

INTERVIEW

Conflicts in Africa and Afghanistan. An Interview with Professor Johan Galtung

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Overview

Professor Johan Galtung was interviewed at the Freie University in Dahlem-Berlin on 4th July 2009 as he ran the workshop Inside the Paxologist Mind. In the interview, Professor Galtung speaks of his experiences, thoughts and suggestions on the conflicts that have dogged Africa and other regions, focussing on the ethnic violence in Kenya in 2007-2008 and violence-prone Afghanistan. He also answers questions regarding some of his methodologies that are in practice today.

Keywords

Johan Galtung, ethnic violence, Afghanistan, reconciliation, peace and conflict, Kenya

THE INTERVIEW

Question: Kenya created the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) in light of the ethnic violence that broke out in 2007-2008. What would be your advice to the commission?

Galtung: Well, the model is South African, I find it positive.

The TJRC in South Africa was too limited to the domestic aspect. In other words between police and the black resistance and you will find similar things between Odinga (Prime Minister of Kenya) and the Kikuyu (largest ethnic group in Kenya). I would broaden it to the international field and look at which outside forces were intervening in it and had interests. If you have a country run to a large extent by the Kikuyu who surround Nairobi, and transnational companies are located there, then guess three times who would be in it?

This is important. If you locate some of the causes outside Kenya you liberate some of the Kenyans from the causes of burden. In other words, expansion to other ac-

tors. Without the Maasai on one side and the Kikuyu on another, and so forth. That would be superficial now, but could have a unifying effect. It can also strengthen the sense of autonomy in Kenya. This would make Kenyans ask themselves whether they are working for the transnationals or for themselves. Then come up with distribution formulas.

TJRC must be tied to solutions. If you go in for reconciliation without a solution, then that is also called pacification – it is a lollypop – the truth about South Africa is that they had the election in 1993 and an end to apartheid. Then they did reconciliation. Are you sure you have a reasonable solution in place so that this does not become lollypop politics?

Another point would be after my own reconciliation experience. The more efficient one than the TJRC in South Africa was the German way of doing it.

Question: And how did the Germans do it?

Galtung: Textbooks write new books. In other words you rewrite the understanding of Kenyan history. In all



history texts there is propaganda and there is no way you can avoid that. What the Germans did is quite interesting. They simply told pupils in all schools that “yes, we have committed terrible crimes – and this is what we did and it will never happen again”. The way you write about what happened in connection with the elections (Kenya) would then be very important. The part of reconciliation is the written version of what happened. That can only be done with the parties cooperating and saying “I can’t accept this unless you accept this”.

Question: Looking at Transcend and where you have worked in the world in terms of conflicts – we are talking of how many conflicts?

Galtung: 122 conflicts. Yes. And there is one country that comes up almost all the time – United States of America. One way or the other.

Question: Do you think that Transcend would be ideal in solving some of the conflicts in parts of Africa? Let’s look at Sudan, Chad, Northern Uganda and Kenya.

Galtung: In the book called 100 Peace and Conflict Perspectives, there are about ten conflicts in Africa. Sudan is not yet published in that book. It will be in the next book. Yes, I think we have reasonably good ideas.

Question: And do you think it will be successful? Look at lawless Somalia. This has been going on for a long time. What would be your input to this?

Galtung: First you have to use the methods of Somali’s themselves. The so-called Shir. It is a genius method which is not a linear agenda. But you have to look at it. Also, you must respect and know that the main issue is not territory but land. I have been working on that a lot. It is a failed state and that had much to do with Mohamed Siad Barre and Mohamed Aidid. Mohamed Aidid murdering the former because he had made a deal with the Americans and sold much of Somalia to three American oil companies. And for that reason America wanted to kill Mohamed Aidid. So they launched the January 1992 invasion under the pretext of the food crisis which was caused by fishing by the EU. And they intervened but as the American-in-Chief told me privately, the mission was to kill Aidid and they spent two years doing that. In the end he died from a heart attack.

I say it only because such solutions are very far away from the way the West is thinking. The West is now concerned about piracy because it is the West. They are not concerned about the role of the European Union. They (the USA) destroy whole economic bases of a country.

Question: Still on the same, I want to refer to a Zulu word – Sabona, ‘I see you’. I am looking at schools in Chad and Somalia, do you think the programme can be used successfully to work there?

Galtung: It is the name of one of our biggest projects. It was fantastic that we found that word Sabona, ‘I see you’. And they translate it as ‘I take you in’ not ‘I take you on’ in English, ‘You are part of me.’ We have had enormous success in the schools we have worked in – the children pick the five essential points of conflicts immediately, they can do it in one week. They start by saying “that’s terrible, we have to do something about it”. Then another says “he may have a point too”. Then there is some open communication. So the moment you learn that it is not just your side but his/her side too, you are making an enormous effort. Adults have been indoctrinated for instance by Christianity-God vs. Satan and things of that kind. They are indoctrinated to a point of being lost. Children get it immediately. So if Sabona could be something to inspire all classes, it would change the whole face of conflict.

