the traditional objectives are to move away from accusations and counter-accusations, to soothe hurt feelings and to reach a compromise that may help to improve future relationships (Amoo 1992:21). Precisely in this characteristic spirit of Africa the secretary-general of the Organisation of African Unity recently emphasised the broader set of goals of which negotiations form part: political reform, economic development and greater social opportunities for all (Salim 1993:5). With regard to the social context he also highlighted the important aspects of values and aspirations, perceptions and visions (Salim 1993:6).

This earnestness about the social context of conflicts is not only practised and proclaimed by the people and leaders of Africa. It is emphatically endorsed by researchers in the fields of both sociology (cf Gulliver 1979:268, Roberts 1979:45) and anthropology (cf Gulliver 1979:269, Roberts 1979:27,200). In fact, the need to take the social context of conflicts

seriously should be absolutely self-evident to anyone who surveys the elements operating in the social dimension.

Social life is the area in which values and norms function. It is the environment in which cultural traditions are formed and handed down from generation to generation. Often, however, the cultural milieu is not just monopolised by one set of values, principles, norms and customs. It may be filled by a bi-, tri- or multi-cultural complexity, and the adherents of the various traditions may tend either to segregate or to integrate themselves. When it comes to religious beliefs, cults and prescriptions, differences (sometimes peripheral distinctions, but sometimes core contrasts) may lead to tensions or hostilities.

Values and beliefs	It should be obvious that the specifically religious or the wider cultural setting of a conflict deserves proper recognition and attention. <sup>7</sup> This may be easier when the values are explicitly mentioned and discussed. It becomes more complicated when values, especially contradicting ones, are implicitly assumed. Values should never be ignored, however. All over Africa people have deeply rooted cultural commitments, and in many of the conflicts in Africa this cultural heritage may form at least a noteworthy background, or may even play a decisive role.
Human relations	The other key element functioning throughout all social life is the fascinating network of human relations. This is obviously a world-wide phenomenon, but in Africa it has always received special attention. Family ties and community networking are constantly respected, maintained and strengthened. Whenever kinship or social relationships are disturbed by a dispute, priority is given to their restoration (cf Assefa 1993:6). When the disputing parties, their supporters and the elders concerned engage in talking a matter through, it is usually the issue of relationships which receives prime attention. The relationships of the past are reviewed, the tense relationships of the current conflict are investigated, and a settlement is sought that would improve future relationships. Not only direct and obvious relationships are taken into account, but also the more indirect relationships that may have a cross-stitching potential (cf Witty 1980:6, Deng 1996:15). If, for instance, each of two divergent groups happens to have members with a strong interest in music, this commonality may be utilised as a converging factor.

A noteworthy leadership policy of *reaching out* to the group or individual farthest from the leader concerned, is well described and discussed by Deng (1996:1-4,14-16). The idea behind this approach is that the interests of the culturally or ethnically distant, even of strangers, should be duly considered. Their interests should be safeguarded as far as possible, without contravening justice of course. When such a method is followed from a position of strength and magnanimity, it cannot be interpreted as weakness or meekness.

Interests and attitudes    Such reaching out is a striking example of an essential part of the orientation towards human relations: a special sense for interests and attitudes. These inner elements of our human existence are not always readily discernible by others. Usually a keen sensitivity and a genuine interest are needed to fathom and identify them. In a conflict situation, as in any situation, they are of vital importance, however. Like values and beliefs, interests and attitudes function at deep levels, either to draw different people closer together or to drive them further apart. As mentioned above, similar interests can help to merge groups or individuals. But conflicting interests can exaggerate already existing divisions.

Unifying and divisive attitudes    Attitudes too, can be of an integrative or a segregative nature. In a typical African community, where social solidarity is highly valued (cf Chazan et al 1988:72, Foraker-Thompson 1990:8), all signs of tolerance and co-operativeness will be observed and nurtured. When settlement-directed talks take place in such a community, the attitude of reconciliation will be promoted as far as possible.

We have to be honest, however, about divisive attitudes which are also found in socially minded Africa. There are traditions which are centred on a preoccupation with honour (cf Roberts 1979:166). In such a context attitudes of competitiveness and retaliation are obviously taken for granted. Attitudes are not easily changed, however (cf Radford & Govier 1982:47-9). Neither are traditions. Both are deeply embedded in the social and individual life of the people concerned. Still, it can make an important difference if such attitudes, as well as the traditions on which they may be based, are duly recognised as part of the social context of a particular conflict.

Fear    Another attitude that can help cause and intensify a conflict situation is fear. Here too, we have to admit frankly that, in spite of all the social cohesiveness

found in Africa, the people of Africa are not exempt from fear. In some cases people seem to be living in fear of being rejected. The prospect of being excluded from association and co-operation in the social group you belong to, is indeed intimidating. But it can become even more frightening when it is coupled with a threat of sorcery or divine punishment.

Entire process of conflict resolution and its stages      When all these ethical, relational and attitudinal elements of a social setting are taken into consideration, it can provide a **meaningful, comprehensive perspective of a conflict**. But such a sensitivity for social phenomena may also be a valuable asset at all stages in the process of resolving a conflict.

Determining root cause and background      From the very beginning of trying to approach and identify the root cause of a conflict, the involvement of the social context can make a crucial difference. A professional conflict resolver from abroad, using a well designed method of conflict analysis, may begin the exploration by retracing the steps of the parties to the point of initial tension. But an experienced elder from Africa, thinking along the life-related lines of social reality, may begin from a vantage point further back and try to form a frame of social reference. From this perspective questions like the following may be put to the individuals concerned (or the key members of the parties): Who are you, and where are you from? How do you form part of your (close and extended) family? In which environment did you grow up? What do you like doing? What are you living for?<sup>8</sup>

Approaching a conflict from such a background may provide important clues, not only about immediate causes, but also with regard to long-standing grievances. Such a probing into the social context may lead to a wider and deeper insight into differences and similarities between the parties. Parties often have fairly similar needs, but rather different interests. Parties may be adherents of similar or different ideologies, and of similar or different beliefs. There may be important age and power differences, which have to be taken into account.

In all these ways insights derived from the social context may greatly increase the understanding of the origin of a conflict. A further advantage is that this understanding can develop as a shared understanding. If the exploring of the social context takes place in a genuinely social way, which

is properly transparent and participatory, it helps all who are involved in the discussion to experience a growing awareness of remote and immediate causes.

Formulating immediate objectives     It is not only the beginnings of a conflict that are illumined by the social context. The social context can also play its role to improve the end of the conflict resolution process. It can make an important difference if the purpose of the process is formulated in social, relational language. Both short-term objectives and long-term aims may benefit from Africa's concern with relationships (cf Assefa 1993:6).

A typical immediate goal is to reach an agreement which includes more than merely solving the problem or rectifying the injustice. What is specifically aimed at in the search for durable peace, is genuine reconciliation and, where necessary, restitution and rehabilitation (cf Assefa 1993:9-16, Deng 1996:6,23,56).

Relationships that have been broken or damaged should be repaired. Wrongs should be rectified, and justice restored. After their conflict the parties should be fully integrated into their community or communities again. If they have been in competition with each other, they should adopt the mood of co-operation again. In societies where reciprocal obligations are expected to be honoured, such responsibilities should be resumed (cf Roberts 1979:86-87). Usually reciprocal goodwill is also hoped for, in spite of the general knowledge that it can never be instilled into a stubborn party.

Envisaging remote aims     Aims for the longer term are usually centred on an *ubuntu*<sup>9</sup> nurturing harmony in the community. Such an aim may be regarded as superfluous in societies who take the social context seriously. The realities of "human-natured" behaviour, also in Africa, deprive us of this illusion, however. Experience teaches us the lesson that even in socially oriented communities tolerance is not maintained automatically. It should purposefully be aimed at and worked for. Conditions that are favourable for sustaining and promoting a forbearing co-existence should be promoted. In this regard four extremely relevant objectives were highlighted in the Kampala Document: security, stability, development and co-operation (Africa Leadership Forum 1991). To these socio-political and socio-economic key words a few others, having a



more specific social thrust, may be added: mutual understanding, mutual respect, and constructive interaction (cf Malan 1994:328,339-341).

Double advantage of such goals

When a conflict resolution process is directed toward short- and long-term goals which really extend into the field of human relations, at least a double advantage can result. Not only will the eventual stages of implementation and follow-up be more far- and wide-reaching. The whole procedure of resolving the conflict will also be regarded to be what it actually is: an event in the continuum of social life.

This broad, socially minded perspective on the complex realities of life has important implications for any actual process of conflict resolution. It prevents us from having convenient illusions about straightforward methods of resolving conflict. Africa does not provide us with any simple recipe, nor with a recipe book. What does happen, however, is that Africa's orientation towards the social context makes us aware of a whole variety of approaches which are indeed found in societies of people with their respective histories, traditions and inclinations. Here too we may think in terms of a continuum of methods, ranging from violent fighting to gentle talking.

Diversity of methods

After all, on a continent which always had a large and growing number of nations (cf Pastoral Institute of Eastern Africa 1974:4) or groups, and which currently accommodates more than 500 million people speaking over 800 languages and co-existing in 53 countries (cf Chazan et al 1988:4), one could expect quite a diversity of methods.

Regulated fighting

We have to be honest, therefore, about the fact that not all these methods have been versions of *talking*. The history of Africa does include examples of regulated fighting (cf Roberts 1979:15,26,120-121). As elsewhere in the world, fighting as an organised method is a rare exception, however.

Adjudication and arbitration

We also have to admit that some ways of talking found in Africa differ from the way we usually have in mind nowadays when we refer to "talks". Past and present practices of conflict resolution in Africa include examples of adjudication and arbitration. In cases of adjudication the social context may not figure prominently. Some form of court proceedings is usually followed, in which an appointed "judge", or perhaps a judicial panel, hears a case and

decides about right and wrong, vindication and punishment. When arbitration is used, however, the social environment often plays an important role. After all, an arbitrator has to maintain the support of the community concerned, and therefore has to be more sensitive to the assessment of his/her decisions by others.

Examples are also found of adjudication and/or arbitration as one option, linked to a second option of informal talking. Here the classic example seems to be the two methods of the Kpelle in West Africa: institutionalised courts making and enforcing arbitral verdicts, and ad hoc local meetings ("moots" or "house palavers") arriving at mediated settlements (cf Nanda 1987:296-298, Witty 1980:5). In another classic example from Africa (the Ndendeuli of Tanzania) these two methods have been combined into one: mediators play an active role by suggesting an agreement and even pressurising the parties to accept it (cf Witty 1980:6).

Shaming and ridiculing Africa's emphasis on attitudes validates the use of two other ways of pressurising by talking and singing: shaming and ridiculing. Such special methods can obviously only be used in contexts where they are acceptable, and in cases where the cause of a dispute is self-evident. Either in a ritualised way or through ordinary conversation the persons guilty of anti-social and conflict-causing conduct are put to shame. Or individuals gifted with the knack of poking fun at others play their jocular role in an effort to change the behaviour of the trouble makers (cf Roberts 1979:62-63).

Neighbourhood negotiation Apart from such more coercive modes of talking, however, the method of talking generally used in Africa is the one of **negotiation in the neighbourhood**. It is a method which can be most effective, and therefore duly deserves the attention of the whole world.

Informal discussions Much of its success may be ascribed to its elemental simplicity, participatory involvement, adaptable flexibility and complete relevancy. Its commonsensical beginning is usually that individuals within their social context start discussing an emerging dispute. According to the circumstances the context can be a condensed family or an extended family, immediate neighbours or a larger neighbourhood, or a combination of family and neighbourhood. It can also be a smaller or larger organisation, like a school or a religious grouping.

Since all the people involved happen to be human-natured individuals, they will always have to contend with the temptation to degrade the discussion to ill-disposed gossip. If the social context is indeed taken seriously, however, this danger may be diminished. Instead of steering the discussion towards spite, or the apportioning of blame, it may be directed at a solution.

- Interest-based orientation towards future
- From its very beginning this process may be kept moving in a direction which differs from both adjudication and arbitration. Judges and umpires make decisions based on rules. They investigate past events, and their whole orientation is towards the past. But concerned family members and neighbours could envisage outcomes based on interests. They could maintain an orientation towards the future, looking forward to improved relations - not only between the disputants but also in the whole community who happens to be involved. And in most cases they will grant the disputing parties scope to make their own decisions. This forms a marked contrast with the judgemental procedure of imposing decisions on the parties (cf Gulliver 1979:17, Roberts 1979:77).
- Transition to negotiating
- Such interest related and forward looking discussions can move quite naturally into the mode of negotiating. But, just as the initial discussions, negotiation itself can begin and continue in a rather informal way. Effective negotiating talks are not dependent upon professionally designed methods and step-by-step manuals of instruction. However useful these may be, they may entice us to forget the unpredictable complexity of actual negotiations (cf Gulliver 1979:47). Informal, receptive and flexible ways of negotiating should therefore never be frowned upon. Even those who have a great deal of experience (and even book knowledge) of negotiation may do well to keep an open mind when involved in a negotiating event in real life. It does happen that experts, struggling to make something out of an untidy but perhaps fragile process, are surprised by the contributions of members of a family or a neighbourhood.
- Enlisting of mediators
- It can also happen, however, that all the informal discussions and negotiations do not lead to a satisfactory solution of the underlying problem. Then real mediating expertise may be enlisted more formally. But this formality is not one derived from professional accreditation. It is a formality that takes shape within the immediate social context. Its first implication is

that mediators are sought within the family or families concerned and/or within the neighbourhood concerned. The second implication is that people are looked for who enjoy social recognition for their experience and integrity. (If these qualities are present in a mediator, the issue of uninvolvedness is usually not regarded as important. A mediator from a particular family or neighbourhood will inevitably be associated with one of the disputing parties.) A third, obvious implication is that more than one mediator must be found. Usually a smaller or larger group is used, which may consist of people selected to help resolve a particular conflict, or of an already existing assembly or council of mediators (cf p 14 above).<sup>10</sup>

Elders as mediators All over Africa **elders are respected as trustworthy mediators**. Elderly people obviously have more decades of accumulated experience, and usually also a greater treasure of practical wisdom. Traditionally preference was given to men, but nowadays gender equity is becoming more widely accepted.

Roles of mediators Depending on traditions, circumstances and personalities, mediators are found in various roles. Apart from the pressurising or manipulating role already referred to (p 24 above), there are various leading roles in which mediators are allowed to make recommendations (like reciprocal offers or package deals), give assessments (of information or of proposals), or convey a suggestion on behalf of a party (who for face-saving reasons refrains from suggesting it themselves). Mediators may fulfil a facilitating role, by clarifying information, promoting clear communication, interpreting standpoints, summarising discussions, emphasising relevant norms or rules, envisaging the situation if an agreement is not reached, or repeating points of agreement already attained. Mediators may even limit themselves to a passive role, as when they are simply there to represent important shared values. Moreover, since the process of mediation does not have to follow a predetermined model, mediators are entitled to change their roles from time to time according to the needs they sense at various times (cf Gulliver 1979:226; Gulliver 1988:248, Deng 1996:22-33).

This does not mean that mediators may allow their personal preferences to determine their behaviour. It does mean, however, that the social context may at certain times imply shifts in approach or emphasis.

Social relatedness of each part of the conflict resolution talks

Although the entire process, from discussion through negotiation to mediation, is unprescribed, flexible and dynamic, and although it defies analysis (cf p 15 above), we may tentatively think in terms of constituent parts. This may give us a stimulating overview of the way in which **each contributing part of the conflict resolution talks is related to and influenced by the social context.**

Background exploring

When the background and causes of a conflict are explored (cf pp 20-21 above), the social situation of each individual or party is considered. This may of course be done in an apathetic way or in a prejudiced way, but often it is indeed done quite sympathetically and honestly. The idea is to form an impression of the interests and needs, aspirations and motivations of each party.

In all fairness to conflict resolution methods from abroad, we have to add that the probing of interests and needs is duly emphasised in most methods. There is, however, a subtle difference which may be spotted. According to the perspective of many imported models it is seen as an effort that has to be undertaken. It is usually listed as an important item of the information gathering stage. When social perspectives are taken seriously, however, there may be an already existent sensitivity to interests and needs. From the beginning of the conflict resolution process (see p 25 above) there may be an automatically present inclination to understand more about the inner motives of the parties.

Further talks

As the talking proceeds, an openness to feedback or influence from the social surroundings is maintained. This may lead to a modification of perceptions or positions. It is not only the mediators that can be receptive to new input (see p 26 above), but also the parties themselves. It is not only the constituencies of the parties whose reactions are acknowledged; the entire social group is regarded as a major constituency whose response is to be respected. After all, the solution that is worked out during the talks will have to be implemented in families or neighbourhoods that form part of the social network in the community.

Another important contribution which the community can make while the talks are in progress, is that of empowerment. It may become clear that a particular party feels insecure and acts unassertively in spite of the fact that they have a just case. At the talks the mediators may play their part to help such a party realise which power they and their just case are indeed wielding. If the mediators' efforts are then also endorsed by the community, it can strongly enhance the party's sense of empowerment and confidence, and increase the self-assertiveness of their behaviour.

- Decision making As the point of actual decision making is approached, even more attention could be given to considerations of social importance. Ongoing social relations and internal solidarity are crucial elements. Reasonable reciprocity is an option that can be strongly propagated from the social perspective. This too, is a possibility that is well known in models of negotiation and mediation used outside Africa. But there it is usually called by a name taken from the language of bargaining: trade-offs. The way of thinking seems to be more or less as follows: We (the one party) want you (the other party) to lower your demand, and so we offer you something which will hopefully induce you to do what we want. Africa's social approach may change the way of thinking to the following: Having looked at both sides, your community is suggesting that you (the one party) make this concession, and that it would then be fair to expect you (the other party) to respond by a reciprocating concession from your side. Here the overtones are not those of pressurising for own gain, but rather those of fair exchange for public recognition.
- Consensus seeking As a consequence of the social approach, the method generally preferred is to work towards consensus. This may develop into an extended search, for which much patience is needed (cf Mazrui et al 1993:2). But when the goal has been reached, the reward is real satisfaction. Every new consensual outcome confirms the validity and value of the time-proven tradition of consensus seeking. It gives all who participated the feeling that they have been involved in a thorough and worthwhile process. And it creates confidence that such a jointly developed decision will prove to be effective and long lasting.
- Affirming an When an agreement has eventually been reached, the good news should be

- agreement shared with the groups and communities concerned. Each particular society may have its appropriate ritual way of affirming such an agreement as a social contract. It could vary from a handshake in public to an elaborate ceremony as required by tradition. This event obviously serves a dual purpose. It spreads the news about the satisfactory conclusion of the conflict resolution process. And it places an additional obligation on the parties to observe the agreement, which has now become public knowledge.
- Assisting with implementing an agreement The society can therefore play a very important role when the agreement is implemented. From the beginning of this final stage, members of the families and the neighbourhood can check whether the parties are really doing everything to which they have committed themselves. If a party needs some face-saving, or empowerment, or encouragement, sympathetic members of the community can render their valuable assistance.
- Conclusion The advantages of all this social involvement throughout the conflict resolution process should be obvious. It can lead to a more profound and shared understanding of the conflict as it has arisen in a particular relational and socio-cultural context. It can encourage the acceptance of aims which deliberately include the relational life after the resolving of the conflict. It can make the conflict resolving talks participatory in a fuller sense of the word than just the inclusion of the parties and the mediators. It can promote a sense of belonging, which, in turn, may contribute to the restoring, maintenance and building of relationships.

