

## Disrupting Cycles of Violence in Africa

### Unlocking Complex Dimensions of Human Security

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Disrupting the matrix of domination that feeds systemic inequality and poverty in violence-ridden societies unlocks complex dimensions of human security. Self-reproducing cycles of chronic violence, driven by a multifaceted combination of structural and interpersonal factors, undermine any efforts to achieve such security. This policy brief discusses a range of negotiation processes that can mobilise communities to engage in social actions that supply in their own security and peace-making needs. The discussion generates crucial insights and knowledge that may inform and strengthen community-based 'whole-of-society' strategies for the prevention of violence and its gendered dynamics.

#### Introduction

Violence shatters lives and poses a major challenge to human security all over the world. At least 25 per cent of the global population live in conditions of long-term violence,<sup>1</sup> more commonly concentrated in low-income countries.<sup>2</sup> Organised violence in Africa has killed millions and displaced many more, leaving them vulnerable to disease and malnutrition.<sup>3</sup> Violence has traumatised generations of children and young adults. It

has broken the bonds of trust with authority structures among and across local communities, shattered education and healthcare systems, disrupted transportation routes and infrastructure, and caused untold damage to the continent's ecology, from its land and waterways to its flora and fauna.<sup>4</sup> In financial terms, the direct and indirect costs of conflict in Africa since 2000 have been estimated to be nearly US\$900 billion.<sup>5</sup>

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Although some progress has been made in Africa in a number of areas, in many societies positive change is still not happening rapidly and effectively enough. Current security interventions are not achieving the outcomes that are needed to ensure adequate progress in creating peaceful relations and a 'better life for all'. Self-reproducing systems of chronic violence, driven by a complex combination of structural and interpersonal factors, undermine efforts seeking the prevention of violence. It is at this point that we question what we know, and possibly can know, about achieving positive change and building peaceful relations for enduring human security. Here, we propose community-based 'whole-of-society' recommendations in the recognition of far-reaching consequences of protracted violence for the well-being of citizens. This holistic approach should be anchored and ideally initiated by local actors. It involves enlisting local cultural and religious traditions based on interest and respect; applying cultural empathy as a tool of analysis; using culture as a bridge and linking localised needs to access implicit cultural knowledge and promote empowerment; initiating a 'cultural inventory' of resources for peacebuilding; and fostering discussions on how to strengthen a local culture of peace by adapting and updating past practices.<sup>6</sup>

Seeking to engage often-isolated stakeholders within development subsystems created by the likes of donors, governments, policy and research spheres, social service agencies, and educators, this policy brief aims firstly to provide an avenue for critical discourse leading toward wider research and the dissemination of best practices and opportunities and, secondly, to address perceived challenges. As a community of scholar-practitioners and community-based researchers involved in two projects over the past six years,<sup>7</sup> our strong conviction is that simultaneous interventions at various levels to improve the human condition would be more effective when a high degree of scientific knowledge and coherence exists at the nexus of policies, implementation and societal realities. It is our ambition to encourage a community-based and policy-directed research agenda conducive to finding effective strategies for the prevention and disruption of cycles of violence.

## Human Security and the Matrix of Domination

The matrix of domination refers to the overall organisation of power in a society. The matrix is characterised by two features. The first is that the matrix has a particular arrangement of intersecting systems of oppression. The factors influencing how these systems come together are historically and socially specific. The second is that intersecting systems of oppression are specifically organised through four interrelated domains of power, viz. (i) structural (i.e., legal, religious and economic structures); (ii) disciplinary (i.e., routines that emanate from rationales regarding the regulation of human behaviour, and bureaucracies for maintaining the structural systems); (iii) hegemonic (i.e., the prevailing ideas of the privileged elites, the language used for framing such ideas and the iconography used to reinforce the ideas; and (iv) interpersonal (i.e., coming to terms with how one's actions and thoughts, in turn, perpetuate another's subjugation).

