

You Shall Not Kill Them: Reading 2 Kings 6:8-23 in the Context of the Conflict in the African Great Lakes Region

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ABSTRACT

The African Great Lakes Region is now renowned across the globe for its history of persistent conflicts. A pattern observable especially in the Burundi, in Rwanda and in the Democratic Republic of Congo, is a succession of political regimes where each time the new regime indicts its predecessor for failing to end the spiral of deadly ethnic conflicts. When the previously oppressed social group finally snatches power it resolves to neutralize the rival social group by becoming the new oppressor. The attitude of the leaders in this region finds echo in the OT where some Israelite kings adopted a similar strategy. This could be observed in the story narrated in 2 Kgs 6:8-23 about a kind of Israel in conflict with an Aramean king. Traumatized by the oppression that his people had suffered from the Arameans, and now in a position of strength, the king of Israel would not want to miss the opportunity to put off the threat for good by annihilating the enemy. But Elisha the good adviser to the king had a different solution, not to kill the now weak enemies but to show them an alternative way of relating. The present paper draws attention to this particular voice in the narrative that is opposed to violence; it focuses on Elisha's approach advocating for turning enemies into friends. Elisha's approach in the narrated conflict is found to be in tune with some teachings of Jesus in the gospels. The essay reads the narrative in the context of the African Great Lakes region with the aim of exploring the relevance of Elisha's pacifist approach to contemporary conflicts such as that experienced in this region of Africa.

KEYWORDS: Conflict, violence, peacemaking, pacifism, nonresistance approach.

A INTRODUCTION

Violence has become a characteristic of human beings. This unfortunate phenomenon that seems to pervade today's society is according to the biblical

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story, as old as humanity; it is observed as early as from Adam's children. Cain was the first to perpetuate violence against his brother Abel (Gen 4:8) and from that time, as the Bible reports, violence has not ceased to expand. Today human societies are marked by different forms of violence though their frequency may differ from society to society. The present essay seeks to examine some factors responsible for the perpetuation of conflicts in the Great Lakes Region of Africa and the appropriate way to address them. The essay proposes a contextual reading of 2 Kgs 6:8-23 which narrates the story of a conflict in the OT times. The text is read from the perspective of a contemporary context of conflict from the Great Lakes Region¹ (GLR) which is used as a case study. As Vlassenroot asserts, a "conflict is understood better in its social setting as it helps to know its roots and understand why and how people turn to it."² Hence, a brief overview on the perennial conflict in the GLR is necessary before proceeding to the reading of the text.

B OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT IN THE AFRICAN GREAT LAKES REGION

The geographical area known as the GLR in Africa is often differently defined.³ But the present work focuses on the three countries of that region, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). These three countries are not only neighbours, but they also share almost the same socio-political history. Burundi and Rwanda were joined together for thirty years into one German colony, Ruanda-Urundi, and later on the DRC was added to them under the Belgian rule.⁴

Furthermore, Burundi and Rwanda are even more united by being host to people of the same ethnic groups sharing the same culture, customs, and language. Probably as a result, the two countries also share a similar history of civil conflicts often related to their major ethnic groups, the Hutu and the

¹ In this essay we will be using the short form, "GLR," to mean Great Lakes Region.

² Koen Vlassenroot, "A Societal View on Violence and War: Conflict & Militia Formation in Eastern Congo," in *Violence, Political Culture & Development in Africa*, ed. Preben Kaarsholm (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 49.

³ Normally the region refers to countries in central Africa that border the Lakes Victoria, Tanganyika and Nyassa such as Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. But the region is sometimes widened to include other countries like Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique, Congo Brazaville, the Central African Republic, Chad, Sudan and Zambia. P. Guadens Mpangala, "Origins of Political Conflicts and Peace Building in the Great Lakes Regions" (paper presented at a symposium in Arusha, Tanzania, 2004), 2. <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/5727/3000.pdf?sequence=1>.

⁴ Tony Sullivan, *A history of Rwanda and Burundi, 1894-1990*, 2006, Libcom.org. Released 8/ September 2006. <https://libcom.org/history/articles/rwanda-burundi-history>.

Tutsi.⁵ This conflict often expands to the neighbouring DRC.⁶ Some scholars trace the roots of this conflict to colonial times. These include Omeje who claims:

I contend that political conflict in the GL region have largely been aggravated by different factions of postcolonial elites deliberately interposing their interests in the exploitative and unjust political, social, and economic institutions and structures inherited from colonialists, as opposed to revamping the structures to serve the collective interest of the citizens.⁷

Omeje's suggestion is that a situation of prejudice might have resulted from the ideology imposed by colonialists in that region who "favoured Tutsi over Hutu, arrogating ethno-racial superiority to the minority Tutsi and setting the context for Hutu reprisals and/or ethnic wars at the dawn of independence and in subsequent years".⁸ A similar view is expressed by Powley who contends that the Belgian colonisers initiated ethnic differences and discrimination between the Hutu and Tutsi social groups and this became the ground for the conflicts that followed. Powley argues,