### **3.2 MAKING POLITICAL STRUCTURES MORE CONDUCTIVE TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

- Continued importance of social context In the previous section we have looked at the value of the social perspective for conflict resolution, mainly in smaller communities. As we now begin to concentrate more on conflict resolution in larger sectors of the political arena, we should not lose sight of the social context, however. All over the world political life and social life are obviously interrelated. But in Africa there is apparently an even stronger link.

Group-centredness: advantages and disadvantages

In Africa the undisputed nucleus around which social, economic and political activity is centred, is **the group**. Groups of various kinds are prevalent everywhere. They derive their cohesiveness from bonds of kinship, gender, age, locality, utility, occupation, language, culture, faith or politics, or from the affinity of voluntary association (cf Chazan et al 1988:72-94).

Such a group-centredness can bring about great advantages. It can safeguard people from the competitiveness and divisiveness of individualism and selfishness. By experiencing the thrill of group dynamics people can be empowered and inspired to act co-operatively and collectively. But gregariousness may also have its disadvantages. A group may become so tied up with their own concerns that they may develop attitudes of exclusiveness and rivalry. They may even succumb to the subtle temptations of groupishness which could exhibit, on a larger scale, the irritable traits of selfishness.

One particular version of group dynamics is the world-wide phenomenon of young men showing off their mettle as warriors. In some cultural or ethnic settings this virile aggressiveness can be incited strongly by peer pressure (cf Deng 1996:47-48, with regard to Nilotic society). It may also be curbed, however, by elders and leaders with their mature experience of peace-making (cf Deng 1996:48).

The political life of a country can thus benefit greatly from co-operative, inclusive groups and networks. But it can also encounter severe problems when obstinate factions use their energy in centrifugal ways. Theoretically it may appear easier to run a country composed of groups than one filled with individuals. In actual practice, however, it could often be the other way round. Sometimes politicians are even tormented by both: difficult groups *and* difficult individuals dominating such groups.

Intergroup conflicts can cause serious local or regional problems. They may escalate into intranational conflicts. On a continent with very large numbers of language groups (more than 800, see p 23 above), minority groups (74 minorities at risk in 29 countries south of the Sahara, according to Brown & Schraub 1992:55), political and local groups, politicians often have to cope with tremendous responsibilities. Their onerous tasks usually include the



demanding assignment of trying to reconcile national priorities with group preferences and interests.

Social perspectives on causes of conflict... Nevertheless, the pre-eminence of groups in Africa can also provide political opportunities. At any rate, this group-mindedness definitely serves as an added incentive to take the social context seriously in the resolution of political conflict. When this is done, similar advantages as those discussed above (pp 20-22) can follow.

More light may be shed on background and on root causes. Behind party-political policies and popular ideologies real social needs may be found. Behind discrimination and exploitation there may be discovered a quest for power, influence and status (cf Tangri 1985:28-29).

...and aims of conflict resolution More constructive future interaction may be envisaged as a purpose. Wherever possible the improvement of intergroup and also international relations may be aimed at.

Selected guidelines from conflict resolution history With regard to methods of responding to political conflict, the social context remains important, but the historical context also comes into the picture. We have already briefly surveyed the developments, disasters and disappointments in the political history of Africa (pp 6-9 above). We have also outlined some salient points emerging from Africa's history of conflict and conflict resolution (pp 10-12 above).

If we now wish to concentrate on lessons in conflict resolution, it becomes a matter of eclectic selection. Those who want to learn more about the aggressive way of fighting and settling a dispute by mere victorious power, will be able to find prototypes in all the eras of Africa's history. Those who are interested in structurally violent methods of repressing opposition, will find examples from the earliest times of dominant and dominating tribes to the most recent history of one-party states. And those of us who are attracted to non-violent, problem-solving methods of participatory talking, will come across many and meaningful examples.

Apart from our imaginative reconstructions of the earliest neighbourhood talks, there is the classic account of the leopardskin chief among the Nuer of

the Sudan. This chief had the limited, but important function of initiating the discussion of a dispute. This was done with due regard to the social context. The chief went, with the plaintiff and some elders from her/his community, to the defendant's home, and requested him/her and his/her kinspeople to discuss the matter (Witty 1980:5).

Democracy as reducing *and* generating conflict Among hereditary leaders and kings there were those with the attitude and insight to talk problems and disputes over with their councils of experienced, elderly advisors. There were obviously also those leaders and kings who responded to conflicts as they saw fit, seldom if ever consulting others.

We may expect to find very good examples in the recent history of revived democracy. What we do find, however, are examples of both conflict resolution and conflict formation. In most cases the implementation of democracy was no panacea for all the suffering under imperialist colonialism (cf Lombard 1992:13). It did eliminate the main source of the conflict situation that had existed between colonised peoples and their foreign rulers. At the same time, however, the introduction of democracy caused new forms of conflict to appear on the scene.

“African democracy” Two different versions of democracy had the same effect. At first a well-intended attempt was made to develop an "African democracy". This movement was inspired by an allergy to foreign and imperfect models of democracy, and by a desire to reinstate a traditional African model oriented towards consensus and unity. Along these lines one-party systems were justified and implemented. The founding fathers of this one-party democracy praised it as a return to the happier past, when the elders used to sit under a big tree, and talk until they agree (Mpangala 1992:25-26).

Unfortunately, however, one-party states became authoritarian and conflict-generating centres. African democracy experienced a severe crisis, and was exposed to be not democracy, but merely the myth thereof (Mpangala 1992:28-31).

Multi-party democracy The second version of democracy which also caused conflict to arise, was the multi-party type. This was expected to supply the self-evident solution for the problems of one-partyism. It was supposed to be a more genuine kind of

democracy. But as its plausible theory was put into practice, various tensions, antagonisms, rivalries and clashes developed. Political leaders and parties were tempted to narrow their perspectives to tunnel visions of their own policies and positions, thereby ignoring the needs and interests of the people of their countries. Many became trapped in restricted ways of thinking, which often prove to be a sure recipe for conflict.

More types of democracy Disappointments with two versions of democracy do not have to result in a discrediting of all democracy. Experiments could still be made with various other models. The possibilities that may be explored include more than just the participatory and representative ways of organising a democratic system (cf Held & Pollitt 1986:7). What deserves special attention is the way in which each underlying value system gives rise to a particular design of democracy (cf Malan 1993:2-4,5-7<sup>11</sup>). A basic decision could therefore be made in favour of an appropriate value system, which would then imply the choice of a concomitant model of democracy.

Creative planning transcending democracy Current thinking among leaders in Africa seems to be even more creative, however. The importance of democracy and democratising is recognised, but what is really aimed at is good governance and accountability (cf Botha 1992:47). At the same time the problems of intrastate and interstate conflict are taken seriously, and the interrelatedness of effective state form and effective conflict prevention and resolution is being discussed.

Developing a new type of state In this way more is done than just selecting and reusing constructive lessons from the past. Definite planning for the future is undertaken by leaders who have become convinced that state organisation and conflict resolution are undoubtedly interrelated.

Valuable experience Leaders in Africa are indeed well equipped to incorporate precautions against unnecessary conflict into the design of a new form of government. Condensed into a single lifetime, the senior leaders have had first-hand experience of the following (cf Chazan et al 1988:40-64):

Bureaucratic, administrative hierarchies who had to implement decisions made by the partially democratic<sup>12</sup> governments of the respective foreign powers

Nationalist movements and parties, extra-parliamentary activism and armed struggles during, and especially towards the end of the period of imperial rule

Pre-independence negotiations and elections which put new forms of government (usually a parliamentary democracy from abroad, sometimes with peculiar adaptations) and new, indigenous incumbents of governmental positions in place

Post-independence problems (especially the great expectations and hasty demands of liberated peoples, and the power- and status-greedy rivalries of leaders and parties) for which solutions were sought in the centralisation and consolidation of power in single parties and/or dominant leaders, and also in the elaboration of bureaucracies and security forces

Further political problems (as the authoritarianism of leaders and the distrust of followers) and economic problems (as the overspending of governments, the personal enrichment of leaders, and the chronic poverty of populations) which prompted a return to greater decentralisation and participation (by more parties and more advisors)

As they were involved in these successive stages, African leaders gained a remarkable experience, perhaps unparalleled anywhere else, of the workings of foreign and indigenous power. They could have observed the use and the misuse of both power from without and power from within. After everything they had to go through they may probably go along with the saying that all conflicts are about power and resources, and that those about resources are about power too. African leaders are therefore in a quite unique position to develop political structures which could help to reduce conflict and to promote conflict resolution.

Inclusive  
democracy

What has already been recommended, is firstly **a more inclusive and integrative type of democracy**. Democracy is accepted as a reality that has come to stay. It is recognised in its essential universality (cf Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:10-11). Its roots in early traditions from Africa are acknowledged, and

the fact that particular versions were brought into Africa from Europe is not regarded to be a serious drawback.

Africa has every right and reason, therefore, to design and develop home-grown versions of democracy. The so-called "Western" model of democracy is decidedly too individualistic and legalistic for Africa. What should emerge from the socio-political context of Africa is a version which will do justice, and give full scope to the community and its traditions (cf Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:11).

Recommendations at consultations and conferences

It is highly significant, therefore, that a recent (1992) high-level consultation<sup>13</sup> of almost 30 political, social and intellectual leaders from more than 10 West, Central, East, South and North African countries (and a few international participants) strongly recommended that multi-party democracy in Africa should become more inclusive and guarantee the full participation of minorities (cf Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:12). Already in the opening address of this consultation, the secretary-general of the Organisation of African Unity, His Excellency Dr Salim Ahmed Salim, emphasised that people across the continent are craving for the greater democratisation of society, and that a more inclusive culture of democracy is imperatively needed - one in which the dissenting views of minorities are not regarded as threats, but as essential contributions to the democratic process (Salim 1993:5).

At subsequent consultations in the same series<sup>14</sup> more calls were heard for democratic practices and institutions (cf Mazrui et al 1993:4), and for a culture of democracy, justice, tolerance and peace (cf Ocaya-Lakidi 1996:26). And clear, courageous voices were heard about the issue of sovereignty. At the Addis Ababa Consultation it was agreed that, while sovereignty had to be respected as governing principle in interstate relations, the notion was becoming more relative and may require re-examination (cf Mazrui et al 1993:12). During the Cairo Consultation it was recognised that there is wide acceptance in Africa that national sovereignty is not absolute (cf Ocaya-Lakidi 1996:19).

At recent conferences in Southern Africa more recommendations on political structures were made. At one<sup>15</sup> of these the Namibian Minister of Foreign

Affairs, the Honourable Mr Theo-Ben Guribab, referred to the intensifying debate on democracy in Africa, expressed the hope that the young Namibian democracy could contribute to it, and admitted that his government had already received calls to broaden the base of participation and affluence (Lombard 1992:2). In the keynote address at the same conference, Prof Wamba dia Wamba, from the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, propagated the search for a new mode of politics in which the discussing and resolving of problems within the community, as the traditional house palaver and village assembly, could be reinstated (Lombard 1992:2).

At another conference<sup>16</sup> the current Honourable President of South Africa, Dr Nelson Mandela, then in his capacity as President of the African National Congress, emphasised the absolute necessity of an inclusive multi-party democracy. He shared his party's conviction that the mosaic of South African Parties should be adequately represented at all levels of government. He reminded the conference about the African National Congress's pioneering choice and sustained commitment to proportional representation. And he stressed the essential interrelatedness of multi-party democracy and political tolerance (Mandela 1992:53-54).

At the Consultative Meeting in preparation for the First African Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution<sup>17</sup> the Head of the Conflict Management Division of the Organisation of African Unity, Dr Christopher J Bakwesegha, strongly emphasised the crucial importance of a democratic culture which would counteract vindictiveness and promote forgiveness and reconciliation.

Democratic atmosphere      What is envisaged in all these recommendations and emphases is definitely not an opportunistic, superficial, nominal democracy to serve the purposes of a political party or leader. The objective is clearly a genuine democracy with long-term sustainability (cf Mandela 1993:255). It is the democratic atmosphere in which minorities are not forgotten once a majority party has won an election. Such an atmosphere even includes the willingness to empower minorities, and the determination to prevent the abuse of power by the powerful (cf Dlamini 1992:19). Nation building and national unity are regarded as important goals, but not as idols (cf Mandela 1992:53-54). Both unity and diversity are taken seriously.

Practical measures also needed More is needed than just an atmosphere, however. Africa south of its dividing desert, which also forms an ethnic and religious dividing line (Brown & Schraub 1992:82), has been identified as the world region with the largest number of minorities at risk (Brown & Schraub 1992:81). Some small consolation may be found in the observation that almost all countries in the whole world are ethnically divided (Lijphart 1990:491<sup>18</sup>). But the excessive topiecedness Africa is suffering from is still mainly a result of the arbitrary boundaries which the empire-building European powers drew on paper during their notorious scramble for Africa (cf Oliver & Atmore 1972:103-127<sup>19</sup>). Although ideals of African unity, both nationally and continentally, were optimistically formed in the 1960s, and although the Organisation of African Unity was established (1963), not much could in fact be done about all the disuniting frontiers (cf Mpangala 1992:26; Africa Leadership Forum 1991:32). This still prevailing fragmentation and conglomeration of peoples and groups call for more pragmatic measures than just sympathy and goodwill. Moreover, it has been observed that regions tend to become more assertive about their interests, and that some even threaten with secession (cf Anglin 1993:11, Boulding 1992:xiii).

The situations and aspirations of the constituent parts of a population have to be duly recognised and considered. The Arusha consultation (see p 37 above) did in fact respond to this need. Among the measures proposed to prevent conflict were the following:

The fair and equitable treatment of a country's regions (Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:9)

Sufficient political and administrative decentralisation to satisfy regional aspirations, together with an integrative central authority (Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:15).

New state form: democracy *and* decentralisation? African intellectuals were also challenged to propose new models of an African state, and a general preference was expressed for a state that would be strong and democratic, but have **an appropriate degree of decentralisation** (Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:22,9).

Inclusive democracy and inclusive decentralisation

Careful planning will obviously be necessary to ensure that such decentralising does not function divisively, but as integratively as possible. Also necessary, self-evidently, is that the democracy of the state concerned should be of an integrative type. It may be useful to note that in the example of different types of democracy given in endnote 11 the four segregative versions are ones in which the *power* of the people is usurped by an individual or a group. The three integrative types are those in which the emphasis seems to fall on effective *organisation*, in order to facilitate, respectively, human rights and human relations, responsibility and functionality, consensus and co-operation (Malan 1993:3-4,10). This implies that a segregative type of democracy could be made more integrative when the greed for power has been replaced by a commitment to organisation. And when this orientation pervades in a democratic system, it should increase the viability of any project of decentralisation. Decentralising may then be regarded, not as a devolution of power, but as a delegation of organisational tasks.

Accountability of leaders and followers

Secondly, and linked to the recommendation of inclusive democracy (starting on p 36 above), it has been recommended that **the responsibilities of leaders and followers** be strongly and persistently emphasised. This call to accountability can obviously be based on traditions from the remote past and experiences in the recent past. The indications we have about the early times seem to point to a well developed sense of responsibility which leaders had towards their communities. In the smaller sized groups of those days it was fairly self-evident that a leader could not simply follow his whims and idiosyncrasies and get away with it. In most cases, therefore, leaders were apparently very much aware of their answerability to their followers, and strove to maintain a significant degree of accountability (cf Botha 1992:38, Lombard 1992:3). Exceptions were probably the situations where hereditary leaders were regarded as uncriticisable fixtures, or where they were tolerated in spite of unpopular behaviour (cf p 33 above).

The recent background of the emphasis on accountability can mainly be found in the disappointments of the post-independence period (see p 36 above). In the case of some of the experiments with autocratic (or perhaps oligarchic) decision making, attempts were made to supply a rationale (see, for instance, the concept of African democracy, referred to on p 33 above).



For some of the extravagances excuses could possibly have been elicited from traditions of honour, but whether these were ever swallowed by a destitute population is doubtful. In many (but not all) cases, therefore, the people's high expectations of having their own, responsible leaders instead of irresponsible foreigners, often dwindled, while disillusionment and distrust grew.

Against such a background it is perfectly understandable that contemporary leaders and thinkers are appealing to the governments and the governed peoples of Africa to take their accountability, in both directions, very, very seriously. At the Arusha consultation (p 37 above), the secretary-general of the Organisation of African Unity more than once emphasised the responsibilities of governments and the obligations of the people (Salim 1993:5), and then clinched this point by stating the need for transparent governments who are accountable to the people (Salim 1993:6). And at the Johannesburg consultation (p 39 above) it was emphasised that responsibility is an integral part of a government's sovereignty, and the theme eventually recommended for the first African Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution was precisely: *State, Sovereignty and Responsibility* (cf ACCORD 1996b).

The clear message to leaders, at all levels, is that the leadership entrusted to them is no licence to dominate others, as if they were their subordinates. It is essentially a calling to serve their people, who are indeed their compatriots. They are reminded that sovereignty is not the monopoly of the government, but has to be shared with the peoples of the country concerned.

A message is also addressed to the citizens across each country, however. They have to realise that it is not only a matter of human rights, but also of human responsibilities; not only a matter of citizenship, but also one of obligations to the state. As democratically governed and democratically co-existing people they are responsible for mutual understanding and constructive interaction.

Conclusion All this political wisdom that has developed out of Africa's traditions and experience is exceptionally remarkable and relevant. What is especially striking and valuable, is that it combines and integrates structures and

attitudes. The time-proven structure of democracy is improved by permeating it with the attitude of inclusiveness. Responding to a real need where different and also diverse groups of people have to be included in a unifying structure, the method of decentralisation is recommended. But here too the attitude of inclusiveness is regarded as a self-evident accompaniment, in order to counteract any possible separatist tendencies. This orientation to problem and conflict prevention is another mark of the wisdom radiating from this style of political planning. And once again it may be emphasised that the context out of which such wisdom emerges, is nothing but the social context which Africa is constantly taking seriously. It is real life remembering, real life thinking and real life planning that can lead to wisdom of this rare quality.

### **3.3 FINDING WAYS OF ADDRESSING AND EVENTUALLY SATISFYING REAL ECONOMIC NEEDS**

Africa's  
economic  
history

When we survey Africa's history (as on pp 6-12 above), we are not only reminded of political events and eras, but also of economic situations and developments. According to our tentative, but fairly obvious, reconstruction, the earliest part of Africa's economic history consisted of a very long time of sometimes more and often less satisfactory subsistence. Since ancient times, however, natural resources were utilised for socio-economic developments in various parts of Africa. Most well known are the prosperous economy, impressive architecture and long-lasting civilisation of Egypt. But enough is also known and conjectured about early kingdoms, cities, art and achievements in West, East and Southern Africa. Trans-Saharan trade and later also trade through coastal centres covered about ten centuries prior to the century of colonial "development" and disadvantage.

Africa's  
current  
economic  
situation

These periods form the background to the considerable complexity of Africa's current economic situation. At the one extreme there is the seemingly everywhere present phenomenon of exploited and exploded populations in severe poverty. Frustrating crises, some due to drought, plague or other natural disasters, others due to revengeful wars, short-sighted policies or other human fallacies, follow one another in quick succession, or become chronic ordeals. Foreign aid programmes do provide some relief, but unfortunately they also offer loopholes for opportunism and corruption. At

the other extreme there is the exaggerated affluence of minorities of elites, both of foreign and African origin, who do not appear to be disturbed by their existing wealth or their craving for more. Then, at various ideological distances from such unashamed opulence, several degrees of disentanglement from luxury are found. This process too is quite complicated. Previously disadvantaged people appropriate themselves the right to enjoy privileges they had been deprived of. And previously privileged people avoid the impression of grudging others the advantages they themselves have been used to (cf Malan 1994:4-5 for an example from South Africa). Nevertheless there seems to be a growing acknowledgement, among people of both previous camps, that some realistic degree of scaling up or down towards a more feasible average is necessary. Also between the extremes of an allergy to imported benefits and a loyalty to own traditions, it seems as if a compromising option is gaining support: foreign extravagance should be rejected and local traditions endorsed, but worthwhile assets from abroad may be retained.