Human security is a development paradigm grounded in the context of an environment absent of insecurity and threats from: (i) *fear* (e.g., of physical, gender, sexual or psychological abuse, violence, persecution or death, natural disasters, hunger, and disease); and (ii) *want* (e.g., of gainful employment, food, health, education, potable water, resource access, microfinance services and markets, human rights, and a clean environment).<sup>8</sup> The objective of human security thus is to safeguard the vital core of all human lives from critical pervasive threats, without jeopardising long-term human fulfilment.<sup>9</sup> It deals with the capacity to identify threats, to avoid them where possible, and to mitigate their effects when they do occur.<sup>10</sup> It means helping victims cope with the consequences of the widespread insecurity and dehumanisation arising from societal geopolitical, economic, cultural, environmental and technological risks.

Césaire captures the lived experience and continuous impact of colonisation in a descriptive and critical manner:

My turn to state an equation: colonization = 'thingification.' I hear the storm. They talk to me about progress, about 'achievements,' diseases cured, improved standards of living. I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extra-

ordinary possibilities wiped out. I am talking about thousands of 'men sacrificed to the Congo-Ocean', I am talking about those who, as I write this, are digging the harbour of Abidjan by hand. I am talking about millions of men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life – from life, from the dance, from wisdom. I am talking about millions of men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkeys. I am talking about natural economies that have been disrupted – harmonious and viable economies adapted to the indigenous population – about food crops destroyed, malnutrition permanently introduced, agricultural development oriented solely toward the benefit of the metropolitan countries; about the looting of products, the looting of raw materials. They talk to me about local tyrants brought to reason; but I note that in general the old tyrants get on very well with the new ones, and that there has been established between them, to the detriment of the people, a circuit of mutual services and complicity.<sup>11</sup>

This passage describes how not only individuals but whole civilisations and systems were, and continue to be, dehumanised. '... [S]ocieties drained of their essence, institutions undermined, millions of men [and women] torn from ... their habits, their life – from life, from the dance, from wisdom'.<sup>12</sup> These destructive forces invade and decimate the sources of humanity that define what it means to be human. To imagine a nurturing community – the essence of caring, sharing and overall charity towards others – being emptied of its very heart and soul only begins to describe the effect of this crime against all humanity; a crime that should not be allowed to continue. Unfortunately, the spiteful presence of 'thingification' continues to pervade the world, dehumanising the poor, the disenfranchised, and the dispossessed in many societies. Accordingly, the relationship between the 'thingification' of the dispossessed, on the one hand, and chronic violence, on the other, must be acknowledged and understood in order for it to be disrupted so as to eventually realise enduring human security.

The genesis and perpetuation of synchronic cycles of violence straddle the entire range of political, economic, social and environmental realms. For instance, one of the challenges related to hunger and nutrition in Africa relates to the so-called 'seed wars'. These seed wars embody both economic and social conflict dimensions. The

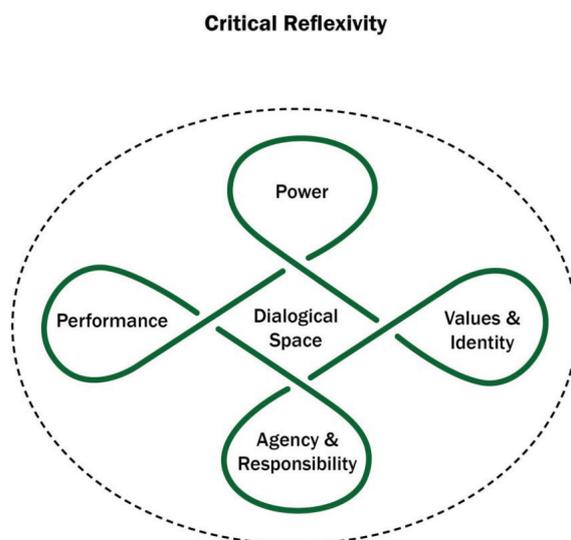
following case study illuminates the relationship between the matrix of domination and Césaire's 'thingification'.

