CONFLICT, POPULATION DISPLACEMENT, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Ogenga Otunnu

Human history has been punctuated by widespread and recurring violent conflicts. Attempts to explain the causes, utility and effects of the phenomenon have engaged the minds of scholars and other stakeholders for centuries. At the centre of the inquiry are questions about human nature: whether and to what extent violence is innately determined in humans or influenced by the external environment.

According to ethnology, aggression or violence is innate and essentially genetic, not learned or a response to environmental conditions. The role of the environment, K. Lorenz posits, is simply to provide stimuli that trigger or hinder intraspecific aggression. This view, which modifies and restates the Social Darwinian theory of natural selection, maintains that aggression is not dysfunctional. Rather, it serves a number of important functions: the preservation of species through natural selection; the creation of social ranks which imposes social order and stability, thus reducing intraspecific damage; defense of territory; protection of mate, siblings and community;

and the distribution of members over available habitat. What makes aggression dangerous, however, is the spontaneity of instinct. Thus, Lorenz concludes that it is important to provide channels into which aggressive instinct can be beneficially diverted or

redirected. Viewing aggressive sport, it is asserted, provides such an outlet.[1]

However, this hydraulic model—which envisages a bottled up flow of aggression constantly seeking expression and overflowing into violence—has been severely challenged because

of its questionable validity to both humans and non-humans, the inadequacy of data and logic, and the failure to consider structural factors and semi-autonomous psychological causes.[2] The findings of increased aggressiveness among some people after viewing violent films or sports is also a direct refutation of the instinctive theory of aggression. The contention that aggression is innate and that humans are inevitably disposed to violence does not only present a false image of humans, it also makes violence a self-fulfilling prophecy. Equally, it makes conflict resolution practically impossible. The intellectual weaknesses of the theory, and the potential effects of endorsing the explanation, compelled a group of 20 leading scientists to repudiate it in Seville, Spain, in May 1986.[3]

Imitation and social learning have been advanced as an alternative explanation of causes of violence. According to one of the leading proponents of this view, A. Bandura, aggression or violence is largely learned by observation through modeling.[4] "By observing others," he insists, "one forms rules of behaviour, and on future occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action."[5] He then suggests that, "modeling influences can serve as instructors, inhibitors, disinhibitors, facilitators, stimulus enhancers, and emotional arousers ... When novel modeled conduct is punished, observers are likely to learn the conduct that was punished as well as the restrains."[6] One who is rewarded for violence, therefore, will influence others to do the same; conversely, one who losses out for a similar act will deter others.

In his review of the behavioural-oriented social learning theory of aggression, K. Bjorkqvist suggests that learning aggression from models require, at minimum, four factors: "1) the degree of similarity between the model situation and the actual situation, 2) the degree of identification between actor and model, 3) the success of failure of the model (vicarious conditioning), and 4) the amount of exposure to the model situation."[7] It should be added that, while the theory correctly indicates that peace and violence can be learned, it neglects some important biological traits, and socioeconomic and political factors that influence human behaviour.[8]

Another explanation that has been advanced to examine violence is the frustration-aggression hypothesis. According to the hypothesis, frustration—which provokes anger, that in turn, triggers aggression—is the most important source of violence. Simply put, there is a direct and necessary link between violence and frustration. A number of intervening variables are then suggested: the number of frustrations in the past; the norms concerning aggressive behaviour; and the resources available to potential object of aggression to punish or retaliate against the aggressor.[9]

The utility of the hypothesis, however, is undermined by the fact that people may be aggressive not as a result of frustration, but in response to other factors. Furthermore, frustration, including that which results from unjust deprivation or inhibited goals, does not necessarily lead to aggression. For example, some people who are frustrated may become depressed, or may seek non-aggressive means to resolve their frustration. Simply, the hypothesis forgets that there are multiple causes of aggression and multiple effects of frustration.[10]

Factors and conditions that make societies prone to violence include: illegitimate and despotic regimes; illegitimate, despotic, corrupt and unaccountable states and institutions; ethnic, racial, religious, gender, cultural and economic discriminations; scarcity of resources such as arable land and water; manipulation and politicization of differences, grievances and conflict; frustrated and unmet expectations; widespread and severe unemployment and poverty; pervasive culture of violence; erosion of societal cultures and systems of conflict resolution; power politics; protracted and severe ecological crises; and easy

availability of weapons and ammunition.[11]