I am thinking of something else to do with Kenya and Zimbabwe. That is the old African tradition – the elders meeting under the shadows of a bushy tree. It was not democracy but it was dialogical. The idea was to lay out something. So the idea of bringing contenders together has roots in the African traditions. The West sees it and calls it coalition government. I would not approach it that way. I would rather say, let the people at the top meet and they run all the ministries together. It’s not a question of one having this or that. Find the peaceful solutions – ideas in all cultures. Sabona is one and there is another important one – Under the Bushy Tree.

Question: You have worked in Ecuador, Peru and Sri Lanka among other countries. But what results have you had in Afghanistan?

Galtung: We had a big mediation in 2001 run by the Taliban organised by an Afghan who is also a Canadian. He had been imprisoned for three years by the communists. He came out not liking communism that much. But he came out with the idea that as Afghans they had a bad way of handling conflicts. So they contacted me and we ended up in Afghanistan. So we organised a major mediation session – 100 people. Thirty cabinet members, 30 sheikhs from various groups, 30 professors – who were not very useful – and ten women who were fantastic. In Afghanistan, to be a woman and be taken in to consideration at that level is exceptional. We had seven days. On the first day I gave them exercises and told them there was one word that was not permitted on that day – Afghanistan. Out of it emerged five ideas which I would like to mention.



- Coalition government with the Taliban. The Taliban are part of Afghanistan. Talib means seeker-student. They are seeking for the truth in the Koran. And they are dead against secularisation. Among the Taliban you find moderates and less moderates.
- Afghanistan can't be run by Kabul. It consists of at least 12 nations that are very autonomous. It might be an idea for Kenya.
- Afghanistan is surrounded by countries that are quite interesting in the sense that parts of those countries are in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan-Tajikistan. So why not make a community like the European Community. Make a central Asian Community. Much of the restlessness and violence in Afghanistan comes from the relationship with neighbouring countries.
- Policy based on basic needs. Food, education and health care. They have to find a Koranic solution like Turkey, the Philippines and Indonesia and this can't be imposed by the West.
- It is a violent country. It needs security machinery. That can't be NATO. NATO is just a western kind of thing. To run it in such a way that the UN Security Council cooperates with the Organisation for the Islamic Conference about non-aggressive peacekeeping.

Question: The Peace Fund in 2009 ranked Afghanistan and Kenya at no 7 and 14 respectively in the failed states index. Do you think there is a justification in this, looking at the violence in Afghanistan and the ethnic violence that took place in Kenya?

Galtung: What has failed in Kenya is western colonisation and in Afghanistan it is something else. Things could work if all stayed in their own areas but with modern transport and communication, maybe they have come too close to each other. These are very different situations now. In Africa, Westerners came and drew borders all over the region and took Kilimanjaro and moved it from one country to another as a wedding gift or whatever it is – that kind of incredible behaviour. In Afghanistan it's something else.

Question: What would you give as the road map for the conflicts in Africa? Look at what happened in Sierra Leone. Others like Charles Taylor are at The Hague.

Galtung: I would first have an African Unity saying that they would not accept any more Africans for the court before you bring in other countries to it. Because this is not an International Court of Justice, it is an African Court of Justice run by the worst colonisers – The Netherlands. The Netherlands came in 1652 before the English and the French. It's unheard of.

I once recommended in Sierra Leone that they get an old atom bomb and put it in the diamond mines and explode the way down (metaphoric). What good has these diamonds done? The problems are different but there is one problem they have in common. You have 53 countries and 500 nations. And the borders are drawn for western convenience. It does not mean to necessarily change the borders but it means to have sub-regions or strong cooperation. And one region could be Tanzania-Uganda, Rwanda-Burundi with the two Congo's. That would be bi-oceanic. In other words from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic and the other one would be the five frontier states – Zimbabwe-Zambia-Mozambique-Angola and Botswana. Again bi-oceanic. Trade less with Europe and trade more with the third world. And at the same time, as you promote regions in Africa and sub-regions you promote more local autonomy which means more federations. In other words you make the borders less important.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Professor Johan Galtung is a Norwegian researcher and winner of the Alternative Nobel Peace Prize. He is among the founders of TRANSCEND, a conflict mediation organization founded in 1993. He is also the founder of TRANSCEND Peace University, TRANSCEND Media Service, TRANSCEND University Press, TRANSCEND Peace Service, TRANSCEND Research Institute. He founded the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo, in 1959. He has published over 100 books and 1,000 articles.

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Jack Shaka is the Country Director for Moving Framez Africa (MFA), a Media, Peace and Development Organisation in Nairobi, Kenya. He is a reporter for Africa News run by Africa Interactive of Amsterdam-Netherlands, an online newspaper with a focus on Africa. He writes/reports on social issues. He has written one book, *The Refugee (An odyssey into the refugee life)*, and co-authored another, *Silent No More, Youth Legislative Theatre Process in Kenya*.



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