The wars arise from a series of laws (structural domination) giving big biotechnology firms like Monsanto Corporation the legal right to control seeds (disciplinary domination) that are used to cultivate crops in many parts of the world. The laws are often promoted as a means of incentivising (hegemonic domination) companies to develop new seed varieties so as to ensure the marketability of crops. The counter-argument is that such laws effectively impede farmers' traditional practices in developing and exchanging seeds.<sup>13</sup> Whereas in developed countries these wars have been fought in the courts of law, the weak institutions in many African countries suggest that in Africa they will be fought outside the courts. More important and worrying, though, is the likelihood of these wars giving rise to new conflicts and the escalation of old ones (interpersonal domination). The reference to 'marketable crops' under the seed wars discourse is namely indicative of the fact that conflict also carries an economic dimension. There are numerous reports of conflicts around access to pasture and water for livestock in many parts of the continent. The economic development discourse indicates that tackling the economic development question often results in both winners and losers. With reference to globalisation and economic development, the difference between winner and loser is often found in how and where firms (and countries) integrate into global value chains.<sup>14</sup> Winners tend to integrate into global value chains in a manner that allows them to engage in activities that result in increasing returns, whereas the losers are the ones that engage in activities that engender declining returns.

## The Matrix of Negotiation

The matrix of negotiation is a shared meaning-making process for providing community security and peace-making needs. There is no single actor or strategy capable of advancing human security. Accordingly, the matrix of negotiation encourages 'whole-of-society' processes and underpins 'trans-', 'inter-', and 'multi-' (TIM) disciplinary engagement with contemporary human security problems. Mutual convergence in the implementation of strategies is crucial to leverage peaceful relationships and improved human development.

**Figure 1:** The matrix of negotiation



Source: Adaptation from Sliep and Norton in Maphosa, S.B and Keadley, A., 2016<sup>15</sup>

Engendering mutual dialogue in a negotiation space promotes the gradual acquisition by communities of scientific knowledge that: (i) allows them to comprehend the power that surrounds them; (ii) takes into account the community's values and identity, possibly in response to the dominant power surrounding them; (iii) helps them come to terms with their collective ability to empower themselves and respond to the dynamics within their community; and (iv) enables them to perform actions to bring about changes in their circumstances and security needs. All of these actions occur in a place of dialogue and empathy, making it possible for communities to be advanced from a subjugated space permitting only a partial perspective to an enlightened, and action-oriented one allowing for collective well-being.

If we consider the seed wars, it becomes evident that there is a need for a meeting between Monsanto and IKS holders. The latter have developed their seed practices over centuries, whereas the former's modern, scientific methods have become a threat to survival due to their enormous need for pesticides among other things. The question is, how can cycles of violence be disrupted with the help of IKS holders' methodology – i.e. the knowledge that IKS holders have developed over centuries? This knowledge has been undervalued not only in the time of the colonisers, but also during the post-colonial era, and it is a predisposition that still persists in modernity, particularly in the colonised mind.

The matrix of negotiation represents a process that can generate comprehensive knowledge for responding to chronic violence if it is taken up by policy makers and researchers. The Nagoya Protocol, which is of relevance to the Department of Science and Technology (DST) in South Africa, is a relevant case. The *Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilisation to the Convention on Biological Diversity* is a 2010 supplementary agreement to the 1992 *Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD). Its aim is the implementation of one of the three objectives of the CBD: the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources, thereby contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The benefits of conserving biodiversity namely go beyond material rewards, enriching cultural diversity at the same time. The use and appreciation of South Africa's biological diversity, its rich cultural and traditional knowledge pool and a deep attachment to the country's natural heritage and beauty demand the inclusion of all people and IKS. In the words of President Nelson Mandela, 'Each one of us is intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country. Each time one of us touches the soil of this land, we feel a sense of personal renewal',<sup>16</sup>

A further illustration of cycles of violence is to be found in the lack of voice of historically marginalised groups such as women. This can also be referred to as 'silent violence', a phrase coined by Watts when writing about the oil

debacle in Northern Nigeria.<sup>17</sup> When applying the domination matrix to the Nigerian situation, the following characteristics emerge:

*Deconstruction of power:* Power has been misused in the exploitation of oil and the distribution of wealth from oil in the Niger Delta region.

