

Chapter 49

Transforming Conflict in the Hands and Hearts of Communities in Kenya: Understanding the Relevance of Amani Mashinani Model

Eddah Mutua

St. Cloud State University, USA

Susan Kilonzo

Maseno University, Kenya

ABSTRACT

Media representation of ethnic conflicts in Africa constructs an image of a continent ridden with wars and violence. At the same time, prominence given to the Western intervention in conflicts in Africa leads to asymmetry of understanding about the role victims of violence play to improve their conditions. This chapter challenges macro-level frameworks about conceptions of ethnic conflict and peacebuilding by highlighting the work of Amani Mashinani (peace at grassroots) as a potential alternative model to transform conflict in North Rift Valley in Kenya. It appropriates peacebuilding as a practice of everyday life and explicates factors that explicitly account for understanding grassroots peacebuilding.

INTRODUCTION

Ellis (2006) demonstrates empirically that ethnic conflict occurs when social conditions become controversial or uncertain. Furthermore, he argues, ethnicity has little to do with conflict since most ethnic groups live peacefully more often than not. This observation is significant in understanding ethnic conflict discussed here and more so, conditions that determine how the conflict is managed. Even though the influences and causes of ethnic conflicts are multiple, complex and sometimes ‘unclear exactly’ (Ellis, 2006), international and national actors have gone ahead to provide constructs of peacebuilding strategies

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and policy preferences during and after ethnic conflict occurs. Often, these peacebuilding constructs tend to necessitate knowledge of macro-level principles of conflict management and relationship to the dynamics of conflicting parties to the political, social, cultural and historical context of the conflict. This knowledge is well documented in policy documents and scholarly works as evidenced in the literature reviewed for this chapter. Having said this however, stakeholders in peacebuilding processes including government agencies, international organizations, Non-governmental organizations, scholars, and activists among others still have to learn more about micro-level approaches that stand to offer potential new understandings of ethnic conflict management.

This chapter aims to extend the range of and new understandings in ethnic conflict communication by assessing the contributions of *Amani Mashinani* (Peace at Grassroots) approach to ethnic conflict management in North Rift Valley of Kenya. *Amani Mashinani* model of community centered peacebuilding was initiated by Bishop Korir of the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret Kenya to bring peace among warring ethnic groups in the North Rift Valley. We discuss strategies used in transforming relationships severed by conditions that force diverse ethnic communities to use violence for their ‘safety’ and survival in the region. Specifically, we examine the relevance of *Amani Mashinani* in transforming conflict and promoting peaceful co-existence among communities in conflict. Peacebuilding efforts are perceived as serving to transform conflict and not conflict resolution because the larger context of the causes of the conflict is yet to be addressed and resolved. Moreover, we take into consideration the relational basis of the ethnic groups in conflict to understand the intentionality of planned activities. These communities are not strangers to each other. They have lived together and build relationships over a long time. The task at hand then is, show the significance of *Amani Mashinani* as a community effort to limit destructive effects of the conflict and restore trusting relationships and peaceful co-existence.

The analysis of *Amani Mashinani* aims to explain its value in transforming severed relationships among communities in North Rift Valley. We draw from micro-level analysis of communication for conflict resolution theorizing how certain type of contact allows conflicting parties to reinterpret narratives, alter prejudices, and rehumanize the other (Ellis, 2006). This approach builds on foundations of intergroup social contact theory (Allport 1954, Pettigrew 1998). We examine the role of *Amani Mashinani* in providing a space where intergroup contact happens and possibilities for renewed relationships are embraced to give meaning to actions taken to promote peaceful co-existence. To locate these meanings, Lederach & Lederach’s (2010) notion of social healing offers a framework to understand purposeful actions taken by the conflicting communities to heal their relationships and chart pathways for the future. In an effort to broaden research about social healing, Lederach & Lederach draw from Paula Green’s definition of social healing as “the reconstruction of communal relations from mass violence” (Green, 2009 cited in Lederach & Lederach, 2010 p. 7). In the vein of this definition Lederach & Lederach argue that “social healing requires a focus on the local community that takes seriously their lived experience in settings of protracted conflict, with their inevitable need to survive and locate both the individual and the collective voice” (p.7).

Put together, individual and collective actions performed by members of conflicting communities exemplify a relational framework that distinguishes *Amani Mashinani* from government led macro-level approaches used to foster peace in the North Rift Valley.

Ethnographic case study method is used to investigate *Amani Mashinani* model. Our approach is ethnographic because it uses thick description (Geertz, 1973) to unveil and describe how *Amani Mashinani* shapes ways conflicting communities transform relationships to seek peaceful co-existence. Likewise, the case study approach poses ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions relevant in investigating a contemporary

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