Economic deprivation as major source of conflict

These economic complexities may differ from country to country. But the problem of poverty, mentioned at the beginning of the previous paragraph, seems to be a common and difficult problem. It is easy to identify and deplore, but not so easy to solve. To a large extent the emergence and escalation of this problem can be charged to economic injustices inflicted on people, especially (but not only) during the colonial period. Economic need has been, and still is, a major source of dissatisfaction, frustration, hostility and conflict in Africa (cf Bakwesegha 1993:380). For the so-called Third World in general, it has already been designated as the principal cause of regional conflict (Brown & Schraub 1992:13, cf Anglin 1993:13). At the Arusha consultation this issue received serious attention indeed. The immediate causes of conflicts were grouped into three categories, and economic deprivation appeared in all three. It is one of the negative legacies of colonialism. It leads to a sense of injustice - both when the people concerned are denied equitable access to resources or opportunities, and when they are deprived of a reasonable means of livelihood. It can result from external factors such as a drop in prices or a change in the policy of a foreign company (cf Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:7-8). It has to be added, however, that too often the economic predicament of people is exploited or even exacerbated by some politicians.

Economic development as conflict-preventing project	Such true insight obviously prompts leaders in Africa to realise that the effective addressing of basic, human, economic needs can become a far-reaching conflict resolving and conflict preventing factor. It is given high priority, and economic development is often mentioned in the same breath with political reform (cf Salim 1993:5, Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:9,22). The Arusha consultation stressed in the third of its ten main recommendations that political and economic reforms should be undertaken simultaneously to ensure that democracy becomes really effective (Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:22). In the keynote address at the Cairo consultation (cf endnote 14) it was emphasised that the increased focus on socio-economic development, stability and peace is based on insights resulting from the wisdom of centuries (Moussa 1996:3; cf Ocaya-Lakidi 1996:24). At the 1996 Cape Town consultation <sup>20</sup> the link between economic development on the one hand and conflict prevention and resolution on the other was once again highlighted (cf International Peace Academy and Organization of African Unity 1996:13)
Realism and responsibility	Such recommendations made at consultations and conferences are no abstract or academic exercises, however. Challenging realities like the following have to be reckoned with: <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Developmental backlogs affecting huge numbers of people, so that concerted efforts spread over a long enough time will apparently be needed to redress them (cf Africa Leadership Forum 1991:33-34)</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Economic development growing at lower rates than populations (cf Anglin 1993:6<sup>21</sup>)</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Foreign aid becoming less readily available, and becoming more stringent as stipulations enforcing the so-called structural adjustment packages are coupled to it (Moshi 1992:103-109, Anglin 1993:7, Nathan &amp; Honwana 1995:12-13<sup>22</sup>)</p>
Existential perspective on human needs	Therefore, when leaders and governments decide to work towards a drastically improved economic situation, they have to be totally realistic. They may be cautiously optimistic about loans or contributions from foreign sources, although probably smaller than previously, but they have to accept

that the major responsibility lies in their own country or countries. They also have to realise that, as in most other cases, this responsibility has both structural and attitudinal implications.

A new vision of development

But precisely here, Africa's contextual approach and relational wisdom can again make a crucial difference. Together with structural changes that can help generate more resources and fulfil urgent material needs, Africa can come up with vital contributions in the existential dimension. Africa has a special way of **taking human needs seriously in the conflict resolution process**. In Africa it is not just a recommended method about which books are written. It is **a self-evident, essential part of living together**.

By propagating *and living* this attitude, Africa has brought about an astonishing change in perception. The whole concept of *development* which was despised in colonial times has been turned into a vision beckoning to an exciting future. Then it was frowned upon because it was dictated and enforced by foreigners who used their own level of "development" as a standard and regarded it as their duty to "elevate" others to the same level (cf Malan 1994:4). Now it is regarded as a desired goal to which all human beings should aspire with an inner motivation. There is a commitment to development as an essential part of human living, and to specific models which have been democratically developed.

Interrelated structural and attitudinal approaches

Two very good, recent examples of integrated structural and attitudinal approaches are found in the Kampala Document and the South African Reconstruction and Development Programme.

In the Kampala Document Africa's internalisation and ownership of security, stability, development and co-operation is emphasised by the use of *calabash* in each of the four section headings. In the introductory part of the *Development calabash* it is emphasised that the aim of development, and more specifically *people-centred development*, was the main reason for initiating the entire process around the four key concepts (Africa Leadership Forum 1991:33). On the same introductory page five basic principles are listed, of which the middle three, on structural planning, are framed by the first and the last, on the attitudes of self-reliance and responsibility. Then, when the implications of these principles are outlined and elaborated,

practical plans and inner driving forces are interrelated, either directly or by implication. For the implementation of *self-reliance*, meaningful recommendations are made, for instance about comprehensive literacy, quality education and training (including science and technology), entrepreneurial development, agricultural research, food self-sufficiency and export, and balanced diets incorporating traditional foods. With regard to *responsibility* pertinent suggestions about population planning and reforestation are made (Africa Leadership Forum 1991:33-42, cf Malan 1994:3).

The current South African Reconstruction and Development Programme has been built on the tradition of the 1955 Freedom Charter (African National Congress 1994:Preface by President Mandela). As the Freedom Charter was compiled in a remarkably democratic way (cf Polley 1988:16), so the policy framework of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (African National Congress 1994) has been drafted, edited five times, and published in the spirit of consultation. Further democratic participation is envisaged and invited (African National Congress 1994:59,147). The thrust of the Programme, and the attitude in which it is propagated, is an orientation towards a better life for all in a democratic and developing new South Africa (although, obviously, the injustice and underdevelopment of the old South Africa is implied by the very name of the Programme).

What these two examples clearly seem to endorse, is the wisdom and value of integrating specialisation and social-mindedness. They show how economists and politicians in Africa are not only specialised in the theory and practice of their particular fields, *but also* inherently aware of the importance of human attitudes and relations. Taking the social context, and also human nature, seriously, they can foresee opportunities as well as difficulties. Such insight enables them to encourage public co-operation and avoid anticipated problems.

Inferences about work ethic and standard of living

In this regard two observations may be added. They have to be mentioned (tentatively), however, since they are related to the already discussed (on p 45 above) problems surrounding access to privileges. But to ignore these issues may only precipitate dissension and discord at later, and perhaps more critical, stages.

The first of these issues is the attitude to work. The inference apparently emerging from Africa's original traditions, varied experience and profound insight is that Africa is in a unique position to develop and promote a home-bred approach. Among other possible elements, two important ingredients of such an orientation seem to be the following:

An encouraging emphasis on enough diligence and discipline

Serious warnings against the First and Second World mentality of individualistic, greedy competitiveness and upwardly mobile self-assertiveness<sup>23</sup>

The second issue is the attitude towards a standard of living. Here a similarly patterned inference seems to be:

Self-evident essentials and enough convenience may surely be endorsed.

But the absurdities of unnecessary luxury deserve to be criticised and even ridiculed.

**Conclusion** Whether such inferences may indeed be derived from past and present views found in Africa could of course be debated. But regardless of different opinions on these issues, a generally acceptable conclusion may be that the people and the leaders of Africa are inherently concerned about human needs and interests, which include real economic needs. And that accordingly development projects are not simply regarded as the improvement of procedures and structures. Attitudinal challenges, through which deep-rooted causes of economic backlogs may be faced, are seriously taken into consideration.

### **3.4 TAKING ETHNIC LOYALTIES INTO CONSIDERATION**

**Ethnic diversity and human unity** On a planet full of amazing variety in every field, ethnicity should not surprise us (cf Sachs 1992:35). In a world where almost all countries seem to be ethnically diverse (Esman 1990:491, Brown & Schraub 1992:52-53, Boulding 1992:xiii), ethnic issues may be expected to appear at all times and

places. But in this same diversified world there are also more than enough bonds of similarity, especially among us as human beings. Diversity and unity should indeed be regarded as an interrelated pair of phenomena.

Salient differences and concealed similarities

Unfortunately, however, we are often tempted to concentrate more on diversity than on unity. This tendency can be readily understood in the light of the fact that differences are usually quite conspicuous, while similarities often remain concealed. In our whole environment, for instance, we observe remarkable varieties of climate and weather, flora and fauna, scenery and architecture. In each of these cases, closer investigation is needed to reveal all the underlying correspondences.

After centuries of scientific research we do understand that absolutely everything is made up of just over a hundred basic chemical elements, consisting of the same sub-atomic particles combined in different patterns. And that every single living being owes its appearance and characteristics to the DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) design embedded in all its cells. But for most of us these inherent connections just remain book knowledge about invisible similarities. Some of us are impressed by the interesting information on the more visible likenesses in the composition and functioning of our human bodies. On the whole, however, we are more strongly influenced by all the salient differences around us and among us. We are inclined to take individuality and ethnicity more seriously than our essential commonality (cf Rex & Mason 1986:224, McCall 1995:230).

Past and present pre-occupation with ethnic sentiments

Such a preoccupation with ethnic distinctions is also encouraged, perhaps quite strongly, by what we learn from our traditions and history. In most cases the traditions handed down to us by previous generations are the customs and ideologies of one particular group (cf Roberts 1979:34-35), often precisely an ethnic group (cf Tonkin et al 1989:1,5). History is usually presented to us from an ethnic perspective. Its core content is often an account of ethnic tensions, conflicts and wars. The main actors in the historical narrative are mostly the political leaders of the nations concerned, as well as the military commanders and their forces.

This ethnic orientation is not only typical of the recorded history of the past; it is also prominent in the present process of history in the making. It is



popularised by all the ethnically prejudiced news items disseminated by the media to a fairly uncritical public. It is endorsed by all political propaganda in which ethnic sentiments are used, whether validly or selfishly. It is exploited by those politicians who have engaged themselves in a reckless hunt for more power and prestige (cf McCall 1995:228).

An ancient phenomenon? With regard to the history of Africa, the debate prompting question has been asked whether ethnicity is an ancient or a recent phenomenon.

There are indications that the notion of ethnicity can be traced far back in Africa's history. It may surely be assumed that group, tribal and ethnic loyalties have asserted themselves since ancient times (cf Omotoso 1994:70). It is possible, for instance, that in the early kingdoms more was propagated than just allegiance to the king. Such loyalty could very well have been supplemented with ethnic fidelity and/or cultural allegiance. Evidence has been found of affinities which developed among peoples who lived in the same regions and who shared similar cultural traditions and socio-economic practices (cf Chazan et al 1988:103).

More pronounced ethnic awareness caused by colonialism? The point has also been made, however, that ethnicity is of relatively recent origin (cf Skinner 1975:135,142, Chazan et al 1988:103). There are indeed indications that the awareness of being a cultural and/or ethnic group distinct from other groups was especially caused by happenings during the colonial period (cf Tangri 1985:85). In their notoriously greedy scramble for Africa the empire builders mapped out colonies according to their power game successes and not necessarily according to the territorial claims of the people involved (cf pp 11-12 above, and Brown & Schraub 1992:81). In most, if not all, cases the demarcation of colonies therefore had a dual effect: it imposed a foreign rule on people who had used to be independent, and it aroused a stronger sense of nationhood among groups who had probably been little concerned about national identities (cf Du Toit 1978:11).

Later on, as the colonial powers were establishing their power and resource bases in their colonies, they often found it advantageous to pay tribute to ethnic legacies. In some cases they invoked ethnic arguments to discourage any intermingling between their own so-called superior cultures and the cultures of the indigenous population. In other cases they used similar

arguments to try and justify strategies of dividing (into ethnic entities) and ruling. A glaring example of both these misuses of ethnic considerations is found in the preoccupation with separatedness (apartheid) in the ideology of the old, undemocratic South Africa.

- Post-colonial  
ethnicism and  
ethnicity
- A possible conclusion could be that pre-existent ethnic affinities were boosted during the colonial period towards more pronounced ethnicism (in a negative sense) and ethnicity (in a positive sense). It could then have been expected to find the same phenomena extended into the post-colonial period (cf Chazan et al 1988:103, Skinner 1975:144,149). As leaders and followers were regaining their independence, they found themselves in new and highly competitive struggles for alluring status and power, as well as for scarce resources (cf Tinker 1977:63). In such circumstances they often found it expedient to utilise tribal or ethnic sentiments and emotions. Several elections have indeed produced clear evidence of tribal or ethnic voting (cf Africa confidential 1980:2, Levy 1993:17, Giliomee 1989:13).
- Ideological  
alternatives
- In the past hundred years two otherwise conflicting ideologies both played an influential role to belittle ethnicity. Capitalist liberalism propagated *individual* initiative, while Marxist socialism devised a strategy of *class* struggle (cf Esman 1990:56, Chazan et al 1988:112). But, in spite of apparent short-term successes, such ideological pressurising failed in the longer run to suppress the latent power of ethnic fervour. As modern states began replacing colonial regimes, state-building enterprises inevitably clashed with nation-building ideals wherever a single state harboured more than one nation (cf Boulding 1992:19). Ethnic aspirations surfaced and accumulated (cf Esman 1990:58-59), developing into what is now generally known as the ethnic revival. This emerged in the form of mounting tensions, and led, in several cases, to dramatic outbursts of irrepressible forces. Such happenings are usually not self-contained, but often prove to be contagious, causing similar responses among other ethnic groups who feel disadvantaged or even threatened, or perhaps just ignored.
- Africa's un-  
generalisable  
variety
- Such a brief overview should be enough to prevent us from making sweeping statements on ethnic problems and solutions in Africa. It seems to be clear that through the whole history of Africa examples may be found of interethnic aloofness and hostility, but also of approachableness and

conciliation. In any case, Africa happens to be a continent harbouring a large number of states (53 of the world's 170 plus) and distinguishable groups (about 800 of the global mosaic of more than 5000 (cf endnote 18). It is therefore completely out of the question to capture Africa's variety of ethnic stories and situations in convenient generalisations.

Evading the issue? For our present purpose, one possibility would therefore be to refrain from drawing any conclusions. There are enough excuses for evading the ethnic issue altogether.

Apart from the bewildering complexity of ethnic realities and experiences in Africa, there is also the confusing array of assumptions and perceptions in the whole field of ethnic studies. The meaning and use of concepts like *ethnic* and *ethnicity* have been and are still being debated (cf Enloe 1973:xi; Du Toit 1978:1-11). Some approach the topic from a cultural and some from a political perspective (cf Epstein 1978:95-96). Others pay more attention to the ways in which real people *identify themselves* as an ethnic group (cf Epstein 1978:96). And if one ventures into the literature available in this field, you are struck by viewpoints, examples and findings which complement but also contradict each other. Both writer and reader (probably including the present writer and reader) may end up with some tentative conclusions and several tenacious confusions.

Moreover, while all this research is taking place, the daily news frustrates us with an apparently never ending spate of ethnically inspired incidents, disputes and wars. It is quite understandable, therefore, if people try to avoid ethnic issues as far as possible. I have to admit that as I was drafting one version of this chapter after the other, I felt tempted to leave it out altogether!

An interesting and intriguing dimension? There is also another and much more demanding option, however. In spite of all its perplexing problems, ethnicity may be regarded as a fascinating phenomenon, both world-wide and particularly also Africa-wide. We may, therefore, accept the dual challenge of exploring this inevitable aspect of our human existence, and of undertaking this task within the context of Africa (cf Skinner 1975:153).

Whatever one does, will surely be criticised. One could, for instance, aim at an overview of the whole spectrum of approaches to the issue of ethnicity. At the one extreme Africa has its groups who propagate and defend ethnic values and aims as if they were ordained to be unchangeable and non-negotiable. And at the other end there are those who downplay ethnic considerations, as if there were reasons to be ashamed of them. In between there will be enough examples of various degrees of ethnic pride and ethnic modesty. Such an overview, as any survey, may obviously have defects of incompleteness, superficiality or unoriginality.

A more meaningful way could be that of searching for and highlighting wise approaches and responses. This method may of course be censured as mere eclecticism. It may indeed deserve such a label, but could nevertheless serve the purpose of gaining valuable insights and skills which may be used in the present time of ethnic revival, and probably also in the foreseeable future.

A general recognition of ethnicity? Opting for this method, with all the risks involved, I am urged to share the following observation which I find both common-sensical and working-hypothetical: **In Africa a definite tendency is revealed to acknowledge and respect the reality of ethnicity.** Such a sentence should obviously not be interpreted as if it were a proven conclusion. Enough examples can be found of different trends, and especially also of tendencies towards hard-line ethnicism. We have to remember, however, that looking for strands of wisdom is a totally different procedure than proving or disproving rules. What may therefore be more relevant at this point would be to emphasise my rationale for the above observation.

Ethnic trends when the OAU was founded A self-evident and convincing starting point for such a rationale is provided by the ethnic and trans-ethnic philosophy of the Organisation of African Unity. This Organisation very expediently appeared on the complex scene of Africa at a critical juncture. It was when (in 1963) the process of liberation from colonialism was gaining momentum. The new era of independence was not merely being ushered in, but almost rushed into. The racial division between Africans and Europeans that was conspicuously prominent during the colonial period (cf Tangri 1985:84) began fading away. It was replaced, however, by the revival of ethnic trends, and even by tribalistic opportunism.

In political rhetoric tribalism was openly denounced, but in reality many political leaders used it covertly to gain support (cf Tangri 1985:34).

An Organisation promoting unity while recognising diversity

It was therefore a wise move when the Organisation of African Unity was initiated by far-sighted leaders. In a remarkably relevant way they began providing guidance with regard to the challenges of diversity and unity. *Unity* was appropriately chosen as *the* key word in the name of the Organisation. Inevitably, however, the adjective *African* brought the diversity of countries and cultures into the name. But then, in a strikingly optimistic way, the preceding preposition decided upon was *of*, and not *for*. The assumption must have been that it was unnecessary to work *for* an envisaged unity, but that the presence *of* an already existing unity could be taken for granted.

It can surely be said that since its founding the Organisation of African Unity has stood for and worked for a realistic, dynamic unity (cf Moussa 1996:3). Unity was not absolutised as an abstract entity. Its relativity was duly recognised, as was clearly shown by the way in which the sovereignty of each Member State was consistently honoured. In terms of our present discussion, the Organisation of African Unity realised that the issue of ethnicity always functions along the sliding scale of a continuum, ranging from an all-encompassing internationalism or planethood (cf Ferencz & Keyes 1991) to a solipsistic individualism. Between the extremes of undiversified unity and ununified diversity, the Organisation of African Unity opted for a territorial unity (cf Tinker 1985:105) while fully realising the presence and power of separatist tendencies (cf Salim 1993:4-5).

Addressing the roots of separatism

Regional, national or even tribal interests were not ignored or wished away. Instead, the conflict resolving and thereby unifying role of the Organisation of African Unity was recently described by its experienced secretary-general as that of addressing the underlying causes of such separatism. He correctly emphasised the crucial needs for both political and economic reform (Salim 1993:5, cf p 46 above). The political vision he endorsed was centred on a culture of democracy in which dissenting opinion would be taken seriously. He went a step further than merely emphasising political tolerance. He showed how differing views were in fact *essential* elements in a truly democratic process (Salim 1993:5).