The Belgian colonial administration, by comparison, was sizably harsh, and had a major impact on the structure of Rwandan society. Belgian authorities consolidated local power in the hands of Tutsi chiefs and privileged Tutsi over Hutu with regard to land rights, education, socioeconomic opportunity, and access to power. Most perniciously, the Belgians brought to Africa notions of race and race

⁵ Due to the nature of the present work the details about the division in these two countries are not provided. But briefly Villa-Vicencio et al. assert that the roots of division in Burundi and Rwanda have a lot to do with both history and contemporary politics. They have their origin in the history of their ethnic groups which was aggravated by the colonial system which strengthened their division by favouring one group while neglecting the other. This was mostly done through education, leadership etc. Cf. Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Building Nations: Transitional Justice in the African Great Lakes Region* (Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2005), 3-12; 73-79.

⁶ Akiiki Majaju, "How to Make Sense of the Events Taking Place in the Great Lakes Region," in *Crisis in the Democratic Republic*, ed. Mwesiga Baregu (Harare: SAPES Trust, 1999), 88-89.

⁷ Kenneth Omeje, "Understanding the Diversity and Complexity of Conflict in the African Great Lakes Region," in *Conflict and Peacebuilding in the African Great Lakes Region*, ed. Kenneth Omeje and Tricia K. Hepner (Bloomington, IN: Indian University Press, 2013), 25.

⁸ Omeje, "Understanding," 29.

science and interpreted existing Rwandan social structures through that lens.⁹

Others trace the roots of Rwandan conflicts back to earlier times. They argue that social inequalities discrimination and oppression pre-date the colonial period.¹⁰ This view affirms that the colonisers did not create social inequalities in Rwanda, but they rather exacerbated and exploited the situation that they found already in place to their advantage. That prejudice might have resulted from the ideology imposed by colonialists in that region who "favoured Tutsi over Hutu, arrogating ethno-racial superiority to the minority Tutsi and setting the context for Hutu reprisals and/or ethnic wars at the dawn of independence and in subsequent years".¹¹ But whatever may be the contribution of the pre-colonial and colonial history to the conflict in these countries of Rwanda and Burundi, the reality is that at the moment of accession to their independence the two major social groups, the Hutu and the Tutsi were at loggerheads with each other.¹²

It is clear for instance that in Rwanda the two successive Hutu regimes that took over from the colonisers did little to reconcile with their former oppressors. The Hutu leaders resolved that the consolidation of their power required the exclusion of the Tutsi whom they always perceived as a threat to their power and to the life of the Hutu social group. Oppressive policies and strategies were put in place to keep away the Tutsi in exile and to keep those who were inside the country under control. Then, the attempt of the Tutsi to challenge the *status quo* resulted in the Genocide.¹³

If the two Hutu regimes that governed independent Rwanda mistreated the Tutsi, the most notorious act against the Tutsi in Rwanda was the genocide in 1994 that drew more attention of the international community.¹⁴ In the aftermath of the Genocide, the Hutu army having been defeated and the Hutu regime having collapsed, the Hutu masses were forced into exile. It was the

⁹ Elizabeth Powley, "Strengthening Governance: The Role of Women in Rwanda's Transition" (report, Women Waging Peace/Hunt Alternatives Fund, Cambridge, MA, 2003), 10.

¹⁰ Johan Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Christopher C. Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide of 1994* (New York: Berg, 1999).

¹¹ Omeje, "Understanding," 29

¹² Eraste Nyirimana, "The Tribal Dimension in the Division of the Kingdom of Israel: A Contextual Study of 1 Kings 12:1-24 from the Perspective of the Struggle for National Unity in Rwanda" (PhD diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2010), 83.

¹³ René Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi* (London: Pall Mall, 1970); Nyirimana, "Tribal Dimension," 2010:103.

¹⁴ Linda Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: the Rwandan Genocide* (London: Verso, 2004), 250. Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 261-265.

turn of the Tutsi, former victims, to take control of the country and to set up policies and strategies that would prevent the former oppressors from ever taking control again.¹⁵ As it was observed, however, some of those Hutu who lost the control remained convinced that the only way for them and the members of their social group to be safe was to retake power and displace the Tutsi rivals once again. Vandeginste observed that the cross-border raids conducted into the northern part of Rwanda by some Hutu exiled in DRC continued to create insecurity.¹⁶ Melvern concurred pointing out that those cross-border raids destabilised local administration and committed murders, most of the time threatening the lives of the survivors of the Genocide.¹⁷ The Rwandan government then "had to take action to deal with those 'genocidaires' who were planning to cross-border from the camp in Kivu."¹⁸ "Rwanda did take action and invaded the neighbouring DRC in order to fight the destabilizing rebels. In so doing Rwanda became actively involved in armed conflict that started as an internal conflict but later becomes a regional war."¹⁹

In the GLR's security concerns has led to strategies that instead of achieving peace has exacerbated conflicts. This is what Tapfumaneyi confirms in his allegation that,

The genocide itself tends to be cyclic as either side, Hutu or Tutsi, will seize any opportunity to exterminate the other ... After all, even Paul Kagame himself has not made any secret of his determination to exterminate the Hutus both inside Rwanda and outside it, particularly in the DRC.²⁰

The history of the conflict in Rwanda however is not much different from that in the neighboring Burundi. A survey of the conflicts that plagued this country following the independence is provided by Niyonzima who laments:

Burundi has experienced multiple bloody social crises since its independence in 1961. Since the assassination of Prince Louis Rwagasore in 1961 it has been a scenario of conflicts following

¹⁵ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder*, 50.