Some of these factors and conditions have led to wars, massive denials of human rights, genocide and large-scale internal displacement and influx of refugees. In Africa, for example, violent conflicts have ravaged many countries. In Algeria, the violence that resulted from the cancellation of multiparty general elections at the beginning of 1992, has claimed between 60,000 and 70,000 lives. In Angola, the horrors of the war that began in 1975 left approximately 1.5 million people dead, and 15 million land mines in the countryside. In Liberia, the civil war that broke out in 1989 lead to an estimated 150,000 deaths. In Somalia, the war and famines have claimed between 400,00 and 500, 000 lives since the overthrow of the Siad Barre regime in January 1991. In Rwanda, an estimated 500,000 to 1,000,000 people, most of them Tutsi, were massacred during the genocide in 1994. Approximately 200,000 Hutu refugees perished in the present day Democratic Republic of Congo. In Sudan, approximately 1.5 million people have died directly as a result of the civil war and famines since 1983. An estimated 300,000 people have been killed in the on-going war between the government and rebels in Acholi, Uganda, since 1987.[12]

In Asia, the situation is not markedly different. In Afghanistan, for example, the protracted war that followed the withdrawal of USSR troops and the overthrow of the Communist regime in April 1992, did not only led to the increased involvement of India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia and Uzbekistan in the war, but also claimed thousands of lives, and left an estimated 10 million land mines in the countryside. In Cambodia, the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime (Khmer Rouge) in late 1978—which regime had destroyed between 1,000,000–3,000,000 lives—led to more deaths and displacement. The war also left behind an estimated 10 million land mines in the countryside. The violent occupation of the former Portuguese colony of East Timor by Indonesia since December 1975, has claimed the lives of approximately 200,000 Timorese. In Sri Lanka, the war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has claimed over 32,000 lives since 1983. In Tajikistan, the war that broke after the declaration of independence in August 1991, is estimated to have killed between 50,000 and 200,000 people.[13]

In Europe, violent conflicts have also ravaged some countries. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, more than 100,000 people were killed in the war that followed the resolution of federal Yugoslavia. The war or ethnic cleansing ended immediately after the Dayton (Paris) accord was signed in November 1995, and a NATO-led multinational force (IFOR) launched Operation Joint Endeavor to replace the United Nations humanitarian operation. The war left an estimated 3 million land mines in the countryside. In Croatia, the civil war that broke out in 1991 caused the deaths of more than 10,000 people. In Russia (Chechnya), the violent conflict that followed Chechnya's abortive declaration of independence, caused the deaths of an estimated 40,000 people.[14]

These examples indicate that the cost of violent conflicts, measured in terms of deaths, is a major calamity of the closing decades of this century. Injuries caused by wars and land mines escalate the costs. To these burdens must be added the trauma that the survivors suffer; large-scale internal displacement and refugee migrations that result from such conflicts; profound economic consequences, including insecurity which discourages investments, loss of human resources, increased corruption, disruptions of agriculture, transportation and industry; severe damage to cultures and institutions which could settle conflicts and provide stability; and the promotion of the culture of violence, repression and discrimination.

Given the patterns, magnitude and effects of violent conflicts, a very pressing need exists for prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.

How conflicts are defined, what strategies and methods are adopted at a particular point, the objectives of intervention and the cultural, socioeconomic and political history of the society, will have significant effects on both the outcome and future relations. Often, each specific conflict is interlocked with other conflicts. Hence, changes in other conflicts may affect both the direction and tempo of the specific conflict that is the focus of attention.

Preventing conflicts before they develop into violence is the most desirable and least costly method of conflict resolution. It requires effective and comprehensive early warning systems. Such systems must be based on factual analyses of the socioeconomic, cultural and political history of the society, and rigorous and balanced examination of the underlying causes, nature and phase of the conflict. Early warnings, in turn, require assertive leadership and commitment to early actions that will alleviate pressures, or risk factors; and comprehensive efforts to resolve underlying and/or structural root causes of violence.[15]

Once violent conflicts have erupted, preventative action should focus on "creating political, economic, and, if necessary, military barriers to limit the spread of conflict within and between states. Firebreaks may be created through well-designed assertive efforts to deny belligerents the ability to resupply arms, ammunition, and hard currency, combined with humanitarian operations that provide relief for innocent people."[16]