Democracy and decentralisation      Such a leading voice is fortunately not a solitary voice. Similar views have been heard at high-level consultations and widely supported conferences. One of the wise recommendations of the high-level consultation in Arusha has already been referred to (p 41 above), in which the general preference was expressed for a properly democratic but appropriately decentralised state. Another recommendation of this consultation highlighted the importance of guaranteeing the full participation of minorities (Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:12), which are often nothing else than ethnic minorities. Also recommended was formal education of individuals and groups towards better understanding one another, avoiding negative stereotypes, and respecting cultural diversity (Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:15). Between these lines mutual understanding between ethnic groups, and mutual respect for ethnic diversity might most probably also be read.

Ethnic problems and sensitivities      At the Johannesburg consultation (cf p 39 above) difficult questions about ethnicity were raised and possible answers were given. Note was taken of countries where ethnic dominance has created severe problems. It was acceded that ethnicity was manipulated by leaders, but also that there *are* reasons for ethnic sensitivities.

Recognition of ethnic interests      Then, at the first African Conference for Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution<sup>24</sup> itself, ethnicity related problems and their solutions became a recurrent topic. It was mentioned by more than two thirds of the speakers, and also by several of the participants in discussions. Ideas that were particularly stressed were the following:

*People-centred thinking deserves strong encouragement. One of its obvious advantages is that it leads to the recognition of ethnic identities and interests (ACCORD 1996a:5,16).*

This approach can influence state-centred thinking, to the extent that forces of ethnicity and self-determination are duly taken into account (ACCORD 1996a:6).

Moreover, in all sorts of situations, including the rendering of humanitarian aid, such a people-centred approach can produce attitudes

of non-condescending modesty and genuine respect for the self-esteem and dignity of other groups (ACCORD 1996a:9,16,18).

The Ethiopian experiment deserves serious consideration:

"... more than sixty ... overpowered [ethnic] groups did not lose their national aspirations. Therefore the new Ethiopian state has taken the reformulation of its various ethnic interests seriously, and is determined to develop a viable multi-national state which will be responsive to the needs and aspirations of all its ethnic, national and nationality groups. The right to self-determination and even the right to create an independent state are accordingly enshrined in the constitution of the transitional federal government and its nine states" (ACCORD 1996a:14, cf 6-7).

When this noteworthy example was discussed, the responses "included the observations that decentralisation and unity are interrelated, and that freedom of choice can indeed strengthen a commitment to negotiate terms of unity. A strong argument was made for rejecting the dislike of ethnicity which was displayed by colonial powers, and accepting the vibrant reality of ethnicity in Africa (as on other continents)" (ACCORD 1996a:14).

In other discussions too the points were made that "factionalism ... may be transcended", that "separation and unity can be reconciled in one country" (ACCORD 1996a:14), and that it is "the current task of local political forces to accommodate the real needs and the cultural characteristics of the peoples concerned" (ACCORD 1996a:6).

More than three decades of post-independence conflict, in which well over one half of Africa's countries have been involved (Salim 1993:2), seem to have convinced many African leaders (also a majority?) that ethnic differences cannot be reconciled through repression of problems (cf Legum 1992:205) or a denial of ethnicity (cf Zartman 1990:524).

Minority problems and possible solutions  
Particular solutions have been fairly or partly successful in specific cases. Zartman (1990:525-529) has listed and briefly discussed various options:

assimilation of minorities into an existing dominant culture,  
integration of minorities in a way which brings a new culture into being,  
compensation of deprived minorities by a majority with a guilty conscience,  
self-determination by minorities to a lesser or greater degree,  
federation, by which decentralised domestic power is granted to minorities (for as long as the usually short-lived federational structure survives), and  
secession (seldom successful), by which minorities acquire the freedom to govern themselves.

In one way or another, however, all these possible solutions are nothing else than responses to ethnic minorities who perceived themselves as victims of unjust discrimination (cf Zartman 1990:512) and who appealed, agitated or fought for recognition of their position and rectification of the wrongs inflicted upon them. There are of course also other ways of dealing with ethnic minorities. Schlemmer (1992:44) refers to authoritarian attempts to eradicate tribalism (cf Sachs 1992:33) and to superficial shows of cultural celebration or make-believe co-option.

Responses to ethnic realities    The obvious conclusions are, however, that there *are* realities of ethnic feeling (cf Sachs 1992:35, Rex & Mason 1986:187-225), that the interests, views and convictions of minorities *must* be taken into account (Schlemmer 1992:49), and that ethnic tensions *can* be reduced by devolving power to the regions concerned (Schlemmer 1992:50).

Once again, the proponents of such honesty about ethnicity, and such a commitment to take ethnic loyalties seriously, cannot claim that these approaches are based on an Africa-wide consensus. But, as briefly indicated above, persuading support can be adduced from leaders, researchers and opinion formers sharing their convictions within the contexts of, respectively, Organisation of African Unity activities, South African transformation, and international contributions.



Special importance may be attached to the insights and proposals emanating from or endorsed by leading figures in the Organisation of African Unity. If people in an Organisation devoted to *unity* express themselves frankly in favour of decentralising measures in respect of ethnic loyalties, it cannot but make an impact on the receivers of such a message.

Moreover, the thrust of this courageous message is further increased by the clear indications that it has an experience-based, life-related meaning that cannot be brushed aside.

Women's initiatives of locally ignoring ethnicity

To all these considerations about national and political responses another observation may, and should, also be risked, however (cf the first observation on p 55 above). Promising signs have been identified of **local initiatives to co-operate in cross-stitching ways which ignore ethnicity**. Several years ago Little (1978:175-189) has already alerted our attention to this "less apparent" but extremely promising factor, and especially to the fact that **such initiatives could mainly be attributed to women**. What Little had observed, was that women, who were enjoying an improved status, particularly in cities, were forming groups in which common concerns were focused upon, while ethnic distinctions were disregarded as far as possible (cf Du Toit 1978:11, and also, with regard to development, Karl 1995:1,12,100-101).<sup>25</sup>

### **3.5 COUNTERACTING IMPORTED RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM**

Fundamentalism to be monitored,

It is not only ethnicity that has been addressed with wise courage. Religious fundamentalism has been mentioned with similar frankness and boldness. At the Arusha consultation (see p 37 above) the secretary-general of the Organisation of African Unity mentioned religious fundamentalism in the opening address. He referred to both the Christian and the Muslim versions, and he described the fundamentalist tendency as arising from intolerance, and resulting in divisiveness (Salim 1993:5). Eventually, when the ten main recommendations of this consultation were formulated, one of them was that religious fundamentalism and ethnicity (in this order) merit careful monitoring (Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:22).

The consultation recognised that these two factors are pivotal causes of internal conflicts (Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:22), and obviously realised that more was needed than just monitoring. Recommendations were indeed made about procedures which may help to counteract ethnic separatism. Respecting cultural diversity was proposed (Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:15), as well as strengthening democracy, and being amenable to appropriate decentralisation (Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:9). With regard to religious fundamentalism, however, such methods are of little avail. For obvious reasons, therefore, the consultation refrained from venturing too far into the domain of fundamentalism.

understood, Religious fundamentalism needs sympathetic but penetrating understanding. It has to be seen as a phenomenon in a field where two dimensions can always be distinguished. One dimension is that of *original experiences* of a religious kind. Since ancient times, and usually related to universal human needs and experiences, certain people apparently had meaningful experiences. Obviously, however, such experiences themselves could not be shared with others. The ineffable can never be communicated effectively by means of words, drama, ceremony, song or prayer. Nevertheless, those who were inspired by visions, encounters or insights, tried to convey at least something to their communities. In this way, inevitably, another dimension began taking shape: the dimension of *resulting structures*. Systems of belief and systems of conduct were constructed (cf Idowu 1976:15,33). Fundamentalism seems to result from an extreme preoccupation with this second dimension. With very good intentions a sincere devotion is lavished upon the objective embodiments of the original experiences. It is of course possible to do this in conjunction with genuine relationships of faith. But, unfortunately, many people are carried away by the impressiveness of religious structures and the pressurising by religious fundamentalists.

In the case of Christianity this second dimension is structured upon a Holy Book, believed to be divinely inspired and authoritative. The fundamentalist tendency is to accept its text as infallible and interpret it literally and legalistically (cf Deist 1984:65). In the case of Islam there is also a Holy Book, but the structure is especially one of five pillars of ritual and ethical commitments. Here the fundamentalist tendency is to enforce dutiful

submission to these practical requirements of Islam as widely and expansively as possible.

and  
challenged

Although such tendencies can of course be implemented in modest ways, they can also tempt people to use more forceful methods of imposing their religious convictions and customs on others. The annals of both Christianity and Islam contain numerous records of lamentable conflicts and schisms on interpretational, ceremonial, doctrinal or ethical grounds (cf Malan 1990:2-3, Cavendish 1980:180-213,230-239). From a conflict resolution viewpoint, therefore, it is not enough just to understand the background and objectives of fundamentalism. It has to be frankly addressed, challenged and discouraged.

The unassailable position of fundamentalism

Nowhere in the world will this be an easy task, however. Almost everywhere fundamentalism is entrenched in fortified positions. Its immediate protection is its proclaimed and perceived piety. It is further safeguarded by the conservative elements of the religion concerned. And to a certain extent it usually benefits from the general acceptance a whole established cultural system may be enjoying. Such an establishment cannot be overthrown by a few aggressive attacks.

African ways of addressing fundamentalism

A wiser approach seems to be one in which fundamentalists are recognised as well-intentioned, religiously committed people, and in which more genuine ways of religious believing and living are then emphasised. Precisely this kind of approach seems to be one which fits the context of Africa remarkably well.

Relational tactfulness

A typically African response may reveal a relational tactfulness, which may even make people reluctant to use the name *fundamentalism*. Both parts of this name happen to have negative connotations attached to them. The *fundamental* part does point to the notion of a sound base, but also calls forth the interpretation of a static, immutable foundation. And the *ism* ending indicates a preoccupation with an extreme position. At the first African Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution (see p 58 above) more than one speaker, when referring to a particular case of Islamic fundamentalism, tried to move away from this label and rather talk of *revivalism* (ACCORD 1995:404,412). So also, there are cases of Christian

fundamentalism which may justifiably be called *evangelism* (although conversely, not all Christian evangelism is of a fundamentalist nature).

Religion as a way of life      A very important positive contribution is surely Africa's traditional emphasis on **religion as a way of life**. If a useful generalisation may be risked, we may say that in Africa it is usually not a matter of *having* a religion or being an *adherent* of a religion. It is rather a matter of *living* in a way which is motivated by religion as a dynamic faith (cf Idowu 1976:4). Through beliefs and values, practices, officials and objects each version of African religion is nothing less than an essential part in the way of life of the community concerned (cf Mbiti 1978:12-13).

Religious tolerance and open-mindedness      The implication is that each group lives according to its religious traditions, and that no attempts are made to convert people of other groups (cf Thorpe 1993:2). The general motto seems to be: **Believe and let believe**. Various groups can therefore co-exist in mutual tolerance of each other's religious convictions and customs. With flexibility, and without prejudice, there is often also an openness which allows groups to borrow ideas from one another (cf Thorpe 1993:2). It has to be admitted, however, that this attitude caused much frustration among the propagators of other religions. They were obviously disappointed upon discovering that many of their proselytes were combining attractive elements of the imported religions with deeply rooted traditions of the indigenous religions (cf Ter Haar 1990:24).

A remarkable feature of traditional religions in Africa is that this emphasis on a way of life is undisturbed by formal elements. Precisely the structural aspects which often lure believers into fundamentalism seem to be entirely absent.

Absence from African Religion of venerated founders,      Firstly, there were no original founders (Mbiti 1978:14) whose divine qualities, miraculous deeds or remarkable life stories had to be defended against the doubts and criticism of unbelieving outsiders. Groups of people obviously have their ancestral leaders and heroes, who are commemorated in myths which often acquire an almost sacred nature (Thorpe 1993:1). But the traditional religion itself is usually regarded as a body of convictions that took shape over centuries. In most cases it could have been a long process, involving many people since the remote past. As in most other religions, the

ancient origins were probably based upon universal human needs (security, food, sex, love, justice) and experiences (related to birth, adulthood, marriage, death, environment, spirituality). There could also have been special experiences (phenomena in nature, events in community life or in the life of an individual) which were interpreted as meaningful. Such needs and experiences must have motivated people to reflect and meditate, and to share and discuss their thoughts.

sacred  
scriptures,

Secondly, there were no sacred scriptures (Mbiti 1978:15) which could give rise to different interpretations. The process of gradual evolution was committed to oral tradition only. We have to admit, of course, that oral material can sometimes become solidified into unchangeable moulds. But even if there were arguments about the exact words in which unwritten traditions had to be preserved, that would have been nothing compared to the disputes about holy writings. The history of religion shows that all the book religions have had to cope with problems of interpretation (cf Grollenberg 1979:1-2). The tendency is always there to venerate the contents of a sacred book as divine words, and to understand them in a literal sense. Such an interpretation is then labelled as "authorised" or "orthodox", and any deviation from it, or critical remark about it, is regarded as heresy.<sup>26</sup> The absence of sacred scriptures has therefore exempted Africa's religions from the conflicts inevitably arising out of interpretational differences.

and official  
doctrines

Thirdly, there were no doctrines (Thorpe 1993:1). It may of course be said that every religion is prone, sooner or later, to some degree of dogmatism (cf Idowu 1976:14). Close scrutiny may show that the religions of Africa are no exceptions. They too have fixed ways in which names and attributes of divinities, spirits and ancestors are handed down from generation to generation. But such doctrinal fragments are far removed from the dogmatic systems found in some religions. Such elaborate systems have never been constructed in the religions of Africa. There were no holy writings to prompt such enterprises. And there were no campaigns to proselytise neighbours or to indoctrinate descendants. It may therefore be claimed, generally and validly, that the religions of Africa have been spared the doctrinal controversies that have marred the histories of other religions.

The freedom from bonds to founders, documents or creeds has indeed safeguarded the people committed to African religions from religious fundamentalism and its conflictual implications.

- The restraints of narrow-mindedness    Such an overall orientation to a contented, tolerant, lived religion should have made fundamentalists think. It should have caused them to assess and rethink the expansiveness and exclusiveness of the religions they were propagating. Mostly, however, the fundamentalists stuck to their one-track-mindedness. The strange paradoxes in their views and objectives remained concealed to them. Their absolute committedness to their beliefs prevented them from guarding against the superficialising of their cherished convictions. In their zeal to propagate their religious traditions as widely as possible they did not realise that they were using strategies of sectarian exclusiveness. Some were not even disturbed by the contradiction between political progressiveness and religious conservatism.
- Greater outspokenness against fundamentalism    Fortunately, however, a wise realism is apparently emerging in Africa. The need is felt to counteract religious fundamentalism more emphatically. The message of religious tolerance, that has been communicated so tolerantly and tactfully, seems to have made little impact. But meanwhile Africa is experiencing serious internal conflicts, several of which reveal religious under- or overtones. Especially alarming are the conflicts along the religious dividing line stretching from West to East Africa. Moreover, there are apparently few cross-stitching ties linking the northern and southern parts of the countries concerned, since in most cases the line happens to be an ethnic divide as well (cf Brown & Schraub 1992:82, and p 40 above).
- Jointly counter-acting ethnic, cultural and religious separatism    This split, which seems almost to bisect Africa into two opposing blocs, definitely increases the potential of conflict, and aggravates the violence of conflict when it has erupted. Strangely and fortunately, however, it also creates an opportunity to launch combined strategies against ethnic and cultural separatism *and* religious fundamentalism. But then, precisely because conflicts in such areas, where deeply internalised values are cherished, are very difficult to resolve, a total approach may indeed prove to be helpful.

Such an approach may be focused on culture as a linking factor. In spite of warnings against using "culture" as a euphemism for "ethnicity", it has to be admitted that ethnicity and culture *are* closely interrelated. And although it may be debated whether religion is part of culture (Monk et al 1980:226, Stewart 1980:3), it is clear that there are at least many comparabilities between the two.

- Acknowledg- With regard to culture the valid point has been made that it is not only a  
ing change in fixed system but also an ever changing process. This observation has been  
culture... emphasised in Africa (cf Mbiti 1978:7) and elsewhere (cf Monk et al  
1980:226-227). At first sight culture may appear to be a historically  
developed product which is simply handed down and passively absorbed by  
each new generation. Closer scrutiny reveals, however, that culture also  
includes a process by which living people are constantly transforming the  
traditions entrusted to them. This process may be slow and at times almost  
imperceptible. Most of the people concerned may be under the impression  
that they are meticulously preserving their ancient cultural heritage. They  
may, however, be endorsing updated interpretations and implementations.
- and religion It is this cultural insight that may be of great value in addressing religious  
fundamentalism and its conflictual consequences. It may serve as an eye-  
opener to all who regard their religious cults, creeds and customs as  
unquestionable untouchables. They may begin to accept the obvious reality  
that the adherents of any religion are human beings who live in an ever  
changing environment (cf Grollenberg 1979:2). They may be delivered from  
a preoccupation with the formal structures of their religion, and enabled to  
penetrate to its essential meaning for believing and living.
- The implied An approach in which cultural change is frankly acknowledged can serve as  
message to a tactful and effective move against religious fundamentalism. It allows  
fundamen- Africa's critical thinkers to admit that the peoples of Africa have not been  
talism exempt from cultural equivalents of fundamentalism. Through the ages  
dominating groups or domineering individuals could have imposed particular  
versions of traditions and customs upon those who were subjected to their  
influence, and afraid to contradict their authority. Becoming honest about a  
harsh traditionalism may therefore serve a very good purpose. It signals a  
willingness to scale down undue extremes and to phase out an enforced

submissiveness to an established culture. At the same time it may pass on a message to the proponents of religious fundamentalism. It may make them aware of the fallacy of a superficial display of religiosity. It may warn them against the arrogance of claiming to wield not just social sanction, but divine power. It may prompt them to admit that outdated peculiarities in religious perceptions and practices need to be transformed in order to acquire a contemporary meaningfulness.

The appeal to live a relational religion

For the sake of summarising, the risk of generalising may once more be taken. It does seem justifiable to say that the main thrust of Africa's message to religious believers is **to live an experienced religion rather than propagate a formalised religion**. To more fanatically minded believers this message amounts to an appeal to de-emphasise the conflict-generating doctrinal and ceremonial matters, and to emphasise as strongly as possible the conciliatory relational and ethical themes.