¹⁶ Stef Vandeginste, "Rwanda: Dealing with Genocide and Crimes against Humanity in the Context of Armed Conflict and Failed Political Transition," in *Burring the Past: Making Peace and Doing Justice after Civil War*, ed. Nigel Biggar (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2001), 223.

¹⁷ Linda Melvern, *A people betrayed: The role of the West in Rwanda's genocide*. (New York: Zed. 2000). 223.

¹⁸ Villa-Vicencio, *Building Nations*, 44.

¹⁹ Vandeginste, "Rwanda," 223.

²⁰ Asher W. Tapfumaneyi, "Some Reflections on the Current Conflict in the DRC: Explaining Zimbabwe's Military Intervention," in *Crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, ed. Mwesiga Baregu (Harare: Bardwell Printers, 1999), 118.

every change of power. The dark hour of our country since independence is told through the low points of killings and massacres in 1965, 1969, 1972, 1988 ... the period from 1993 until today has been one of serious violence.²¹

Villa-Vicencio asserts, "there have arguably been more coups, attempted coups and changes of governments in Burundi since the country's independence in 1962 than in any other African country."²² It is further observed that the independence of Burundi left the political power in the hand of members of the minority Tutsi social group. The successive Tutsi military regimes opted for the exclusion of the Hutu from power until June 1993 when the Hutu managed to use their majority to win the first democratic election. Melchior Ndadaye then emerged as the nation's first democratic president – bringing an end to decades of one-party rule that had been dominantly Tutsi party.²³

The democratic dispensation in Burundi promised to usher in a new era of reconciliation and peace which was apparently the direction President Ndadaye was taking. But he could not overcome some of those from the rival group who were dominated by fear, insecurity and mistrust; he was kidnapped and murdered on 21 October 1993 by some of Tutsi army officers.²⁴ Ndadaye's assassination and the violence that ensued worsened the feeling of insecurity and mistrust within the members of both Hutu and Tutsi groups. That ill act promoted the "hysterical choice of kill-first-not-to-be-killed" by large segments of the population.²⁵

In the year that followed the assassination of President Ndadaye a new party from a Hutu rebel group, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy–Forces for the Defense of Democracy (Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie–Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie, CNDD–FDD) was formed and won municipal and parliamentary elections. It presented itself as a party of moderation with its top leadership including both Hutus and Tutsis. This was followed by the inauguration of a democratically elected government in Burundi headed by the CNDD-FDD under the leadership of Pierre Nkurunziza in 2005 that signaled the new era in Burundi.²⁶ Since then, the CNDD-FDD and the President Pierre Nkurunziza have been in power but conflict in Burundi continues. As president Nkurunziza struggles to keep power it was recently reported that in 2015 Burundi was plunged into its worst crisis

²¹ David Niyonzima, "Ethnic Conflict in Burundi," in *Seeking Peace in Africa: Stories from African Peacemakers*, ed. Donald E. Miller, et al. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2007), 97.

²² Villa-Vicencio, *Building Nations*, 3.

²³ Villa-Vicencio, *Building Nations*, 4.

²⁴ Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*, 199.

²⁵ Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*, 200.

²⁶ Villa-Vicencio, *Building Nations*, 13.

since the end of civil war in 2005.²⁷ The issue of holding on to power as a way of ensuring one's security however is unfortunately not unique to the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi. The same is observed in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).²⁸

The DRC, like its neighbouring countries of Burundi and Rwanda, traces its problem from the pre-independence period. When the country recovered its independence in 1960 Patrice Lumumba became the Prime Minister and Joseph Kasavubu became the president. But independence in Congo did not mean peace; few weeks later the country faced severe revolt which led to Lumumba's assassination. After his assassination Mobutu ousted President Kasavubu in a *coup d'état* and "Mobutu brutally quelled new rebellions and personally dominated Congo until the crisis of the Rwandan genocide which resulted in more than a million of Hutu refugees in Congo."²⁹ Harboring these Hutu refugees perceived to be a threat to the stability of the Tutsi regime in neighboring Rwanda became Mobutu's fatal mistake. It was the presence of these refugees in Congo that motivated the Rwandan government to forge an alliance with Laurent Kabila, then a leader of one of many groups opposing Mobutu.