Negotiation is also a necessary method of conflict resolution. Here, conditions that make the protagonists recognize the humanity of each other, and that a mutually acceptable settlement is possible and necessary, should be created. Such confidence-building strategy requires mediators who are perceived as fair and just by the parties to the conflict. This perception is important if a high-quality and durable settlement is to be reached. The mediators should also possess good understanding of the conflict and its

underlying causes, the parties and the society. Depending on the nature, phase and goals of conflict and conflict resolution, the roles of the intermediaries may include: encouraging communication; providing appropriate settings for negotiations; developing options; offering compensations and rewards that facilitate reaching negotiated settlements; increasing costs of not reaching negotiated settlements; offering appropriate conflict resolution methods; controlling information; and setting time limits.

Generally, mediators fall into two broad categories: non-official and official. The former, called variously, Track Two, people-to-people, citizen, or supplementary diplomacy, increasingly offers important channels of communication and creates options for negotiated settlements. These are often done by organizing conferences and providing other forums for unofficial dialogue involving members and/or supporters of the parties in conflict. Such activities may also influence formal decision-making process, that is Track One Diplomacy. National and international non-governmental organizations are among the major players in Track Two diplomacy. For example, The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) were principal mediators in the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement that temporarily ended the war in Sudan. Saint Egidio and churches in Mozambique were important actors in Mozambique peace negotiations. In Uganda, the churches continue to exert pressure on both the government and armed opposition groups for a comprehensive negotiated settlement to the war in the north and west of the country. The International Peace Academy, the Carter Center's International Negotiation Network, the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy, and the International Alert, among other NGOs, have also been instrumental in mediation efforts.[17]

Official mediators are representatives of states, regional and international organizations, and pursue Track One diplomacy. Often, they bring more incentives, resources and muscle and higher prestige to mediation than unofficial mediators. For example, powerful and industrialized states are capable of engaging in "power mediation" by using coercion or leverage in the form of incentives, compensation or threatened punishments to drive the parties towards a negotiated settlement. Weak states with low prestige and very limited access to resources, on the other hand, are more likely to engage in "pure mediation" in which they have no power over the outcome.

Although bringing more incentives, rewards, resources and muscle, and higher prestige do not guarantee success in negotiations, it improves the chances of settlements. This is particularly true when the parties to the conflict depend on the support of external powers for financial and military assistance, moral support, propaganda and recognition. The significance of assets, resources, prestige and leverage in mediation also suggests that weak, poor and less prestigious regional and international governmental organizations have diminished influence in driving the parties towards negotiated settlements. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) is a good example of a weak, poor and less prestigious regional governmental organization that has very little power over the outcome of negotiations. Admittedly, the ineffectiveness of the OAU in mediation is also result of other factors: its reluctance to get directly involved in internal conflicts because the charter of the organization prohibits such an action; the willingness of some member states to continue aiding the protagonists with propaganda and war supplies; and the presence of many major violators of human rights, and dictators as heads of state.

In some instances, mediation is supported by sanction regimes and forceful actions to ensure compliance. Sanction is often intended to serve three major policy purposes: send a clear message of grave concern to the offending sate; punish the state for unacceptable behaviour; and indicate that stronger measures, including, if necessary, the use of force may follow.[18] The imposition of sanction on Iraq is a good example. Effective sanction regimes, however, must be carefully targeted to avoid punishing the whole population. The sanction regime in Iraq is an example of one that is poorly targeted and has lost moral appeal because it continues to decimate the population.

The foregoing suggests that violent conflicts are caused by many related factors. Resolving violent conflicts, therefore, requires a number of coordinated interventions by many actors. Powerful governmental organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), for example, should use their powerful economic leverage to attach non-violent political practice, democratic pluralism and respect for human rights, as conditions for loans and development assistance. Such a policy should be supported by the industrialized states that control these financial institutions. However, it will also mean that some aspects of the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) that cause tensions and violence, and undermine economic development and social justice, should be eliminated.[19]

Collective actions for conflict resolution will require educational institutions to offer courses in conflict resolution and problem-solving. This will also mean reforming the institutions, designing curriculum and adopting teaching techniques that are less adversarial, less dictatorial, and less discriminatory. Teaching and learning peace will involve developing a clearer theoretical and practical understanding of conflict and conflict resolution techniques.