Fundamentalist apartheid theology denounced in South Africa

Fortunately there are encouraging examples of people responding to the challenge of living a life-related religion and propagating a life-related religion. The record of the recent political change in South Africa includes a striking instance of religious fundamentalism converted into religious repentance and rectification. Of course, the whole dramatic transformation took place as the result of an orchestrated combination of contributions (cf Ocaya-Lakidi 1996:8). There was a massive and many-faceted socio-political struggle. There was a whole array of internal and international economic pressures. But there was also a very significant contribution from the sphere of influence of religion. This was of crucial importance, especially since the notorious apartheid (separateness) theology had been concocted by Christian fundamentalists. The entire apartheid system of social, economic and political discrimination and oppression can indeed be seen as ultimately based on Christian fundamentalism. Convenient passages from the Christian Bible - not even from the Christian New Testament, but from the Old Testament as background to Christianity! - were put together to construct a rationale for racial separation. This was presented as a divinely authorised design, and many well-meaning, submissive people and politicians in the Christian camp, especially in the Dutch Reformed Church, were swept along by it (cf Johnston & Sampson 1994:184-188). When the apartheid policy was imposed on the country and reinforced by one law after the other (cf



Johnston & Sampson 1994:182-184), other South African churches immediately began opposing the political system (cf Johnston & Sampson 1994:190-199). Gradually, however, voices of opposition were also heard from ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church, and later on, rather belatedly, and often in circumventive phrasing, also from official meetings of the Dutch Reformed Church itself (cf Johnston & Sampson 1994:192-193,195). Eventually, as recently as late 1990, a Dutch Reformed professor of theology, Willie Jonker, openly confessed his sin, guilt and responsibility with regard to the socio-political, economic and structural wrongs of apartheid, and ventured to do the same in the name of the Dutch Reformed Church and the white Afrikaans people. Archbishop Desmond Tutu of the Anglican Church and others responded with statements of forgiveness. The other Dutch Reformed delegates at the Rustenburg conference, where 80 denominations and 40 para-church organisations were represented, fully identified themselves with Jonker's statement (cf Johnston & Sampson 1994:198-199).

Life-related  
Christian  
Religious  
Education

Another example may be taken from the life-related courses in Religious Education designed in Africa (cf endnote 8). In a Christian context impressive team work was done by teachers from five East African Countries (Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia), and resulted in syllabuses of outstanding quality (cf Pastoral Institute of Eastern Africa 1974,1975). With regard to their relevance, life-relatedness and methodology of learning, I have not yet seen anything better from anywhere in the world (cf Malan 1991:15). In these syllabuses a courageous breakaway from the content-oriented tradition in Christian religious education was ventured. Revelation was not taken to be a set of doctrines, but rather a human experience of a relationship. The whole course is unmistakably focused on the present life-situations of the students. The themes are life-themes. Examples, anecdotes, pictures, exercises and assignments are taken from real life. To encourage thinking and discussion, background information and reference material are given from African tradition and church history. Appropriate Bible passages are given for study and discussion. The students are required to summarise, reflect on and synthesise the work done in each unit (cf Malan 1991:1-16).

Such a course may very well be one of the best ways of counteracting the tenacious tendency towards fundamentalism. Showing no trace of

authoritarian indoctrination, it promotes frank discussion and meaningful exploring. In accordance with the context of Africa, its pages are filled with life-related and relational material. Where appropriate, reference is made to the formal structuralities that were developed during the history of Christianity, but the main emphasis is on the dimension of experiencing religion and living relationally (see p 62 above).

Life-related Islamic Education      By its very nature, Islamic religious education is also in harmony with the context of Africa. Although much attention is devoted to memorising the contents of the Holy Book, the Qur'an, the real focus is on character-building for living a life of purity and sincerity. It is not facts that are emphasised, but relational insights and skills (cf Ter Haar 1990:25-27). The dimension of observing customs and performing moral duties is taken very seriously, but also the dimension of religious experience (cf Ter Haar 1990:29-30).

Optimistic conclusion      It seems, therefore, that throughout Africa a strong case can indeed be made against religious fundamentalism with its conflict causing ramifications. The traditional religions of Africa are essentially ways of living. Religious correctness is emphasised, but not in a spirit of competitiveness. Of the religions brought into Africa from elsewhere, Islam and Christianity are also truly oriented to their respective ways of life. They both contain elaborate systems of scriptures, teachings and ceremonies, which are often strongly emphasised, but usually enough attention is nevertheless focused on the implications for believing and living. Each of the two happens to harbour fundamentalist elements, but these are actually foreign to the real nature of both Christianity and Islam. Also Hinduism and Buddhism can add their contributions to promote an anti-fundamentalist culture of tolerance. Even Judaism can play an indirect role. It may have its internal interpretational debates, but in its capacity of being a nation-oriented religion it is not tempted to a competitive and intolerant expansionism.

It is to be hoped, therefore, that Africa's genuine believers across the spectrum of faiths will keep radiating an unequivocal message of **inner sincerity instead of outward show**. It is also to be hoped that such a message, even if it is spread by small numbers of real believers, will have a decisive impact on the supporters of fundamentalism and the related extremes of literalism, dogmatism, ceremonialism and traditionalism.

### 3.6 PRACTISING LIFE-RELATED WAYS OF EDUCATING

Inherent life-relatedness of traditional education

The first example of life-related religious education given above (pp 70-71) happens to be one which represents important aspects of African education in general. The tradition of life-relatedness must have been inherent in African education from its earliest beginnings. What parents shared with their children, and communities with their younger members, was a practical and pragmatic preparation for adult life. The life they had in mind was no abstract average, however, but the particular life as lived in the society concerned (cf Ter Haar 1990:16). The context was therefore mostly that of the concrete situation of a local community, including its specific issues and problems (cf International Bank for Reconstruction and Development 1988:11). The overall aim was to impart to the next generation the knowledge and behaviour, skills and attitudes required to fulfil the social roles of adults of both genders. One set of objectives was to develop physical, intellectual and vocational skills. But in order to equip the youth for their communal life in a network of kinship relations, special attention was devoted to another set of objectives: to develop respect for life, humanity, the community and the extended family, and to appreciate cultural values, privileges and duties (cf Ter Haar 1990:16-19). The educational methods were mainly experiential ones according to which learning takes place by doing.

Experience-based and experience-oriented education

It is clear that **experience is an integral component of all truly African education**. Firstly, characteristically African education has originated from the experience of communities and individuals (cf Ter Haar 1990:16). The cultural values were not derived from any supernatural order. They were developed and refined in the process of human living. Secondly, the typical education of Africa is oriented towards the life experience to which each new generation is on its way. Thirdly, the obvious educational method is therefore one in which experience is utilised as the most important (cf Ter Haar 1990:16), and in any case the best teacher.

The roles of three life-related religions in education	<p>In addition to highlighting the centrality of life experience, our religious education example (pp 70-71 above) also indicates how religion can be integrated into such an education for living. In the history of education in Africa the inputs of three major religious perspectives figure prominently. From ancient times to the present day <i>Africa's traditional religion</i> has permeated the education of the youth of Africa. What was handed down to them was not just a utilitarian training, but especially also a religious nurturing. They were guided into experiencing, as part of their community, the religious significance of actions, events and phenomena in daily life. Then, almost 2000 years ago, <i>Christianity</i> entered Africa from the northeast. A striking example of how Christianity became involved in African education, was the educational system instituted by the Ethiopian Christian Church about 1550 years ago. This was a comprehensive system, however, in which the Ethiopian cultural, scientific, literary, artistic and spiritual life was also embodied (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development 1988:11). Long before Christian education became established in other parts of Africa, however, <i>Islam</i> secured a place in African education. From about 1300 years ago the influence of Islam spread in North and West Africa. Islamic education provides another example of a decidedly life-related kind of education. Its aim is to actualise the original good nature of human beings through submission to the divine will in every sphere of life (cf Mohamed et al [1991]:6,29). This education is firmly embedded in the social context, where a comprehensive, disciplined way of living is propagated (cf Ter Haar 1990:15).</p>
Conciliatory spirit	<p>It is encouraging to note that these two immigrant religions are, in different ways, clearly life-oriented (although some of their adherents tend to override this concern in favour of fundamentalist priorities). In order to focus on conflict resolution wisdom from Africa, however, we have to return to the truly African versions of education. And here it may be said, by way of a generalisation which is hopefully justified, that the education which may be regarded as traditionally African does indeed promote a conciliatory spirit.</p>
Harmony and inclusiveness	<p>Such a way-of-life education, which consistently takes kinship and communal relations seriously, inevitably helps to create and promote a culture of harmony. Perspectives of <b>harmoniousness and inclusiveness</b> are obviously developed with regard to the social environment. A relational</p>

reverence is bestowed upon nature, from the immediate surroundings to the impressive universe (cf Ter Haar 1990:18). Prevalent beliefs in a Creator God are usually augmented with convictions about benevolence as a divine characteristic (cf Ter Haar 1990:19).

Overcoming self-centredness

In more than one way this kind of education can therefore play an important role in equipping young individuals with a larger vision. It can engender a fascinating sense of being part of one's family and community. It can let one experience the recurring thrill of being at one with vibrant humanity on a remarkable planet. It can provide constant practice in **transcending personal interest** by taking the interests of one's group seriously (cf Ter Haar 1990:23).

and group-centredness

To be liberated from self-interest can be of crucial importance in resolving interpersonal conflicts. It is along this way that a person can be led to understand the interests and motives of another person. When this happens, in any conflict situation, it is nothing less than a decisive breakthrough which usually greatly facilitates the conflict resolving process. There is, however, the possibility of being only partially delivered from self-centredness. Selfishness can merely be replaced by groupishness. Such an exaggerated group loyalty may then prevent similar breakthroughs from taking place in intergroup conflicts.

Mutual understanding, and prejudice reduction

It is therefore to be welcomed that the problem of group-centredness was taken seriously by the Arusha Consultation (see p 57 above). As an outcome of the discussion on preventive and confidence-building measures an educational recommendation of crucial importance was formulated:

That a formal education is required which would encourage individuals and groups to understand one another better, and to avoid negative stereotypes (Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:15).

In this recommendation we find the combined wisdom of past traditions, present realism and future planning. Emphasising **mutual understanding and prejudice reduction** is directly in line with the traditional focus on community and humanity. At the same time it is a most appropriate response to current intergroup friction and hostility. Obviously also, it can serve as an

effective precaution against future antagonism by educating the youth towards respect and understanding, trust and confidence (cf Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:15).

- Courageous applications... Such relational training may already be incorporated in many, if not most, models of education in Africa. But that does not diminish the seriousness with which the above recommendation should be regarded by educational planners, curriculum and syllabus designers, teachers and learners. What is of special importance is to implement it frankly and fearlessly. There will always be possibilities of partial applications which are conveniently limited to individuals and groups who happen to be co-existing quite amicably. The real challenge is to include individuals and groups with whom relations are tense or actually conflictual.
- and attitudes When the search for understanding is courageously extended to cover difficult people, it is obvious that opposing attitudes will also have to be faced. Real understanding cannot be reached or even approached as long as attitudes are restrained in a show of obliging meekness. Outspokenness and assertiveness may be unavoidable if misunderstandings have to be penetrated or if stereotypes have to be eliminated.
- Understanding and assertiveness This wise linkage of understanding and assertiveness seems to have prevailed at the Arusha Consultation, and to a greater or lesser extent, at other meetings and conferences also (cf pp 38-39,58 above). The Arusha discussions and recommendations reflect the genuine concern for both other and own viewpoints.<sup>27</sup> It is significant that the educational recommendation mentioned above was preceded by one which included a warning against attempts to suppress a potential conflict (Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:15).
- Africanisation as assertiveness... A similar correlation of **receptiveness and self-assertiveness** can be discerned in a process that has become an integral part of African education. What is implied by the name of the process, Africanisation, is precisely this dual response to a complicated historical background. When Africa was subjugated to the powers and whims of colonialism, its education experienced a mixture of useful inputs and disruptive inroads. Sensible elements of the education practised in the home countries of the colonisers were introduced. In many cases the intentions could have been, in part at

least, altruistic (cf Ter Haar 1990:45). Too often, however, the motivations appeared to be, partly or mainly, opportunistic. Unfortunately, also, much was done in consultationless and condescending ways. In most cases the people who were supposed to benefit from the educational enterprise therefore experienced it as a patronising scheme imposed on them. Their reaction therefore showed more allergy than acceptance. While ostensibly participating to some extent, their innate feelings were opposed to any foreign system of educating their children. Resistance was even greater in cases where education was coupled to the inculcation of a particular religion. In fact, it was precisely the problem of religious pressurising that caused meaningful changes to begin taking place. Even before the end of the colonial period African education was largely emancipated from control by the Christian Church and placed under state control.

This change provided a strong incentive to plan and implement a comprehensive process of Africanisation of education. Even before the era of political independence was inaugurated, African educationists were already encouraged to begin designing a new and duly contextualised version of education. Elements that formed integral parts of Africa's education but were ignored in the colonial models of education, were reinstated. At appropriate places in curricula and text books African customs were included. In the study of social and natural environment a relevant concentration on local situations was reintroduced. With regard to history, the content was adapted to include the area or sub-region concerned, and the perspective was changed from Eurocentric to Afrocentric.

coupled with  
receptivenss

Throughout this process, however, with only a few exceptions perhaps, a sane rationality was revealed. In spite of all the justifiable criticism against the educational systems brought in by the colonisers, these structures were not simply eradicated in a revengeful way. Applying prudent judgement, a distinction was usually made between the components fulfilling universal educational needs, and the additions reflecting characteristic elements of particular, foreign cultures. Even these cultural peculiarities were not always summarily rejected. Either sub-consciously or intentionally, worthwhile benefits from other cultures, even those of the colonisers, were accepted. After all, the so-called Western education does boast features such as openness and innovativeness (cf Ter Haar 1990:21). In many ways,

therefore, the new education emerging from Africa's experience proves to be a remarkable integration of meaningful ingredients. It duly embodies traditional values, but not as petrified, outdated idols. It also accepts the reality of change, the prospect of development and the possible worth of acculturation. It has apparently assumed the uncontested prerogative to practise eclecticism in a responsible way. The Africanising of education is therefore not a matter of having recourse to an ancient, idealised past. It is rather a refurbishing of a system that has developed historically, in order to replace incongruous elements by indigenous features.

Life-oriented education... This process is another example of the life-relatedness characterising African education. Life, in all its variety, is taken seriously. Problems are not evaded by taking refuge in centrifugal abstractions. Cultural diversity is respected (cf Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:15) and resulting challenges are addressed - as frankly as possible and as inclusively as possible.

as precaution against conflict It goes without doubt that such an education could be one of the best ways of preventing conflict. When this Africanised system of education is duly implemented, it can provide unique advantages to each growing up generation. The meaningful process can be initiated by parents from the day of a child's conception, and by teachers from each youngster's first school day. What can thus be handed on to the children, is a comprehensive orientation to the reality of life. At the same time, however, they can be encouraged to use a life-oriented approach in the specific but overlapping spheres of their communal, family, professional, recreational and individual life. In this way school "subjects" are not used as channels along which learners are to be filled with quantities of theoretical and practical knowledge. Areas of learning become contexts in which students can acquire relevant experience, insight and skills to improve the quality of their later life.

The additional need for social relations... Such an education can indeed communicate conflict prevention and conflict resolution skills. We have to realise, however, that conflict resolving miracles can never be expected as the straightforward result of an appropriate education. All over Africa, and all over the world, more is needed. It is significant that the Arusha recommendation referred to above (p 75) does not only appeal to formal education, but also to social intercourse (Ocaya-Lakidi



1993:15). Community leaders and families are called to live up to their special responsibility with regard to positive socialising. It is in an experience-based and far-sighted way that this recommendation links education for mutual understanding with socialisation for mutual understanding. Constructive social relations can become a life-long extension of conflict preventive education.

and  
attitudinal  
changes

Here too, we have to admit that even a long-term continuation and reinforcement of such an education is no guarantee that conflicts will be easily or smoothly resolved. A breakthrough towards understanding (see p 75 above) is almost always the immediate result of a change in attitude. It is therefore extremely encouraging when educationists and religious leaders in Africa are emphasising inner, attitudinal changes.

#### **4. PRACTICAL AND ATTITUDINAL APPROACHES EMPHASISED IN AFRICA**

Integrating practical methods and attitudinal messages

It was for the sake of a less complicated discussion that we have focused our attention on each of the above mentioned areas in turn (cf p 15 above) – social life, political structures, economic problems, ethnic values, religious trends and educational opportunities. In the complexity of real life, however, these areas are not separate compartments but interrelated contexts. They are life, experienced in all its variety. Life, as a fascinating unity of dynamic diversity, therefore obliges us to conclude any analytic procedure by synthesising our findings.

Before we began concentrating on the different areas, we have already used a preliminary synthesis. The prevalent elements of negotiation and togetherness prompted the metaphor of an interwoven warp and weft (see p 14 above). At that stage these typically African phenomena were highlighted as examples of a definite committedness both to one's particular community and to our common humanity. They could therefore serve as a fitting introduction to our discussion of the importance attached in Africa to the social context (pp 15-30 above).

Now, we may return to this same pair of emphases as examples of an extraordinary duality in Africa's conflict resolution wisdom. They represent a method which is both practical and attitudinal. Negotiation is the core of a pragmatic response to the inevitable reality of conflict. And togetherness is of central importance in the attitudinal approach to conflict.

##### **4.1 THE PRACTICAL ORIENTATION TO HUMAN CONFLICT**

Well-founded practicality

When an overly analytical type of thinking is used, practicality may be treated as almost isolated from theoreticity. There may even be a tendency to regard its down-to-earthness as inferior to the high-flown intricacies of theory. When life as a comprehensive whole is taken into account, however,

theory and practice are seen as correlatives, and special importance is attached to the practical implementation of theoretical insights.

In the field of conflict resolution such a balanced and positive assessment of practicality can of course be found all over the world. But the contribution rendered by Africa can be of great value. It is related to a background of informal, meaningful theory,<sup>28</sup> but it is especially based on practical life experience.

Theoretical debating about human nature

In passing, we may take note of the interesting theoretical debate about the inherent inclination of human nature, either to violence or to peace. A well-known round in this ongoing discussion took place on African soil, at the UNESCO Congress on "Peace in the Minds of Men" held at Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, in 1989. At this occasion the argumentation of the Seville Statement on Violence,<sup>29</sup> of three years earlier, was taken a step further. The first part of the Yamoussoukro Declaration on Peace in the Minds of Men emphasises the positive content of peace, by using significant words like the following:

Peace is reverence for life.  
Peace is the most precious possession of humanity.  
Peace is more than the end of armed conflict.  
Peace is a mode of behaviour.  
Peace is a deep-rooted commitment to the principles of liberty, justice, equality and solidarity among all human beings.  
Peace is also a harmonious partnership of humankind with the environment (UNESCO 1991:9).

The Declaration states an optimistic case for peace as a possibility within our reach, and holds forth the pursuit of peace as an exhilarating adventure. The Congress did not stop short at a theoretical debate, however. The practical implications of the new vision for peace were developed into a Programme for Peace, which is outlined in the second part of the Declaration (UNESCO 1991:9-10). States, organisations, scientific, educational and cultural communities, and all individuals are invited to help develop a peace culture based on respect for life, liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance, human rights and equality between women and men. But this invitation is immediately

followed by several practical proposals. Although this Declaration was adopted at an international conference, where 160 specialists from the natural, social and human sciences represented not just Africa but the whole world, its message and thrust are definitely in line with the spirit of Africa.

Others who are, knowingly or unknowingly, contributing to the debate about human nature, are religious communities and the general public.

In some sectors of Christian theology the original sinfulness and total depravity of human nature are upheld (cf Gillett 1982:246-252). But the clear message of the Christian scriptures (the New Testament) is that human believers who accept the power of God's grace can indeed experience an inwardly transformed life of righteousness and love (cf Romans 12:1-2, Galatians 5:16).

According to the theology of Islam all human beings have an original good nature, which only needs to be actualised. But the prescribed method is one of dutiful submission to the divine will as revealed (cf p 71 above).

A typical public conception, brought in from the so-called "West", and apparently based partly on Christian "original sin", and partly on experiences of human corruption, is that human nature is basically selfish and unjust.

In Africa, however, the general assessment of human nature seems to be more positive. It is assumed that the potential is there to develop relationships and co-exist peacefully.