Amidst escalating violence that engulfed the entire Congo, Laurent Kabila overthrew President Mobutu Sese Seko in 1997. Within a year, this Congolese war included nations from across the continent. Once in power in Kinshasa, Laurent Kabila attempted to resist the influence of his former allies from Kigali. He was assassinated in 2001 and was replaced by his son Joseph Kabila.³⁰

Bangura argues that the war which broke out in the region of the DRC in 1998 threatened to become Africa's first modern regional war. As he was writing, already five countries, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia had committed troops to the embattled country. Other countries in the region were set to intervene or to provide varying forms of support to those who were already in.³¹ From Baregu's view, several claimants or players in the conflict of the DRC used the excuse of protecting their borders, while others suggested

²⁷ Daniel Haydyk, "Burundi conflict: 'no signs of improving' in 2017," released December 2016. <http://www.darpost.com/2016/12/burundi-conflict-no-signs-of-improving-in-2017/>.

²⁸ The present essay does not deal with the details of the problem of the DRC before the pre-colonial or during the colonial time. The focus remains on the current conflict especially under the current president Kabila.

²⁹ "Roots of the Crisis – Congo," *Enough! The Project to End Genocide and Crimes against Humanity*. http://www.enoughproject.org/conflict_areas/eastern_congo/roots-crisis.

³⁰ Villa-Vicencio, *Building Nations*, 35-36.

³¹ Yusuf Bangura, "Comments on Regional Security and the War in Congo," in *Crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo* ed. Mwesiga Baregu (Harare, Zimbabwe: Bardwell Printers, 1999), 10.

that they were supporting groups that were opposing the regime in Kinshasa when this regime was perceived to be sympathetic or supporting rebels from the neighboring countries. He clarifies,

Angolans feel they need to protect Kabila and prevent the Banyamulenge from coming to power for fear that they will link with Jonas Savimbi. Savimbi himself claims that the Angolan MPLA have a presence in the DRC so he needs to back the Banyamulenge to remove them. The Namibians claim that they are there to protect Angola and secure their own borders. The Angola's internal struggle and the conflict between Angola and Namibia are now being played out in Congo... I all, there are fifteen players, some of whom have sometimes fought on both sides at the same time.³²

As pointed out above, while the Congo was faced with external conflict resulting from neighbouring countries with their pretence to protect their borders, the DRC was also facing conflict resulting from the president Joseph Kabila who wished to keep power like his counterparts in the neighbouring countries. The countries of the Great Lakes Region, especially Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda have experienced unending conflicts because of their insecure leaders who preferred to use any means in order to keep themselves in power as the only guaranty for their security and the security of those around them. It was observed that there were successive *coups d'états* which indeed were followed by bloodshed.³³ Omeje and Hepner find that "the most evocative image of wars in the region and –elsewhere on the continent- is that of savagery, associated with ethnic differences and rivalries ... In ethnocide, ethnicity is transformed, mobilized and ultimately incorporated into horrors ad irrationality of genocidal violence."³⁴

The above summary shows that the constant conflict in the Great Lake Region is hence fueled by a feeling of fear and insecurity of social groups and their leaders. The conviction is that keeping away one's rivals from ascending to power by oppressing them is the only way to survive and be safe. Therefore, to achieve this objective, oppressive measures and violence have been found to be the preferred means. But the text of 2 Kgs 6:8-23 also reflects similar concern. The biblical story, however, does not condone such ideology of violence. It rather advocates for an alternative approach for dealing with enemies and achieving security. The present paper proposes examining this

³² Mwesiga Baregu, ed., *Crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo* (Harare, Zimbabwe: Bardwell Printers, 1999), 80-81.

³³ Nyirimana, "Tribal Dimension," 83 and Villa-Vicencio, *Building Nations*, 3.

³⁴ Kenneth Omeje and Tricia K. Hepner, "Introduction: Conflict and Peacebuilding in the African Great Lakes Region," in *Conflict and Peacebuilding in the African Great Lakes Region*, ed. Kenneth Omeje and Tricia K. Hepner (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 5.

approach from the perspective of the situation of conflicts in the African Great Region. This means that issues arising from the context of conflict in this region guide the attention paid to the details of the text. Prior to this discussion, the next section briefly describes the method that guides the reading of the text.

C THE NARRATIVE ANALYTICAL APPROACH

The reading and analysis of the text are facilitated by the narrative criticism approach. Narrative criticism is one of the tools for interpretation and one of its major goals is to allow the text communicate its meaning to the reader by involving him/her in the world of the text and helping the reader understand that meaning of the text more clearly in his/her own world.³⁵ In this line,

... the narrative criticism seeks to discover and disclose the narrative's own intrinsic points of emphasis, thereby facilitating its interpretation and consequently helping to discriminate among various possible interpretations.³⁶

The fundamental points from the texts in the present work are pointed out by the means of the literary questions that Malbon³⁷ suggests as the five "W's." These are, "who" (characters), "where," "when" (settings), what and why (plot). The interaction with the text in this work focuses mainly on two major elements: the characters, that is, the characterisation of the main actors and attention to their roles, and the plot. As Gunn points out, these two elements, "questions of plot and character are staples of the study of narrative."³⁸ Paying attention to the narrative character of the text allows the reader understand how the text means what it means to him or her. The literary context of the text in the present essay helps to trace the setting of conflict narrated in the text in its context.