*Values and identity:* Boko Haram use religion and resistance in the splintering of Muslim communities, drawing the spotlight by, for example, abducting young girls. Some of the ways in which these abducted girls are being abused include their being used as suicide bombers, being reduced to sex slaves and having to carry the group's loot and supplies.

*Agency and responsibility:* As a result of the ripples from these cycles of violence, the basic fabric of mobilisation and responsibility has been torn at a community level. It has now emerged that even when some of the kidnapped girls manage to escape, it is difficult for them to re-integrate into communities. They are treated with suspicion, and it is said they have been 'polluted' and are bearing the children of the enemy.

*Accountability performativity:* Hundreds of billions of dollars have not improved to the standard of living for the vast majority of people in Northern Nigeria, with more than 60 per cent of them suffering from famine and disease. Within communities, members are inflicting violence on each other while those in power remain untouchable.

## Way Forward/Recommendations

There is a continuous need for research and funding to generate scientific knowledge that addresses the dearth of information about, and strengthens communities and policy-makers' understanding of the nuanced realities of vulnerable communities' lives. Implementing interventions without sufficiently understanding local realities may be counterproductive and ineffective – and may even contribute to more violence. Deeper knowledge on the local realities could provide important clues that may help in drafting better policies to address chronic violence and, inter alia, its gendered dynamics. Furthermore, greater knowledge could ultimately support collective action by communities.

Scientists and holders of indigenous knowledge systems should be encouraged to listen, talk and negotiate with each other through research and dissemination.

'Silent' voices, especially those of the marginalised and vulnerable such as women, children,

the youth, the disabled, and minority racial groups, should be encouraged and strengthened.

Coherence should be promoted by focusing on interactions and processes in everyday life, on the one hand, as well as processes and structures at other levels where institutions, organisations and governments are involved, on the other. It is crucial to promote aspirations for increased human security within all spheres of society.

Responsible authorities at the local level, both formal and non-formal, should mount, promote, and endorse 'healthy and peaceful campaigns' for achieving irreversible, fundamental and significant changes that make systemic peace development possible.

Following on Césaire's analysis, a vigorous rehumanisation plan should be embarked upon.<sup>18</sup>

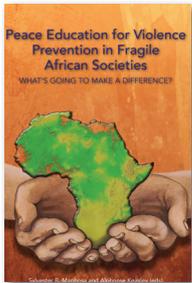
## Acknowledgements

This research is supported by the HSRC and its AISA division through a Parliamentary grant from the Government of South Africa.

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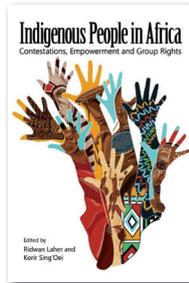
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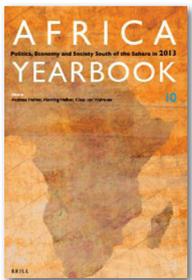
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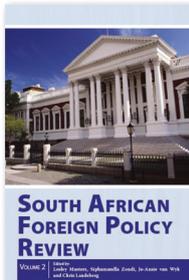
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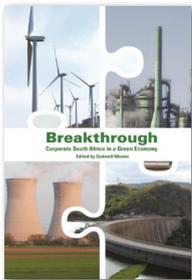
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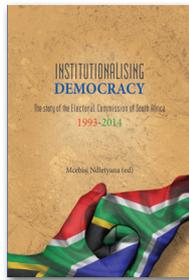
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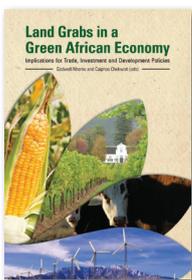
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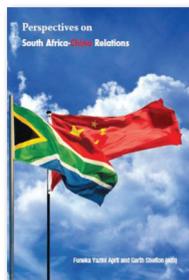
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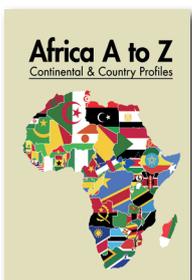
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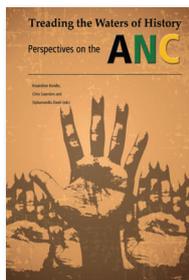
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