Practical  
implications  
of such  
debating

This whole debate is surely more than just a theoretical exercise. It can have a meaningful effect on conflict preventing and resolving activities. It can have different effects, however, depending on the winning argument. If, for instance, the conclusion is reached that human beings are destined by their very nature to fight out their differences, the result may be a fatalistic rejection of conflict resolution, or at least an indifferent detachment from conflict intervention. If, on the contrary, the inference is drawn that human nature is not inherently conflictual, and that it does harbour a certain deal of goodwill, then the consequence may be an inspired commitment to ways of dealing with conflict.

Another deduction is also possible, however. The ongoing and never-ending speculation about the goodness or badness of human nature may lead to the conclusion that the whole debate is inconclusive. Although people may appreciate all the interesting discussions, they may eventually have to admit that they cannot commit themselves to either option.

Realistically approaching conflictual phenomena

There may therefore be a good deal of practical wisdom in adopting a less philosophising and more phenomenological approach. Conflict-causing problems in daily life, and conflictual tendencies within living people, *are* indisputable phenomena (cf Gluckman 1973:2,55). These realities do call for priority attention. Most urgently needed, therefore, are methods and skills for dealing with the reasons, realities and results of conflict. This down-to-earth approach seems to be preferred and practised across the continent of Africa.

Family and neighbourhood negotiation

Family and neighbourhood negotiation is an excellent example of this approach. Precisely there where a conflict threatens to erupt, or has suddenly erupted, it is addressed as soon as possible. Professional qualifications are not required. Sophisticated facilities are not set up. People directly concerned about disrupted relationships among their relatives or neighbours simply begin responding in ways they regard as appropriate. Stemming from experience and guided by common sense, such responses usually develop into effective and satisfying processes of conflict resolution.

There is of course always the possibility of untactful or injudicious inputs by some of the persons involved, but these can often be curbed and remedied by the contributions of others in the extended families or community groups. There is also the danger of spreading unfounded rumours and opinions by gossiping, which may be more difficult to rectify. In most communities, however, there may be enough goodwill to isolate or ignore malicious gossipers.

This culture of prompt talking about emerging or existing disputes provides a practical incentive to initiate practical responses to such disputes. Such talking can serve the useful purposes of rapidly bringing problems to the attention of the problem-causers, of urging the persons or parties concerned to talk frankly and listen receptively, and of facilitating the search for

satisfactory solutions. It has the practical effect of making everyone aware of the social context. In this way valuable light is shed on preceding events, disturbed relationships, underlying values, root causes, clashing interests, and difficult attitudes (cf pp 17-21 above).

Another very practical feature of this approach is its flexibility. Any of the methods of negotiation, mediation or arbitration may be used, or all of them. According to the way in which the talks develop, methods may be adapted, combined or changed (cf pp 23-28 above). When an agreement is reached, and especially also when it is implemented, families and neighbourhood communities can play meaningful and constructive roles (cf pp 28-30 above).

- Life-oriented education    A second striking example of the practical approach to conflict prevention and resolution is found in Africa's life-oriented teaching. The great value of this kind of education is that a constant awareness of the dynamic context of human living is maintained. The focus is not only on facts, but as far as possible also on the people involved. Such a way of studying communication, environment, events, discoveries and developments can promote insight into human activities and achievements. It can help engender an overall respect for life in its remarkable setting. But it can also lead to a better understanding of human intrigues and disputes, as well as of human co-operation and harmony. Moreover, it can equip young people with skills to deal with disputes in ways leading to satisfactory solutions and improved relationships.
- Practicality in other areas    People who have internalised such a trend towards pragmatism can then, throughout their life, play preventive and constructive roles with regard to conflict. Wherever economic need, with its inevitable potential for causing conflict, manifests itself, such practically minded people will begin doing something to stimulate development (cf pp 46-49 above). Where there are signs of religious fundamentalism and divisiveness, they will probably reveal the practical boldness to challenge religiously defended bulwarks.

Practical plans for improved state forms	Of special importance are the practical projects undertaken in the field of politics and statecraft. We have already taken note of experience-based recommendations in favour of more inclusive models of democracy (pp 35-41 above), more flexibility with regard to decentralisation (pp 41-42 above), and more accountability of leaders and people (pp 42-43 above). The political leaders of Africa have advanced much further than merely designing better forms of government. They have actually implemented a series of measures which are unique firsts in the world.
An Organisation of <i>unity</i> in Africa	<p data-bbox="496 465 1249 600">Africa was the first continent, and still is the only continent, boasting an Organisation of continental unity. When the Organisation of African Unity was founded in 1963, the reasonably effective international United Nations Organisation had already been in operation since 1945.<sup>30</sup></p> <p data-bbox="496 633 1249 1003">In the 1960s more and more African countries were recovering their original independence and were joining the United Nations. While thus showing their commitment to global unity, African leaders also took up their responsibility for putting a continental unity in effect. They must have realised that as countries were arriving at the independence they were craving for, they could easily be tempted to push on towards the isolated extremes of self-determination. Bearing in mind all the pent-up feelings and repressed fury that had accumulated during the ordeal of colonialism, exaggerated reactions could indeed be expected. The founding of the Organisation of African Unity was therefore a timely and wise move with very definite conflict preventive objectives.</p>
A comprehensive vision of unity,	The unity which was accepted, both as a given postulate (see p 56 above) and as an envisaged goal, was taken to be a comprehensive, multi-dimensional unity. Interrelated with political co-existence, there were also economic co-operation and developmental partnership (cf OAU Information Services 1993:59-60). National, ethnic, linguistic and ideological differences were recognised, but a oneness of mutual understanding and family solidarity was aspired to (cf OAU Information Services 1993:59-60). Although any project to develop any of these compatibilities could serve the purpose of preventing, reducing or resolving conflict, specific attention was also focused on the promotion of peace and security (cf OAU Information Services 1993:59-60).

...linked to a respect for sovereignty	At the same time, however, it was duly realised that genuine unity can never be imposed on states, groups or individuals who choose to entrench themselves in unyielding positions. In order to allay fears of being overruled by the Organisation, the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Member States, as stipulated in the OAU Charter (Art III(2)), was therefore honoured consistently. Time and again this pledge to state sovereignty prevented the Organisation from intervening in intrastate conflicts. The Organisation did voice its strong disapproval of such conflicts, but the conflicting parties could glibly ignore the reprimanding.
Informal mediation	With regard to interstate conflicts, a Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration was originally set up, but Member States repeatedly opted for less formal and more flexible ways of addressing conflict. Preference was usually given to informal, diplomatic mediation (sometimes also conciliation, but never arbitration) by individual Heads of State, eminent persons, or ad hoc committees (cf OAU Information Services 1993:5-28,50-51; Moussa 1996:3).
The need for effective intervention	<p>As the dire realities of interstate and especially intrastate conflicts became more numerous and more disastrous, the conviction grew that a way out of the dilemma had to be sought. Violent, death-inflicting conflicts between and even within groups could not simply be connived at with the excuse of non-interference.</p> <p>Eventually, therefore, the paving of the way towards effective conflict intervention began taking place. Before statements and plans could be put on paper, there must have been countless conversations and discussions. In 1990, as part of a Declaration that took note of the political and socio-economic situation in Africa, and the fundamental changes that were taking place in the world, an OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government endorsed a rededication "to work together towards the peaceful and speedy resolution of all conflicts" (OAU Information Services 1993:1, cf also Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:4).</p>
A Mechanism for dealing with conflict	The process gained momentum when, two years later, the secretary-general of the OAU submitted proposals for an OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. This time the Council of Ministers



and the Assembly of Heads of State and Government were not merely confronted with an objective, that could be interpreted as a remote, idealistic goal. They had before them concrete proposals under a pragmatic and comprehensive title. What was proposed was a practical *Mechanism* for dealing with all stages of conflict, from before its emergence to after its resolution.<sup>31</sup> That this prompted exhaustive and lively debates (cf OAU Information Services 1993:1-3) could not have been a surprise. Thereafter, however, the establishment of such a Mechanism for preventing, managing and resolving conflicts in Africa was adopted *in principle*. In a very practical and also democratic way the secretary-general was requested to undertake an overall and in-depth study, reflecting on the administrative, political and financial implications of putting into place such a Mechanism. Member States were also invited to submit their views, comments and proposals on the proposed mechanism, and the Council of Ministers was requested to assess all these findings and submissions, in order to draft concrete recommendations for consideration by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government (OAU Information Services 1993:3).

The OAU  
Mechanism  
for Conflict  
Prevention,  
Management  
and  
Resolution

The next year, 1993, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government considered the secretary-general's report on these activities and established, within the OAU, the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (OAU Information Service 1993:62). What was listed as objectives of this Mechanism, were firstly to anticipate and prevent conflicts, and, secondly, to undertake peace-making and peace-building functions in order to facilitate the resolution of actual conflicts. Expectations were especially focused on speedy anticipatory, preventive and mediatory action, which, if effective, could make lengthy and costly peace-keeping<sup>32</sup> operations unnecessary.

In order to facilitate prompt action, based upon well-informed decisions, the functioning of the Mechanism was prescribed as follows. It was directed that the Mechanism be directly controlled by a Central Organ, composed of the annually elected State members of the Bureau of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. The Central Organ has to meet at least once a year at the level of Heads of State and Government, twice a year at Ministerial level, and once a month at the level of Ambassadors and duly authorised representatives. In addition to such regular meetings, meetings may also be requested by the secretary-general or any Member State. The decisions of the

Central Organ meetings, generally arrived at by consensus, are then to be implemented by the secretary-general in consultation with the parties involved in the conflicts concerned. The secretary-general, relying on the human and material resources of the General Secretariat, may also make use of eminent persons, other expertise, special envoys, special representatives or fact-finding missions. Such activities are to take place in close co-ordination with sub-regional<sup>33</sup> organisations concerned, and in co-operation with neighbouring countries wherever needed. At the same time, however, close co-operation with the United Nations is to be maintained (OAU Information Services 1993:63-65).

Responsibility for solving own problems

It is clear that the practicality of this Mechanism is not limited to relevant objectives, representative composition and reliable procedures. A wide-ranging realism is also revealed in its acceptance and application of the principle of responsibility. The entire Mechanism "signals Africa's determination to solve its own problems" (OAU Information Services 1993:2; cf Moussa 1996:3). The Mechanism came into being as a truly indigenous initiative. It endorses Africa's commitment to be the principal architect of its own destiny.

This responsibility is not only accepted with far sight into the future, but also with a wide view of the areas involved. It is comprehensively placed in its micro, meso and macro contexts. Sub-regional organisations, as well as neighbouring countries are expected to perform their duty in the problem-solving tasks of their respective areas. But, when a problem escalates into proportions the region and even the continent cannot cope with, then recourse is to be had to the global organisation with the hopeful name of *United Nations*.

Inevitability of practical problems

Having praised the OAU Mechanism for all its practicality, we also have to assess the putting into practice of its practical measures. From our life experience, however, we know only too well that anything which is used on the practical testing ground of life is bound to encounter practical problems. A work of art displayed in a museum may be admired or criticised, but stays intact. If a wheel were to be placed in a display cabinet, it may receive various compliments or criticisms, but will remain in good shape. But when such a wheel is put to use on real roads, it will be exposed to normal wear and tear, as well as to random knocks or punctures. Several lessons may be

learnt, but not all of them will apply to the wheel. Some may also be about the roads, and others about the vehicle of which the wheel forms part.

Similarly, case studies of conflict intervention by any of the role players mentioned in the Mechanism produce a variety of findings. Obviously, there is the perennial problem of lack of sufficient resources to operationalise the Mechanism fully. Some findings point to structural shortcomings in the particular methods used in specific cases. Others seem to identify human shortcomings: errors of judgement, forgetfulness, distrust, untrustworthiness, condescending, domineering or hostile attitudes, lack of co-operation or co-ordination, personal aggrandisement, stereotyping, prejudice, renegeing. Still others are related to unexpected accidents, misfortunes or catastrophes. In fact, anything human beings can do to cause or aggravate conflict, or to counteract the resolution of conflict, can upset a process of conflict prevention, management or resolution. Anything that can go wrong according to Murphy's Law, can just happen in the most disruptive way. The case studies presented and discussed at the first African Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution (see p 58 above) provide ample examples of well-intentioned intervention, favourable responses, unforeseen eventualities, and more, or less, satisfactory outcomes (cf ACCORD 1996a:9,12-15).

The way in which these practical problems have been discussed at most of the conferences and consultations already mentioned, usually seemed to be one of receptive realism rather than discouraged defeatism. Contingencies were not regarded as contraventions jeopardising the process of dealing with the conflicts concerned. In most cases they were apparently taken as evidence of the untidy but challenging dynamics of vibrant human life. New problems were not seized as excuses for frustration; they were accepted as opportunities for practising problem-solving skills.

An early  
warning  
addition to  
the OAU  
Mechanism

In full realisation that the practical way of dealing with human conflict will always be a route with known and unknown problems, Africa's leadership seems to be determined to continue in this direction. A significant further step has been taken aimed at the establishment, within the OAU, of an Early Warning System on Conflict Situations in Africa. This system, apparently the first of its kind to cover a whole continent, may have to begin modestly due to limited resources (cf OAU 1996:10,13). But from the start it should

enhance the effectiveness of the OAU Mechanism, which is especially intended to respond to early warning signals and initiate political action through preventive diplomacy. It was rightly emphasised that conflict prevention is the most crucial, the most rewarding and the only cost effective stage of intervention (OAU 1996:3).

It was recognised that problems like poverty, under-development and environmental degradation are continuously sounding warning alarms which are so clear and urgent that they do not need a special system to be picked up. But it was also realised that fragmented information has to be integrated, supplemented and communicated. Note was therefore taken of the variety of sources from which knowledge and expertise could be derived: governments, universities, research institutes, the United Nations and its specialised agencies, non-governmental organisations, traditional and local authorities, the media, and civil society. When enough relevant information on political situations and socio-economic conditions has been gathered and processed, the essence of emerging problems may be determined, and appropriate decisions may be taken before it is too late (OAU 1996:2-9).

With regard to the availability of information, it was stressed that valuable contributions could be expected of non-governmental organisations, but that governments may be reluctant to share information. At governmental levels the concepts of sovereignty and non-interference may easily be resorted to as a rationale for secrecy (cf OAU 1996:6). Governments were therefore encouraged to provide information, and all parties concerned were called upon to develop the political will for supporting early warning and early action (OAU 1996:14).

Regional and sub-regional preparedness

This latest addition to the infrastructure of the Organisation of African Unity is another striking example of Africa's practical preparedness to prevent, manage and resolve conflict. For more than three decades Africa had benefited from having a continental Organisation devoted to *unity*. From a promising start with 32 Member States in 1963, the OAU has grown and is now made up of 53 Member States representing all of Africa and its islands. Moreover, Africa is also equipped with sub-regional organisations, one for each geographical sub-division: the Maghreb Union in the North, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the West, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD)<sup>34</sup> in the East, the

Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) in Central Africa, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in the South (cf Nhara 1995:101).

Development and conflict resolution Although these sub-regional organisations are mainly committed to issues relating to economic development, they cannot be uninvolved in conflictual issues. After all, if such issues were to be left unattended, they could easily undermine the economic performance of these organisations. A good example of accepting this extra responsibility is found in the Conflict Resolution Procedures laid down by SADC, with regard to both interstate and intrastate conflicts (Nathan & Honwana 1995:19-22). We are, in fact, constantly reminded (cf pp 47-49 above) of the close interrelatedness of poverty and conflict on the one hand, and of development and conflict resolution on the other. At the recent seminar where prospects for establishing an Early Warning System within the OAU were discussed, each of the eleven speakers emphasised, or at least referred to, these direct links between socio-economic circumstances and either conflict or peace. From several perspectives it can indeed be substantiated that underdevelopment generates or aggravates conflict, that conflict causes or worsens poverty, that development promotes conflict resolution, and that stability and peace stimulate development (cf, for instance, Salim 1996:15, OAU 1996:100,102,109, Bakwesegha 1996:27,29).

Undoubtedly, therefore, the sub-regional organisations can play significant socio-economic and political roles in helping to resolve conflicts and promote development and peace.

Addressing causes of disunity: It is surely significant that of the five sub-regional bodies three have the concept of *community* in their names, one is called a *union*, while the name of the fifth implies inter-state *co-operation*. It is as if Africa as a whole and in its sub-regions, is increasingly moving away from conflictual separatedness and towards communal oneness. Inspired by its success in eradicating entrenched colonialism and institutionalised racism, Africa is now well positioned to address current causes of disunity (cf the Preamble and Art II(c) of the OAU Charter).

Sovereignism During the deliberations about the Early Warning system the respected principles of sovereignty and non-interference were mentioned, but it was

done in the context of tactful criticism against unco-operative, secretive governments. When governments were encouraged to provide the required information to facilitate early action (OAU 1996:102, cf Gounden 1996:51), they were by implication warned against the extreme position of sovereigntism (cf Rupesinghe 1996:53-54).<sup>35</sup>

**Ethnicism** The issue of ethnic tensions was treated with great caution and sensitivity, but it was inevitably implied by every reference to the tragedy of intrastate conflicts. It had to be admitted that since the end of the Cold War these internal conflicts were no longer suppressed and have become more dominant than interstate conflicts (Bakwesegha 1996:26, Gounden 1996:40, Rupesinghe 1996:54). The disastrous effects of these civil wars, on the peoples of the countries concerned and neighbouring countries, were frankly mentioned. The possibility of an integrated nation state is thwarted when a specific ethnic group has managed to monopolise power (Gounden 1996:40). Virtually every attempt in the direction of development is undermined by internal conflicts (Bakwesegha 1996:26). People sharing the same language, country and culture are driven apart by hatred and fear (Rupesinghe 1996:53). Ethnicism, as other versions of extremism, aggravates any situation which is already complicated as a result of political and socio-economic problems (cf Cilliers 1996:71).

In spite of an understandable reluctance to call ethnicism by its name, the unavoidable assumption is that Africa's Early Warning System should warn about all ethnicist tendencies. Participants in fact finding and information gathering should therefore have the courage to allow tactful questions on ethnic realities to be asked and answered (cf Rupesinghe 1996:63). The important contributions of local communities should be taken seriously, since they are in a position to observe and experience early signs of tension (cf Bakwesegha 1996:32).

The examples listed above, mainly of societal, educational and political practicality in Africa, can of course be multiplied. Our observations on continent-wide trends in these areas may obviously be supplemented and most probably endorsed by more specific examples from the various countries of Africa. South Africa, in particular, has much to share on the practicalities of negotiation, constitution drafting, reconstruction and development and nation building. At this stage of our present discussion,

however, it may be useful to shift our attention from the pragmatic to the relational emphasis.

## 4.2 THE RELATIONAL ORIENTATION TO HUMAN TOGETHERNESS

Interrelated-ness of practical and relational orientations	We have to remind ourselves again (as on pp 79-80 above) that these two orientations, the practical and the relational, may be distinguished, but should not be dissociated from each other. The metaphor of interweaving calls forth the image of crisscrossing threads describing wavy lines as they pass over and under one another, and forming one piece of cloth in which every thread running in one direction is continually in touch with those of the other direction. Africa's conflict resolution wisdom really seems to live up to this metaphor. The practical arrangements are continuously waving through the relational implications, and the relational concerns are never out of touch with practical consequences.
Africa's relational message	To a greater or lesser extent this may be true of conflict resolution methods all over the world, but without any doubt <b>Africa's emphasis on relationships</b> may be regarded as unique. It may very well be said that Africa's very special contribution to conflict resolution is its orientation to the dimension of relationships.
Not an additive,	From the perspective of our topic we may indeed call this a contribution to conflict resolution expertise, and we may appreciate the value of giving such priority to relationships. But such a response, well intended though it may be, is not phrased in the language of Africa. Although it seems to communicate that the message has been received, it actually says that the full impact of the relational wisdom of Africa has been sidestepped. This type of response may be compared to what often happens after a conference paper or a religious sermon: the message is commended but the receiver lives on almost unchangedly.
but an existential reality	The crucial point to grasp is that Africa's relational message is actually no contribution to be added on to any unrelational approach to conflict resolution. It is no additional technique. It is not a bit of moralising. <b>It is an</b>

**integral part of a way of life. It is lived reality.** To present it as an item in a manual on conflict resolution is to miss the point. It is nothing less than an attitude which may be discernible in all contexts of life (cf p 16 above).