D LITERARY LOCATION OF 2 KINGS 6:8-23

The text of 2 Kgs 6:8-23 is part of a larger narrative often known as the Elijah-Elisha cycles. The narrative is an integral part of what some scholars have described as an editorial unit commonly referred to as the Deuteronomistic

³⁵ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction From Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), iv.

³⁶ Richard G. Bowman, "Narrative Criticism of Judges: Human Purpose in Conflict with Divine Presence," in *Judges and Methods in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 17

³⁷ Elisabeth S. Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 17.

³⁸ David M. Gunn, "Narrative Criticism," in *An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their Application*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 213.

History, a term introduced by Martin North in 1943.³⁹ Gray argues that the Deuteronomistic history is a pre-exilic compilation with an exilic redaction and expansion.⁴⁰ The story in this part of the narrative makes the prophet Elisha one of the main characters. Elisha took over from Elijah in the time of Jehoram (2 Kgs 2) and his ministry outlived the Omride dynasty to cover the reigns of Jehu (2 Kgs 9:30), Jehu's son Jehoahaz (2 Kgs 13) and to end during the time of Jehu's grandson Jehoash. Each of these kings had his time to face the conflict narrated in the text under study.

The text of 2 Kgs 6:8-23 reports one of many cases of conflict between Syria and Israel. Hens-Piazza is of the opinion that this is an episode of an on-going conflict between Israel and Syria/Aram. As he puts it:

Since the account of Ahab's reign (1 Kin 20 and 22), stories continue to document what evidently was a persistent conflict between Israel and Syria. As recently as the story of Naaman's cure in 2 Kings 5, the king of Israel initially interpreted the request from the Aram's ruler for a cure for his officer as a pretext for another war. The language describing the Aramean king's new aggression "at such and such place" (v 8), along with the description that Elisha alerted the king of Israel "more than once or twice" (v 10) of these impeding threats give an impression of ongoing conflict.⁴¹

The first reported encounter between Syria and Israel is dated to the time of David when David prevailed over the Syrian Arameans who had come to help the Arameans of Zobah (2 Sam 8:3-7; 1 Chr 19:6-19). David also subdued many other Aramean kingdoms but the military weakness resulting from the division of the Kingdom of Israel allowed the Syrians to strengthen themselves.⁴² Later on, under Ben-Hadad I, the Syrians invaded Israel in the time of King Baasha at the behest of King Asa of Judah (1 Kgs 15:16-21). Tenney⁴³ suggests that the growing power of Syria may have been the motivation behind Omri's strategic move in seeking an alliance with the Phoenicians by the marriage of his son Ahab to Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, King of Sidon (1 Kgs 16:31). Ahab was able to repel two attacks from Ben-Hadad I king of Syria (1 Kgs 20:1-21, 26-34) but he later met his death attempting to retake Ramoth Gilead from Syria. Ahab's son, Jehoram, continued the battle with Syria and he was nursing the wound incurred in one of such battles (2 Kgs 8:28) when his commander Jehu killed him (2 Kgs 9:24)

³⁹ Gail A. Röthlin, "Gold and Silver for a Kingdom, The Judean Economy in the Iron Age II: Possible Sources for King Hezekiah's Wealth," (M.A. thesis, University of South Africa, 2009), 16.

⁴⁰ John Gray, *1 & 2 Kings: A Commentary* (Bloomsbury: SCM Press LTD, 1985), 6.

⁴¹ Gina Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings*, AOTC (Nashville: Abington Press, 2006), 268.

⁴² Merrill Tenney, ed., *Bible Dictionary*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan 1987), 975.

⁴³ Merill, *Bible Dictionary*, 976.

and brought an end to the Omride dynasty. Nevertheless, "no details are given about his (Omri) reign except that he bought Samaria and fortified it (2 Kings 16:24) and by implication made it his capital instead of Tirzah v23."⁴⁴

Conflicts between Israel and Syria will continue with Hazael of Syria invading Israel under Jehu (2 Kgs 10:32-33) then under Jehu's son Jehoahaz. Hazael will prevail over Israel and oppress them (2 Kgs 13:3; 22). The conflict will continue for later generations and it will be under Jehoahaz's son, Jehoash (2 Kgs 13:25), and after him, under Jeroboam II, that all the cities taken by Syria will be recovered by Israel (2 Kgs 14:25-28).

As the foregoing survey indicates, the relation between Syria and Israel is reported to have been always marked by strife and conflict. Each of the two nations had its turn to have the upper hand in the conflict but no victory of either party ended the conflict. The episode narrated in 2 Kgs 6:8-23 in this essay analysed from the perspective of the perennial conflicts in the GLR provides an indication as to why the belligerents never achieved lasting peace. Each party linked security with the destruction of the enemy.