Non-governmental and governmental organizations that provide humanitarian assistance and work with refugees and immigrants should become more actively involved in conflict resolution. This will require the organizations to train their employees in cross-cultural conflict resolution. Those who work for the organizations

should also posses good and balanced understanding of the people and/or societies that they assist. Such knowledge and training are important because those who are being assisted are not only victims of conflicts, but also carry the very conflicts that uprooted them from their homes.

Reducing the likelihood of violence, containing and resolving those that emerge, demand identifying, creating and strengthening local and international institutions and regimes for conflict resolutions, protection of human rights, and economic development. Also, such goals call for active commitment, investment and participation of governments, the United nations, regional organizations, religious institutions, business community, and the media in resolving conflicts and eliminating the root causes of violent conflicts. It is only by engaging actively, promptly and collaboratively in preventing conflict that the international community will avoid watching many more countries being violently torn apart, millions of people killed and many more violently displaced, violence spreading to, and/or destabilizing peaceful regions.[20]

This issue of *Refuge* focuses largely on conflict and conflict resolution. The significance of strengthening international human rights institutions and regimes; the assumptions and roles of non-governmental organizations in conflict resolution and rebuilding war-torn societies; scarcity of resources, such as land, and its implications for conflict and conflict resolution, are discussed. ▣

Notes

1. K. Lorenz, *On Aggression* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1967), vii–x, 34–40, 55–71, 237–89.

2. See, for a start, S. D. Nelson, "Nature/ Nuture Revisited I: A Review of Biological Basis of Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 18, no. 2 (1974): 285–335; P. Wilkinson, "Social Scientific Theory of Violence, in *Terrorism: Theory and Practice*, edited by Y. Alexander et al. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1979), 48–51; D. Zillmann, *Hostility and Aggression* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence, 1979), 1–170.

3. See "Seville Statement on Violence (1989)," deposited at the Lamarsh Centre for Violence and Conflict Resolution, York University.

4. A. Bandura, *Principles of Behavior Modification* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 62.

5. Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 47. See also, A. Bandura, D. Ross and S. A. Ross, "Transmission of Aggression Through Imitation of Aggressive Models," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 66 (1963): 3–11.

6. Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action*, 47.

7. K. Bjorkqvist, "The Inevitability of Conflict But not of Violence: Theoretical Considerations on Conflict and Aggression," in *Cultural Variation in Conflict Resolution: Alternative to Violence*, edited by D. P. Fry and K. Bjorkqvist (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlabaum, 1997), 32.

8. See, for example, Wilkinson, "Social Scientific Theory of Violence," 52. Indeed, Bandura, a liberalized behaviorist, is critical of some behavioral formulations. See Bandura, *Principles of Behaviour Modification*, 45–46.

9. See J. Dollard et. al., *Frustration and Aggression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), 7; L. Berkowitz, "Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis Revisited," in *Roots of Aggression: A Re-examination of Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis*, edited by Berkowitz (New York: Atherdon, 1969), especially 1–34.

10. See, for example, Bjorkqvist, "The Inevitability of Conflict," 30–31.

11. See, for example, Carnegie Commission, *Preventing Deadly Conflict* (Washington, DC: Carnegie, December 1997).

12. See, for example, The Carter Center, *State of World Conflict, 1995–1996* (Atlanta: The International Negotiation Network, 1996), 16–29; The Democratic Party, *The War in Northern Uganda* (Kampala, 1997).

13. The Carter Center, *State of World Conflict, 1995–1996*, 33–51.

14. Ibid., 64–71.

15. See, for a start, Carnegie Commission, *Preventing Deadly Conflict*, xviii.

16. Ibid.

17. See, for example, D. R. Smock ed., *Making War and Waging Peace: Foreign Intervention in Africa* (Washington, DC: United State Institute of Peace Press, 1993), 11.

18. See, for example, Carnegie Commission, *Preventing Deadly Conflict*, xxiv.

19. For a good discussion of SAPs, see, among others, P. G Gibbon, Y. Bangura and A. Ofstad, *Authoritarianism, Democracy and Adjustment* (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1992).

20. See Carnegie Commission, *Preventing Deadly Conflicts*, xvii–xlvi. ▢

Ogenga Otunnu, Ph.D., teaches in the Department of Politics and School of Public Administration, Ryerson Polytechnic University, Toronto, and Research Associate at The Lamarsh Centre for Violence and Conflict Resolution, York University, Toronto.