Relational existence is therefore infinitely more than a useful suggestion. A metaphorical approach to the limitless implications of relational togetherness would be to call it the salubrious atmosphere of Africa's **ubuntu** promoting climate.

The thrill of *ubuntu*,  
This meaningful word from Africa<sup>36</sup> is a relational treasure deserving to be listened to empathetically. Such a receptiveness may lead to the thrilling experience of grasping a fascinating meaning which becomes a stimulating ingredient of one's ongoing life. In terms of traditional, imported grammar, *ubuntu* would be classified as an abstract noun, and it would need at least a verb to form a sentence. When communicated *meaning* is taken more seriously than traditional analyses of *words* in dictionaries and grammar books, other and more dynamic distinctions become possible. One of these models (also imported, however!) distinguishes four types of words: objects, events, abstracts (or qualities) and relations (cf Nida & Taber 1982:196,200,204,205). Here too, of course, the context is needed to understand the semantic type and the semantic field in which a word is used. With regard to the above context of a setting in which *ubuntu* is nurtured, we may understand it as a *quality word*, but especially as an *event word*, with *relational implications*.

of being  
human in  
human  
fellowship...  
In order to explore the meaning communicated by *ubuntu*, a significant, rhyming saying may be helpful: *Umntu ngumntu ngabantu*. An equally concise English rendering may be: A human being is a human being through human beings. And an expanded paraphrasing may be: Every single human being only becomes a truly human being by means of relationships with other human beings. It is into this field of meaning that we are guided by the event word *ubuntu*. To all of us as human beings *ubuntu* signifies **being** as **human** and **humane** as can be, **being** as **humanity oriented** as can be, living in genuine **human-ness**, and **humane-ness**, together with **fellow human beings**.



...as a life-sustaining atmosphere

The set of metaphors used above (p 88) may guide us further towards understanding **how** the event of experiencing *ubuntu* may take place. It is not knowledge which can be learnt in a classroom. Neither is it a skill that can be acquired in a training session. That is why the air of the atmosphere provides a good comparison. Like an invisible but essential prerequisite for living, it constantly enters and energises us. Most of the time, as with breathing, we may not even be consciously aware of this influence entering us. But if we are privileged to live our daily life in a human environment where *ubuntu* is taking place around us, we may experience how the *ubuntu* spirit is becoming part of us. As the oxygen we inhale is transported to the billions of living cells in our bodies, the *ubuntu* attitude may reach all our words and deeds. It is by such a silent but potent process that real human-ness can be nurtured into us. Discoveries and insights with regard to *ubuntu* may fill us as by a sudden deep breath, but the internalisation of the implications and applications of *ubuntu* is usually an extended process. The metaphors of life-long breathing and long-term climate are therefore quite appropriate.

Storm damage by conflicts,

This last metaphor may also be taken a step further, however. We may remind ourselves that every type of climate has its short-term fluctuations between fine and stormy weather. So too, the climate of togetherness inevitably includes the storms raised by selfish or groupish human beings. It is precisely the forecasts and the appearances of such storminess that give rise to all the conflict prevention, management and resolution measures discussed above (pp 83-95).

Some of these storms have escalated into devastating tornadoes, leaving shocking numbers of deaths and casualties in their wake. Some are still raging without any signs of abating. Just as literal storms often disrupt lines of communication, human disputes and conflicts also have a damaging effect on communicational and relational networks. Ties of understanding and association, that may have linked neighbouring states and/or co-existing groups in the same state, are loosened or severed.

but an enduring climate of togetherness

Nevertheless, however, Africa's commitment to inherent human interrelatedness remains unshaken. While emergency measures are taken against the spells of adverse disruption, a heartening confidence in the stimulating climate of togetherness is maintained.

...and side-by-sideness	In line with our typically African trend of sharing thoughts and experiences in proverbial and metaphorical idiom, <sup>37</sup> even another metaphor should not be regarded as superfluous. In Xhosa we find a remarkable event word <i>ukunxulumana</i> <sup>38</sup> which calls up the image of <b>side-by-side-ness</b> . It is made up of verbs for walking alongside and standing alongside, but it also contains a reciprocal ending. It can therefore be used in the semantic fields of getting, being or acting side by side, next to each other (McLaren 1963:115), and coming into a relationship with one another (Tegnidisc [1965]:64).
An inclusive vision of humanhood	Such picturesque words, derived as they are, not from abstract theorising, but from actual experiences, can stimulate us to develop a mental vision of <b>ubuntu</b> in real life. We may, for instance, cherish <b>a scenario of people in face to face communication, and in shoulder to shoulder co-operation</b> . When we visualise people in such relationships we should remember to include representatives of the whole variety concerned. If we take human togetherness seriously, our mental pictures will embrace both genders, all skin colours, and all political, socio-economic, cultural and religious groups concerned.
Opposition against exclusiveness	With regard to gender, we have to admit that many traditional ways of thinking, in Africa and across the world, did propagate male superiority and female submissiveness. But then we must add that Africa's women are courageously demanding the phasing out of such outdated favouritism. With regard to skin colour, cultures, conditions and convictions, we have to admit that Africa has its numerous examples of hard-liner in-groups who are vehemently excluding out-groups. It can surely be said, however, that in almost all cases enough preference is indeed shown for inclusiveness.
Living together and thinking in terms of togetherness	Once again (cf what has been said about the relational orientation on p 28,96 above) we have to remind ourselves that such an envisioning of togetherness is not supposed to be used in a sermonising way. It may of course be shared modestly, and then it can surely encourage people who are inclined to separateness to experiment with togetherness. But it should especially be regarded as a sign of living and growing in togetherness. It is when we are really experiencing our human togetherness that we enjoy such imaginative

and creative visions of fellowship, which in turn inspire us to more intense relational living.

All of us, as human beings, inevitably have a yearning for a larger or smaller degree of togetherness. Most of us experience an inborn urge towards companionship, partnership and sociability. This can be strengthened by an environment breathing the spirit of communality and by an education nurturing us in the attitude of *ubuntu*. It can also be weakened, however, by disuniting experiences or divisive ideologies. When advantage is therefore taken of inherited traits, and a relational orientation is fostered, this should be duly appreciated as life-skill wisdom in general, and conflict resolution wisdom in particular.

The great value of such an orientation is that it can become part of the way of life of individuals and communities. Then it is not an effort that is applied sporadically, but a constant turned-towardness. As phototropic plants benefit from sunlight and the energy it provides, *ubuntu*-tropic human beings can experience the dynamics of relational thinking and living.

As an essential ingredient of communication and conduct, human togetherness can make meaningful differences. It can turn the everyday greeting of fellow human beings into opportunities of becoming better acquainted. It can have important effects on *what* we say and do to each other, and especially on *how* we say and do it. It can help to promote attitudes of tolerance, conciliation and co-operation. Moreover, when words and actions are based on such attitudes, they are confirmed as genuine by the body language accompanying them.

Advantages for conflict prevention and resolution

As we list such consequences of Africa's sense of togetherness, it becomes clear that each of these advantages can have a dual effect. There can be the **general effect of improving life relationships, which may prevent many conflicts from occurring at all**. But then there can also be the **specific effect of helping to resolve conflicts** where they have erupted and **where they are driving human beings apart**.

Early in our discussion, our thoughts on relational goals already warranted a reference to such a double benefit (cf p 22 above). This same perspective may now prove useful when summarising our findings.

## 5. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

### 5.1 COMPREHENSIVE WISDOM!

If we review the experiential realities, meaningful insights and practical implementations discussed in our survey, we are sure to find double benefits (*or at least* double benefits) in each case. Usually the implications are relevant for both conflict resolution and conflict prevention. Quite often there are also applications in the field of conflict management. What is striking too, is that almost all the advantages for the process of dealing with conflict flow forth from the relational wisdom of the point concerned.

One example of a summary According to our experiences, circumstances, interests and needs all of us may be able to make our own eclectic summaries of the preceding pages. As we all list the thoughts we find meaningful and useful, we obviously have the liberty to differ and to criticise, to omit and to add, to de-emphasise or to emphasise more strongly. What follows is just my version of an annotated summary, which could serve as *one* example of a set of stimulating findings. I prefer to share them in more existential and less exhortative language. When a way of approaching a situation, relating with the people involved, and dealing with the problem concerned is part of a way of life, it seems to be inappropriate to translate it into hortative language. It would be an illusion to think that one can just add a few hints extracted from Africa to function as tokens in an approach which is incongruous with approaches which are indigenous to Africa. This may be an alluring temptation to conflict resolvers who are engrossed in the rat race to success and eager to append any opportunistic extra to their repertoire. African conflict resolvers are not trying to arrive successfully at the success folly; they are oriented towards sharing relationally their relational wisdom.

According to my opinion, the following manifestations of this wisdom deserve to be highlighted:

**The social context approach** 1. Potential and actual conflicts are understood in their social context. Values and beliefs, fears and suspicions, interests and needs, attitudes and actions, relationships and networks are duly taken into consideration. Timely

precautions against conflict, and/or possibilities of conciliation, are suggested. Origins and root causes are explored. A shared understanding of the past and the present is developed. Restoring, maintaining and building of relationships in the future are regarded as important goals.

- Neighbourhood discussion and negotiation** 2. Conflicts are normally addressed in the environment where they are emerging or have emerged. Talking may start informally within the families or neighbourhoods concerned. Usually the initial discussions lead the parties into the mode of negotiating, which can be as frank and direct as the discussions. Throughout the talks any inputs from, and implications for the social context, are taken seriously.
- Elders as facilitators or mediators** 3. The valuable expertise of an elder, in the family or neighbourhood, may be utilised from the very beginning, as facilitator, or from a later stage, as mediator. No prescriptiveness is imposed on such elders, and they may therefore be effectively guided by previous experience, receptive listening, contextual information, penetrating insight and sound judgement.
- Elders of both genders as conflict preventers** 4. Elders, of both genders, may make meaningful contributions to preventing conflicts. Their mature experience can enable them to observe early warning signals in their families or neighbourhoods, and respond tactfully, creatively and wisely.
- Consensual agreements** 5. Such elders are almost never expected to act as arbitrators. They are not even supposed to function in their individual capacities. Each of them remains, throughout the process, an elder in the family, or an elder in the neighbourhood, who is therefore regarded as an experienced representative of the social context of the disputants. The responsibility of such an elder is, consequently, to guide the talks toward an agreement which would reflect as inclusively as possible the consensus of the entire group of relatives, neighbours, friends and acquaintances.
- Communal endorsement of an agreement** 6. The interest and involvement of the people around the disputants are usually not regarded as unnecessary nuisances. In certain circumstances or at particular stages their participation may be less obvious, but in some way or another it is almost always implied or incorporated. It may clearly return to

the foreground when the community takes part in affirming an agreement and monitoring its implementation.

- Inclusive democracy** 7. Democratic participation is not limited to the local scene. As countries gained their post-colonial independence, they promptly welcomed democracy on their national scenes. Many had to discover, unfortunately, that a well-intentioned version of democracy could be usurped by an uncompromising majority or a dictatorial individual. After various experiences and experiments, Africa's leadership is currently focusing its creative attention on inclusive and integrative models of democracy.
- Inclusive decentralisation** 8. As if political rivalries were not enough, one country after the other began falling victim to civil hostilities. Facing the threat of falling apart, or even exploding, into separate ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural or socio-economic factions, emergency plans have to be forged. Of these, the most promising seem to be those being developed in the direction of inclusive decentralisation.
- Campaigning for accountability** 9. Furthermore, as if political and national disintegration were not enough, personal disintegrity has aggravated the crises countries are trying to deal with. Resources that are already limited, are further recklessly depleted by bribery, fraud and embezzlement. Anti-corruption measures, however ingeniously devised, are too often circumvented by cunning tricks of money addicts. It is a wise strategy, therefore, to supplement the curbing of aggrandisement by positively encouraging a culture of accountability. Here too, the social context is taken seriously, and the call to accountability is not only directed to the leaders but extended to the people as well.
- People-centred development** 10. Another constructive way of preventing and counteracting conflict is to promote socio-economic development. Africa's experience of imposed, foreign types of development has led to an important change of perspective, however. A home-grown version of people-centred development is being advocated, and is apparently gaining support. Quite obviously, of course, people will be better motivated to commit themselves to a developmental programme when they are convinced about their real needs and valid objectives with regard to development.

- Respect for ethnic loyalties and aspirations** 11. People-centred perspectives have wisely been introduced into the area of ethnicity as well. When, recently, various subdued and dormant ethnic aspirations were revived, all sorts of linguistic, cultural and ethnic agendas were widely accepted and emotionally pursued. Rigid state-centred thinking would have demanded the suppression of such ethnic "uprisings". Receptive people-centred thinking, however, led to the acknowledgement that ethnic and cultural values, as well as linguistic loyalties, are deep-rooted, and cannot be wished away or ruled out. The realistic admission was therefore made that in all these fields understanding, respect and tolerance can indeed promote peaceful co-existence, and even nation building.
- Tolerant, relational religion** 12. A similar approach could have been followed where religious fundamentalism drives people into conflicting camps. By so doing, however, fundamentalists may only be hardened in their convictions, which they cherish as divinely sanctioned. Tactfully contrasting Africa's existential type of religion with the legalistic or dogmatic versions of imported religions may therefore be more tactful, thought-provoking and effective. Of great value, undoubtedly, is the strong emphasis on life relationships which Africa has already contributed to the religions that came in from elsewhere.
- Life-skills education** 13. This same emphasis is communicated through Africa's inherently life-related education. Conflict preventive work of crucial importance is done where mutual understanding and prejudice reduction are encouraged, while self- and group-centredness are discouraged. Such an education can equip each new generation with essential life skills for problem solving, conflict resolution, constructive interaction, and relationship building.
- Experience-related practicality,** 14. Although all the examples of conflict prevention and resolution wisdom summarised above are obviously of a practical nature, this practicality deserves to be specifically highlighted. These examples are practical, not in the sense of extemporaneous, ad hoc actions, but rather as practicable procedures developed out of real life experience. In most, if not all, cases this development could have included discussion and contemplation, but most probably such talking and thinking were constantly related to actual experience. It is this life context which makes all these methods so useful and recommendable. From neighbourhood negotiation to the OAU Mechanism they were designed out of life experience for application in real life.

**...but always in the context of relational togetherness** 15. To me there is no doubt that Africa's conflict resolution wisdom calls us to realistic, responsible, practical action, as an integral and dynamic part of our relational living. To me this relational emphasis is the basic assumption of our entire discussion, the common factor discernible in every item of this summary, and therefore also the fitting climax of this summary.

## 5.2 CORRESPONDING WILLINGNESS?

Relational messages from outside Africa... It may of course be said that the relational message is not just a common element found in the various manifestations of conflict resolution wisdom from Africa. It may indeed be argued that human common sense anywhere in the world may emphasise the same point. It should also be added that conflict resolvers elsewhere in the world have not remained silent about the fascinating field of human relations.

An outstanding contribution to this field has been published under the straightforward, significant title of *Human Relations: from theory to practice* (Henderson 1980). The author presented his book modestly as a supplement to the many fine textbooks in the rapidly growing field of study called "human relations" (Henderson 1980:vii). He indeed enhanced the field by including scores of examples, anecdotes and reports from real life. In every chapter there is at least one extended quotation, and these slices of life enable the reader to breathe the atmosphere of side-by-side-ness (cf pp 99-101 above, and Malan 1993:351).

and from Africa Precisely in the spirit of broad human togetherness, we cannot claim any African monopoly on the relational message. Nevertheless, we have sufficient reason to be grateful about the way in which this message has already been lived and shared in Africa.<sup>39</sup>

Wisdom needs willingness to be implemented In honest realism, however, something more has to be said about all of us as human beings - in Africa and everywhere else. There is something in us that can turn the climax of our whole discussion, as briefly summarised above, into a disappointing anti-climax.



It is something that has been revealed innumerable times in Africa and in the rest of the world. In future it will probably continue to be revealed in Africa and elsewhere. It is nothing more, and nothing less, than **unwillingness!**

Unwillingness can prevent wisdom from becoming real wisdom. Wisdom, after all, is more than mere factual knowledge. Wisdom may be based on or related to some theory, but is more than mere abstract theory. It is when an idea, an insight, a judgement or a plan proves to be of relevance and usefulness in life that we acclaim it as wisdom. It is when a wise thought is carried out in wise action that its wisdom is confirmed.<sup>40</sup>

Value of a conflict-resolving life-style

This putting into effect of a wise proposal is not always straightforward and easy. It may be strongly opposed by the supporters of an unwise and conflictual strategy. Implementing wisdom in real life therefore needs real commitment. In many cases mere willingness may be enough. Sometimes, however, positive courage may be required.

It is obviously a great advantage when signs of inherent wisdom can be identified in existing approaches and procedures, Precisely this has made our current discussion, to me at least, extremely stimulating. So many and such significant examples of conflict resolution wisdom could be described as **elements already forming part of a traditional and current life-style**. In the context of our present discussion there was no need to argue for the inclusion of certain methods as *extras*.

The thwarting force of obstinacy

At the same time, however, we should not allow ourselves to be misled by attractive illusions. While praising a way of life which embodies so much conflict resolving expertise, we have to admit that both Africa's past history and current news contain tragic reports of conflict - small and large scale, brief and protracted, detrimental and devastating. In spite of all the commonsensical and wise ways of preventing and resolving conflict, there always seem to be individuals and groups who wilfully remain unwilling to make use of them.

Their unwillingness may rest on a misunderstanding. They may, for instance, be under the impression that willingness to talk means willingness to concede to the demands of their opponents, or at least implies a willingness

to compromise. But the unwillingness of people may also be the result of fear or guilt or self-interest.

Unwillingness is an attitude, which may form part of a whole set of attitudes. To move from unwillingness to willingness implies nothing less, therefore, than a change of attitude. Attitudinal changes never take place easily, however (cf Radford & Govier 1982:479). A change of disposition might be somewhat facilitated in a social environment of relational togetherness, but not necessarily. When people are unwilling to negotiate, all the wisdom we have discussed may be of little or no avail.

Insights with regard to unwillingness Even at this point, however, wise insight can make a significant contribution. There can firstly be the recognition that the willingness of the people concerned is of crucial importance. An appropriate plan for preventing, managing or resolving a conflict can only be initiated if the people are willing to talk, and can only be effectively implemented if the people are willing to address the root cause and work towards solving the problems involved. Secondly, there can be the acknowledgement that unwillingness, whether it be clearly manifest, or partly subdued, can never be removed by pressurising the people. But then, thirdly, such willingness, as well as other helpful attitudes, can be tactfully recommended.