E READING AND ANALYSING THE TEXT (2 KINGS 6:8-23)

The second step in the analysis of the text which is proposed by the narrative criticism approach pays special attention to the structure of the text with the aim of retrieving the literal meaning of the text due to its focus on the plot. The analysis of the plot involves the literal structure of the text. Thus, while the present text can have different aspects in its structure according to the reader, this work chooses to adopt the following chiasmic structure as drawn by Cohn:⁴⁵

- A** Expository antecedent: Aramean raids on Israel thwarted by Elisha's insights (6:8-10)
- B** The king of Aram is made aware of Elisha's insight (6:11-14)
- C** YHWH opens the eyes of Elisha's servant (6:15-17)
- X** YHWH blinds the Aramean army and takes it to Samaria (6:18-19)
- C'** YHWH opens the eyes of the Aramean army (6:20)
- B'** The king of Israel sees, feasts, and dispatches the Aramean army (6:21-23a)
- A'** Expository consequence: Aramean raids cease (6:23b)

This chiasmic structure puts the neutralised, powerless and vulnerable Aramean army in Samaria at the centre. Everything that is done in the text turns around them. At the beginning of the plot, the Arameans are the powerful aggressors. The reader is anxious to know the fate awaiting the prophet

⁴⁴ Gwilym H. Jones, *1 & 2 Kings* (Marshall, London: Morgan & Scott Publ., Ltd.), 1984), 296.

⁴⁵ Robert L. Cohn, *2 Kings* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 44.

identified as a threat to their security. In the middle of the plot, the fortunes change as the oppressors are subdued. This time the reader is made curious to know the fate to be reserved to the overpowered former aggressors. The structure also pays attention to the behaviour of the other main characters of the narrative, namely the king of Syria, the prophet Elisha, the king of Israel and YHWH. It is the reaction of each of these characters to the situation they find themselves in that influences the course of the conflict. The plot ends with the resolution of the conflict and an announcement of a period of peace, without casualties. The next section examines with more detail the course that the conflict takes when the king of Syria becomes conscious of his vulnerability; Elisha insights are problematic to the Aramean king.

1 A Expository Antecedent: Aramean Raids on Israel Thwarted by Elisha’s Insights (2 Kings 6:8-14)

The narrator exposes to the reader the situation of the oppressor who becomes conscious of his vulnerability. The narrative is set against the background of the Aramean wars, although no details are provided.⁴⁶ The two rival kings are not named in the text but Dilday believes that “the King of Syria referred to in v.8 is probably Ben-Hadad,”⁴⁷ and Josephus has identified the Israelite king involved here as Jehoram.⁴⁸ The events take place at Dotan (Tell Dōtān), an important town about 20km north of Samaria on the edge of a fertile plain.⁴⁹ After the narrated conflict has ended, Ben-Hadad is introduced in v. 24 as a king who intervened later to re-ignite another conflict after an unspecified period of peace. The previous case of fighting between Syria and Israel was that which cost the life of Ahab, king of Israel while attempting to recover Ramoth Gilead from Syria (1 Kgs 22:29-40).⁵⁰ Apparently the dominance of Syria allowed Syrian kings to launch regular raids in Israel’s territory (v. 23) in which King Ahab died, probably killed by Naaman. Dilday claims,

Because of his character the Lord had allowed the Syrian army to defeat the wicked King Ahab of Israel. Josephus believed that Naaman was the nameless archer who shot the arrow that killed Ahab. The favourable description of the Syrian commander nonetheless ends with a note of pathos: “but he was a leper.”⁵¹

Apparently it was during one of his many raids in Israel that the servant girl at the house of Naaman was captured (2 Kgs 5:5).

⁴⁶ Fritz Volkmar, *1&2 Kings*, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 264.

⁴⁷ Russel H. Dilday, *1, 2 Kings*, ComCom (Waco, TX: World Books, 1987), 305.

⁴⁸ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, WBC 13 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 76.

⁴⁹ Volkmar, *1&2 Kings*, 264.

⁵⁰ Volkmar, *1&2 Kings*, 268.

⁵¹ Dilday, *1, 2 Kings*, 315.

2 B The King of Aram is Made Aware of Elisha's Insight (6:11-14)

The Aramean king enjoyed his position of dominance over Israel until a time when his heart was greatly troubled when he was made aware of Elisha's insights (vv. 11-14). Elisha warned the Israelite king, "Beware of passing that place..." (v. 9). According to Dilday the clause, "Beware that you do not pass this place" can be understood as, "Don't overlook this place and leave it unfortified or unprotected." Jehoram took the prophet's warning seriously and on several occasions sent out military patrols to verify it.⁵² No wonder the Aramean king was troubled; it was not only that his raiding plans were no longer successful, but more importantly that the king of Israel was likely to turn the situation against the Aramean king.

The Aramean king felt vulnerable and this prompted him to initiate a war. Having received intelligence tracing the source of the leak (v. 12), he launches an attack (vv. 13-14). He ordered a great army with horses and chariots to surround the city of Dothan (v. 14), but little did the Aramean king know that he was about to witness the capture of his own troops instead.⁵³ Judging on the magnitude of the army and artillery involved, the aim of this invasion seems not to have been limited to capturing the disturbing prophet. Rather, it may have been another raid intended to punish and intimidate the subdued kingdom and to dissuade the vassal from entertaining any idea of rebellion against the master. As Hobbs observes, "the raiding band was large enough to set a siege to the capital city."⁵⁴ If the attitude of the Aramean king was inspired by insecurity, the prophet's response was grounded in the consciousness of his security.

3 C YHWH Opens the Eyes of Elisha's Servant to See Elisha's Security (2 Kings 6:15-17)

The army had arrived in Dothan in the night and had taken position around the city (v. 14). It is through the reaction of Elisha's servant that the frightening sight of the invasion is described. "Early the next morning the servant was terrified to see the whole city was under the Arameans' control, or so he thought."⁵⁵ Dilday argues that Elisha's servant saw the Aramean troops through the eyes of fear and unbelief, which made the situation to look hopeless,⁵⁶ but Elisha who faced the identical situation, saw things differently because of his secure mind due to his relationship with YHWH. The reaction of Elisha's

⁵² Dilday, *1, 2 Kings*, 315.

⁵³ Volkmar, *1&2 Kings*, 264.

⁵⁴ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 77.

⁵⁵ Tomas, L Constable, "2 Kings", in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, Old Testament*, ed. Walvoord, John F and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor, 1987), 549.

⁵⁶ Dilday, *1, 2 Kings*, 317.

servant seems to represent what would have been the reaction of any inhabitant of Dothan realising that they were surrounded by the notoriously violent Aramean army.

Answering his servant question, Elisha remarked that the first thing to be done is to overcome fear (v. 16). It was the same fear that had inspired the Aramean king in the first place to invade Israel's territory. It was a panicking king who could go to the extent of dispatching horses and chariots and a large attacking force just to capture one unarmed man!⁵⁷ For the prophet, a proper response to an act of aggression motivated by fear should begin with overcoming that fear. Elisha believed that fear is better overcome by a conscience of security. The conscience of security does not come as long as too much attention is given to the magnitude of the threat. The secret of the prophet's calm is based on his understanding that "those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (v. 16). Elisha followed the motto of faith which emphasises that "believing is seeing"⁵⁸ and in that way he overcame insecurity. Elisha's prayer put an end to his servant's panic because it is claimed that YHWH opened his eyes and he saw "the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha's house" (v. 17). It is worth noting that the horses and chariots of fire were not surrounding the Syrian army, as if YHWH intended to fight and destroy the Arameans, but they were surrounding Elisha for his security. The phrase "horses and chariots of fire" is used elsewhere only in 2 Kgs 2:11 where it refers not to a fighting force but to the cloud of glory that whisks Elijah to heaven.⁵⁹ In other words, "God's purpose was not to destroy the Arameans' lives but to save the Israelites' lives."⁶⁰ Elisha's prayer opened the servant eyes and blinded the Aramean army (6:18-19).

4 X YHWH Blinds the Aramean's Eyes and in Samaria there was a Feast (2 Kings 6:20-23a)

Just as Elisha had prayed for his servant's eyes to see security without violence, he now prays for the eyes of the Syrian soldiers that were used to see security only in war and violence to be closed (v. 18). Taking over the control of the situation, the prophet now leads the army which was surrounding him into Samaria where they will be the ones to be surrounded. Once inside the city and the fortunes having been reversed, Elisha now prays for the eyes of the violent aggressors to be opened (v. 19) that they may see a different reality: security is possible without violence! After Elisha's prayer, YHWH opens the eyes of the Aramean army and they realise that they are in Samaria (v. 20).

⁵⁷ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 74.

⁵⁸ Dilday, *1, 2 Kings*, 317.

⁵⁹ Peter Leithart, *1&2 Kings*, BTCB (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 202.

⁶⁰ Tomas, "2 Kings", 550.

Once in Samaria, it was the turn of the Israel King to be taught a lesson about security without violence. When the king of Israel realised that his oppressors had been defeated and were now helpless within the very walls of his royal capital he shouted excited, "My father shall I kill them?"⁶¹ Robison submits that the reaction of the king of Israel was normal:

Prisoners taken captive in battle were at the disposal of the captor, to be killed, or ransomed, or sold into slavery. In this case the men were God's prisoners. The king may have accepted this, and then the question would have been asked whether or not they should have been killed in sacrifice. In early days of Israel when the tribes had been called together in the name of Yahweh to fight a holy war, the spoils of victory had commonly been offered in sacrifice. This practice has been referred to as "putting to the ban" or "devoting to Yahweh."⁶²

However with this particular incident it was different; in fact it was not the Israel king who had captured the army but YHWH. The prophet Elisha who knew the truth better, suggested a different option. To the king's question Elisha replied with a rhetorical question: "Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow?" (v. 22). The expected answer was, "no." The prophet advised the king to feed the prisoners instead, and surprise them with release. "Shocking them is better than killing them ... The Prophet breaks the cycle of conventional hostility by an act of gloating generosity that disarms."⁶³ At this point, Brueggemann asserts, "The Syrian king has a lot to think about: the prophet who knows so much and seems to control is the one who can save. The Israelite king has a lot to think about: there are resources given to the people and prophet, beyond conventional politics."⁶⁴ Both kings learnt that security could be reached not necessarily with a great army capable of destroying the enemy but with a great banquet where former oppressors can be invited for fellowship.