The culture of gathering at a meeting place These insights endorse the importance attached everywhere to the getting-to-the-table stage of conflict resolution. In Africa, however, it is usually not regarded as a duty conveniently entrusted to a (professional) mediator who has to make the best of this difficult and time-consuming task. It is normally accepted as a more general responsibility of the societal network. But then, in this social and relational context, everyone taking part in such a project enjoys the backing of a culture of negotiation (cf pp 24-26 above). Another significant difference is that in Africa a tree is usually regarded as a better symbol of a meeting and talking place than a table. In many parts of Africa trees have become traditional places of meeting - especially trees like the Baobab, since they are such conspicuous landmarks. A mental picture of a gathering under a tree therefore symbolises several ideas:

The conflict resolving talks take place at the same spot where regular discussions on topical matters are held, which obviously implies that the

conflict concerned is dealt with as one of the occurrences in normal daily life.

The talks take place in the open, and not behind closed doors, which signifies that frank, transparent negotiating is expected and that hidden agendas are discouraged.

Real people meet in their living environment in order to talk, listen, think, discuss and plan. Special provision is not made for lots of paper work or for high technology gadgets.

Once again, however, we have to remember that in spite of all such cultural and traditional encouragement, some people may still entrench themselves in a position of stubborn unwillingness. Almost a miracle may be needed before they will commit themselves to honest disclosures, unprejudiced understanding and joint problem solving.

The issue of political will	A special case of willingness is the one usually called "political will". In all the conferences and consultations referred to above, this issue of political will was mentioned and discussed (cf Ocaya-Lakidi 1996:11-12). Contextually understood, this phrase seems to be a useful abbreviation with regard to a dilemma often experienced by political and government leaders. The situation may be one of intrastate or interstate conflict, or one of political strategising towards state formation or nation building (cf Deng 1995:210). There may be sufficient clarity about an obvious solution for the problem concerned. There may even be a willingness to decide in favour of the solution. But there may be political restraints preventing the leaders, or some of them, from actually doing what they are almost ready to do. They may fear the solution to prove disadvantageous to their own status, the policy and image of their party, or the ideology they are adhering to. In such cases, therefore, there may be enough will, but too little <i>political</i> will to put a wise plan into practice.
Willingness to utilise imported methods	Another special case of willingness also has to be noted. In spite of all the experience and expertise within Africa, people of Africa have shown, and are still showing, a remarkable willingness to learn from people in the rest of the world. This has already happened during the colonial period (cf Omotoso

1994:16-20), but after the liberation from colonialism, and after experiments with various versions of independent state formations, there seems to be a growing openness and receptiveness to input from abroad. On some occasions this has been clearly expressed (cf Moussa 1996:5), but mostly it becomes manifest when imported methods of conflict resolution are simply adopted, with or without adaptations, as useful and effective methods (cf pp 12-13,15-16 above).

Further discussion of wisdom from Africa and the world

This openness indicates a second way in which our present discussion can be continued. The first and obvious way in which it should remain open ended has already been stated at the beginning (pp 3-4 above). What has been shared on all the preceding pages is intended to encourage further searching and researching into all possible conflict resolution wisdom from Africa. But this ongoing process may then also include the exploring of ways in which wisdom from elsewhere can be appropriately integrated with Africa's own wisdom.

Such further discussion in these two directions should not be seen merely as an intellectual exercise. We may surely expect wise, implementable findings to emerge from it. Two crucial needs may provide enough incentive for continuing the discussion.

The alarming increase in internal conflicts between minorities and majorities highlights the need to address the sensitive but serious problem of *majoritarianism*.

The escalating of brutal violence, of which by far the most is perpetrated by men, makes it urgently necessary to develop effective ways of restricting *male domineering*.

### 5.3 CONTINUING DISCUSSION ...

More questions, answers and questions

What is concluded in this "conclusion" (pp 102-112), is only my sharing of impressions and thoughts with readers who are interested enough in the topic to have read to these last pages. A publication like this one, unlike a daily newspaper or correspondence between friends, inevitably has to reach a final sentence on a last page. Hopefully, however, all of us, as readers and writers,

will not forget the topic when we close the book. Hopefully, also, the topic will be kept topical by contributions from many, if not all, countries in Africa (cf pp 3-4 above).

True wisdom, after all, never claims to have arrived. Both creators and users of wisdom are explorers on a continuing journey. If we happen to be interested in *conflict resolution* wisdom, we have to realise, therefore, that we are involved in a never-ending but fascinating process of observing, searching, questioning, thinking, discussing, planning, experimenting, improving, assessing and re-searching.

So, as an unconcluding conclusion to our discussion and an inspiring incentive for our ongoing journey, I wish to share the following:

Time and again, in context by context, and situation by situation, **Africa is communicating a message of community and communion.** In order to celebrate the potential of human harmony in song-loving Africa, this may be endorsed on a musical note.

A song that was made a few decades ago has two lines recurring as a chorus:

Africa is shaped like a question mark,  
but Africa has the answer!

Surely, to questions about meaningful living and lasting conflict resolution Africa does have a wise answer: **Responding to the inevitable reality of ethnic, group and individual diversity, we can develop the inherent togetherness of human living, and experience the inspiration of sharing a common *ubuntu*.**

But also, the shape of our continent can serve as a continual reminder to all of us to **keep asking penetrating questions in our search for conflict resolution wisdom.**

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Stellenbosch, near Cape Town in South Africa, was the birthplace of Jannie Malan (1931) and also the place of most of his school and university education. His studies included a Secondary Teacher's Diploma, Master's degrees in Philosophy and Theology, and a Doctorate (1977) in Biblical Studies, with a focus on Hermeneutics. During his doctoral research he studied for a term at the University of Oxford.

He has worked for 4 years as a high school Science teacher, for 8 years as minister in three pairs of Xhosa-speaking congregations of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, and for 20 years as lecturer, senior lecturer and professor in Biblical Studies at the University of the Western Cape (including 4 years as Dean of the Faculty of Arts). Through all these years he participated, tactfully but resolutely, in the struggle against the notorious political system of apartheid, and also against superficiality and fundamentalism in Christian religious circles.

Apart from 19 conferences in the field of Christian religion (where he presented 16 papers), he has attended 24 in the field of conflict resolution and human relations (where he presented 10 papers). In several of the papers on Christian religion he referred to and strongly recommended life-related Religious Education courses developed elsewhere in Africa. In papers on conflict resolution and human relations he focused on topics like necessary change, mutual understanding, culture-friendliness and inclusiveness. Similar lines can be discerned in his publications (articles in the media and in journals, and a few Religious Education books).

His membership of the following societies dates from the founding of each of them: Southern African Biblical Studies Society, South African Association for Conflict Intervention, and the (South African) Forum: Educating for Peace. Of the last two he is presently treasurer and secretary, respectively.

As the outcome of a study leave project in 1986 he submitted a comprehensive report recommending the establishment of a Conflict Studies course at the University of the Western Cape. This course was then indeed introduced as an interdisciplinary module offered to post-graduate students, and he is still presenting it.

At the end of 1992 he retired, in order to join the ACCORD team as researcher. Thus far he has mainly been concentrating on the fields of free and fair elections, democracy and development, education for justice and peace, multi-cultural and multi-faith tolerance and

respect, and especially on conflict resolution wisdom from Africa. In addition to publications on such topics he has also participated in compiling conference and seminar reports.

He and his wife, Magriet, are looking forward to celebrating, together with their daughter, son-in-law, three sons, three daughters-in-law, and five grandchildren, their 40th anniversary at the end of 1997.



## REVIEWS

This is a very well written and detailed book about conflict resolution wisdom in Africa. It begins its narratives with a detailed but concise narration of African history and then gradually moves on towards modern times. It focuses very well on the issue of conflict by discussing the issue from a social context approach. It looks at how conflicts are normally addressed in the environment where they are emerging or have emerged. Talking may start informally within the families or neighbourhoods concerned. It also looks at how members of society, i.e. elders of both genders, may make meaningful contributions to preventing conflicts. Another constructive way of preventing and counteracting conflict is to promote socio-economic development. Africa's experience of imposed, foreign types of development has led to an important change of perspectives. A home-grown version of people-centred development is being advocated, and is apparently gaining support. People-centred perspectives have wisely been introduced into the area of ethnicity as well. When, recently, various subdued and dormant ethnic aspirations were revived, all sorts of linguistic, cultural and ethnic agendas were widely accepted and emotionally pursued.

Although all the examples of conflict prevention and resolution are obviously of a practical nature, this practicality deserves to be specifically highlighted. These examples are practical, not in the sense of extemporaneous, ad hoc actions, but rather as practical procedures developed out of real life experience. In most, if not all, cases, this development could have included discussion and contemplation, but most probably such talking and thinking were constantly related to actual experience. It is this life context which makes all these methods so useful and recommendable. From neighbourhood negotiation to the OAU mechanism they were designed out of life experience for application in real life. So also, the alarming increase in internal conflicts between minorities and majorities highlights the need to address the sensitive but serious problem of majoritarianism.

The book covers many aspects of conflict resolution, and if there is any criticism, then it has to be that the book is rather detailed. The way it is written, however, in a way that makes it flow easily, more than makes up for this detailedness.

Mr Alioune Sall  
Regional Director  
African Futures Programme  
United Nations Development Programme

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

One of the major constraints to nation-building in post-colonial Africa is that externally generated and directed processes of state formation and development have tended to undermine indigenous values, institutions and patterns of solving problems. This has fostered a tendency to look outside the continent for solutions to Africa's problems. The challenge now is to reverse this mindset, not to reject good ideas from outside the continent, but rather to integrate them with the wealth of accumulated knowledge, wisdom and expertise within Africa. Professor Jannie Malan's *Conflict Resolution Wisdom from Africa* is a major contribution to this challenge. Insightful, intellectually stimulating and functionally targeted, it is a remarkable blend of that which is *humanly* universal to humanity and that which is distinctive to Africa. It should serve as a useful guide to scholars, political leaders, peacemakers and other activists anywhere in the world, but particularly in the African context.

Ambassador Francis Deng  
Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution  
Washington D.C.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes

<sup>2</sup> With regard to a publication in the field of philosophy, Holiday (1994:135) has made the valid point that no particular type of communal life may be assumed to be universally present in the cultural life of people across the entire continent.

<sup>3</sup> Using the cardinal directions, south and north, is undoubtedly preferable to the old-fashioned use of "below" and "above", as still found in *sub-Saharan* and *supra-Saharan*. Such a top-down perspective was apparently derived from the arbitrarily chosen custom of drawing maps with North (and Europe) at the top. Maps may just as well be drawn with south, east or west at the top. And, after all, maps on paper are two-dimensional distortions of the spherical surface of our planet revolving and orbiting through space.

<sup>4</sup> For the sake of convenience we may use the widespread but imported method of dating events as "before the Christian era" (BCE) or "in the Christian era" (CE).

<sup>5</sup> Where a set of recommendations is introduced by the reminder that governments should look at their policies also from the viewpoint of the *people*.

<sup>6</sup> Cf the fresh kind of approach of Caplow (1989), who shifts the attention from abstract formulas to pragmatic arguing, and from war games to peace games.

<sup>7</sup> Gulliver (1979:50-51) already deplored the fact that in writing about negotiation and models for negotiation theorists pay little attention to (or even ignore) factors like rules, norms, values and beliefs.

<sup>8</sup> Cf the themes of a (Christian) religious education course developed in East Africa (Pastoral Institute of Eastern Africa 1974): my personal freedom, my work and relationships, my power to live, my responsibility in community, my search for values, my response to values. (Although, from the particular religious viewpoint, these themes are individualistically phrased, they are definitely elaborated in a relational way, with a repeated emphasis on togetherness, fellowship and friendship.)

<sup>9</sup> Something more about this highly significant concept is said on pp 97-98 below.

<sup>10</sup> In the cultural area spreading across North Africa another type of group mediation is used, in which a group of mediators function as go-betweens, moving to and fro between disputing

parties. In the same area a process of intermediation can also be entrusted to a respected individual (Witty 1980:7).

<sup>11</sup> In which the following frame of reference was used (with reference to Beck and Cowan's (1990:1, 1992:[2]-[3]) scheme of value systems functioning as deep structures in human thinking:

	<b>Self-focused types</b>	<b>Society-focused types</b>
		Tribal democracy
<b>Segregative types</b>	Dictatorial democracy	
		Authoritative democracy
	Capitalistic democracy	
<hr/>		
		Social democracy
<b>Integrative types</b>	Functional democracy	
		Global democracy

<sup>12</sup> When democracy appeared on the aristocratic Athenian scene more than 2500 years ago (Starr 1981:48), it was not really a rule of the *people*, but only of a small part (10% according to Lindeke 1992:5) of the people: *male citizens*. Since then the history of democracy has included many examples of nominal but limited democracies.

<sup>13</sup> Convened by the International Peace Academy (IPA) at Arusha, Tanzania, 23-25 March 1992, under the theme: *Africa's internal conflicts: The search for response*. For further references to this consultation, the term "Arusha Consultation" will be used.

<sup>14</sup> The special consultation on the theme *The OAU and Conflict Management in Africa*, hosted jointly by the OAU and the IPA at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 19-21 May 1993, hereafter referred to as the "Addis Ababa Consultation". And the Cairo Consultation on *The OAU*

*Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution*, held at Cairo, Egypt, 7-11 May 1994, co-sponsored by the IPA and the OAU, with the support of the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

<sup>15</sup> The 14th Southern African Universities Social Science Conference, held at Windhoek, Namibia, 12-14 November 1991, and attended by about 40 delegates (and as many visitors) from 9 countries, had as theme: *Struggles for a multi-party political system or for a civil society: Implications for sustainable democracy and economic transformation*.

<sup>16</sup> The 1st National Conference of the Institute for Multi-Party Democracy, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, 28 February - 1 March 1992, under the theme: *In search of Democracy: Majorities and Minorities*.

<sup>17</sup> Held in Johannesburg, South Africa, 29-30 March 1994, attended by 22 conflict resolution advocates, practitioners and academics (18 from Africa, and 4 from the United States of America), and co-operatively hosted by the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), the Organisation of African Unity and the Africa Leadership Forum. For further references to this consultation the term "Johannesburg consultation" will be used.

<sup>18</sup> Boulding (1992:xiii-xiv,xx) refers to various estimates/counts of communities, societies or ethnic groups in the plus minus 170 states of the world: 10000, 5000, 6267!

<sup>19</sup> Under chapter headings deploring the dual tragedy: *The partition of Africa on paper, 1879-1891*, and *The partition of Africa on the ground, 1891-1901*.

<sup>20</sup> A Consultation on *Civil society and conflict management in Africa*, hosted by the International Peace Academy and the Organisation of African Unity, in co-operation with the Centre for Conflict Resolution at Cape Town, and held near Cape Town, South Africa, 29 May - 2 June 1996.

<sup>21</sup> Where the following averages are given for Africa south of the Sahara in 1992: 1,4% growth in gross national product, 3,2% population growth

<sup>22</sup> Since the events in Eastern Europe, symbolised by the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the requirements of the structural adjustment programmes have been expanded to include, over and above all the economic demands, also the political demand for multi-party democracy (Moshi 1992:103,106). From this foreign perspective too, economic and political restructuring are thus being linked together.

<sup>23</sup> Both of these warnings can be read between the lines of the Kampala document's calabash on development (cf Africa Leadership Forum 1991:32-42).

<sup>24</sup> Hosted by the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) at Durban, South Africa, 20-22 March 1995.

<sup>25</sup> See also Adesida-Peterson 1995 for a stimulating compilation of data with regard to women's achievements and initiatives.

<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note that in his latest publication Johan Galtung (1996:33,35) emphasises three types of violence: not only direct and structural violence, but also *cultural violence*.

<sup>27</sup> In this context the useful suggestion was made that the concept of non-interference be replaced by that of "inter-mestics" - domestic issues with international ramifications (cf Ocaya-Lakidi 1993:14).

<sup>28</sup> Cf Morrow 1989:10, where, with regard to education, the point is made that the Western model is not necessarily academic and the African model not necessarily practical. Features that are conspicuously displayed should therefore not prevent us from probing the advantages of underlying cross-fertilisation.

<sup>29</sup> In which five alleged biological findings to justify violence and war were refuted by scientists from around the world and from various relevant sciences. Cf UNESCO 1991:6-7.

<sup>30</sup> Prior to that, there had been the earlier experiment, after the First World War, with the League of Nations which was meant to become a permanent consultative structure, but soon proved to be incapable of maintaining peace. Cf Naidis 1972:452-453,470.

<sup>31</sup> The Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration was not authorised to work at a preventive level. Cf OAU Information Services 1993:6.

<sup>32</sup> The following definitions of terms, based upon the United Nations secretary-general's *An Agenda for Peace* and further developed by the North Atlantic Co-operation Council (Gumbi 1995:27-29), seem to have been generally accepted:

**Conflict prevention** includes different activities ranging from diplomatic initiatives to preventive deployment of troops, intended to prevent disputes from escalating into armed conflicts or from spreading.

**Peace-making** is used for diplomatic actions after the commencement of conflict, with the aim of establishing a peaceful settlement.

**Peace-keeping** is narrowly defined as the containment, moderation and/or termination of hostilities between or within states, through the medium of an impartial third party intervention, organised and directed internationally, using military forces and civilians to complement the political process of conflict resolution and to restore and maintain peace. (Instead of the less apposite *peace-keeping*, *peace-restoration* might have been more suitable, but everyone seems to be going along with the generally adopted term.)

**Peace-enforcement** signifies action in which military means are used to restore peace in an area of conflict.

**Peace-building** is used for post-conflict action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify a political settlement in order to avoid a return to conflict (Gumbi 1995:28-29, Cilliers 1995:57-58).

Of all these terms only *peace-enforcement* is classed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, dealing with "Action With Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression". The others fall in the context of Chapter VI, which deals with "The Pacific Settlement of Disputes" (Gumbi 1995:31).

<sup>33</sup> As in the case of the definitions listed above (p 89, footnote), the global terminology is followed here too, according to which Africa is viewed as a *region* and parts of Africa as *sub-regions*.

<sup>34</sup> Previously the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Desertification (IGADD)

<sup>35</sup> The matter of sovereignty was also discussed when SADC was established (cf Nathan & Honwana 1995:12-13).

<sup>36</sup> There may very well be a version of this word in each of Africa's 800 languages. I have chosen the Xhosa version for two simple reasons. Xhosa happens to be, in a geographical sense, the southernmost, extant version of a truly African language. And secondly, it is the only one of Africa's languages of which I have a working knowledge, and which I am still eagerly studying.

About the pronunciation of *ubuntu*, the following may be said. Both the first and the last *u* are pronounced as in *put*, while the middle *u* (in the stressed syllable) is sounded longer, as the *oo* in *too*. The *b* is the soft, *implosive* b of Xhosa.

<sup>37</sup> A method which members of the ACCORD team has begun using very profitably in training programmes



<sup>38</sup> All the *u* sounds are short as in *put*. The first *a* (in the syllable carrying the main stress) is pronounced as in *arm*, and the second similarly but shorter. The *nx* combination represents the nasalised version of the click sound formed by sucking in air between any side of the tongue and the palate.

<sup>39</sup> I am tempted to add that the author of the above mentioned book on human relations, a person who during a brief visit (which fortunately also included attending one of his classes) impressed both my wife and me with the radiance of relational living, happens to be an Afro-American.

<sup>40</sup> It is interesting to note that the Greeks, the initiators of "love of wisdom" (*philosophia*), also used "wisdom" (*sophia*) in the semantic field of understanding *leading to wise action*. Cf Louw & Nida 1988:384.