5 B` The King of Israel Sees, Feasts, and Dispatches the Aramean Army (2 Kings 6:21-23a)

The king of Israel understood and followed Elisha's advice. His eyes were able to see the powerlessness of his adversaries and instead of taking vengeance against them, he accepted to follow the different way of peace which was to prepare a feast for them and then let them go! According to Brueggemann, instead of vengeance the king of Israel was advised "to embarrass his foes with kindness and impress them with the all-sufficient power of YHWH ... As it was

⁶¹ Dilday, *1, 2 Kings*, 318.

⁶² Joseph Robison, *The Second Book of Kings*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 61.

⁶³ Walter Brueggemann, *2 Kings* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 25.

⁶⁴ Brueggemann, *2 Kings*, 25.

with their release, Yahweh's power was glorified and peace was ensured, at least for a while."⁶⁵

Elisha's peaceful approach which was followed by the king of Israel and demonstrated to the Aramean army replaced the aggressive mission of the Aramean's king. Thereafter the initial mission of the Syrian troops which was to "go and see (v. 13) a man who was a threat" to them, was replaced by Elisha's recent act to help them "see a hospitable man" in Samaria.⁶⁶ The initial thought of the Israelite king in Samaria was to destroy the enemies, which is often believed to be the effective tool to ensure that the threat is eliminated for good. In this way violence is considered as a way toward peace and security. But Elisha's approach to peace in this story has suggests a different solution: that of attempting to turn enemies into friends. The proposition of sharing food was not only an act of generosity but more importantly a sign of hospitality and fellowship. "In the ancient Near East eating together under one's roof constituted making a covenant of peace."⁶⁷ Leithart confirms by saying that the prophet Elisha fought the Arameans with generosity and overcame their hostility with abundance of hospitality.⁶⁸

6 A` Expository Consequence: Aramean Raids Cease (2 Kings 6:23b)

Volkmar says that the

final scene tells of the sparing and the release of the prisoners. Elisha outspokenly objects to the death sentence envisaged by the king of Israel; in this way he is revealed as a defender of life and justice even and especially concerning the enemy.⁶⁹

The message was so powerful and apparently it produced the effect expected by the prophet as at the end the narrator reported that this action was followed by a period of peace as the Syrian raiders came no more into the land of Israel (v23). In other words, Elisha's act of turning enmity into friendship changed the situation in a peaceful way. At least Elisha's act proved that the Syria-Israel conflict which lasted for generations could not be ended by the determination of each of the two nations to dominate and oppress the other.

Elisha's approach of peace can also be placed alongside and linked to the pacifist teachings of Jesus in some of the NT texts, particularly the

⁶⁵ Brueggemann, *2 Kings*, 25.

⁶⁶ Richard Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1987), 187.

⁶⁷ Thomas, "1 Kings", 550.

⁶⁸ Leithart, *1&2 Kings*, 203.

⁶⁹ Volkmar, *1&2 Kings*, 264-5.

teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. As Hershberger⁷⁰ comments, the members of Jesus' kingdom are those who are poor in spirit, pure in heart, merciful, and meek. Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, they are peacemakers, they suffer persecution for righteousness' sake (Matt 5:3-12). From this perspective, Jesus is understood to propose that his followers are those who choose to live with others peaceably including their enemies. "And you have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy,' but I tell you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you'" (Matt 5:43-44). Drieger and Kraybill concur by proposing that one should live in peace with those who inflict violence on him/her as only God has the right to execute punishments.⁷¹ The next sections look into the applicability of such an approach to the contemporary context, particularly the solving of conflict in the Great Lakes region.

F TURNING FOES INTO FRIENDS, A MODEL FOR MAKING PEACE IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

As pointed out above, the situation in the three countries of the GLR, Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda is marked by a spiral of conflict which traces its origin back to the pre-colonial and colonial times. Conflicts have been in the region for about a century now and rival social groups have had opportunities to govern in their countries. None of the social groups has been able to bring about lasting peace. This paper argues that the root problem lies within the fear and mistrust among members of different social groups. Concern for security contributes to the determination to hold on to power at all cost as the only guaranty for survival. This contemporary context presents a situation in many ways similar to the context of the story of 2 Kgs 6:8-23 so as to allow a conversation between the two contexts. It is worth noting that the text is located in the OT, a corpus replete with narratives generally renowned for advocating violence. The hero of the text, prophet Elisha himself cannot be said to be always a pacifist. Yet in such pervasive logic of violence surrounding the text, the biblical story discussed above stands as a beacon of peace, challenging both the surrounding narrative of violence as well as the contemporary perpetual belligerents in the African Great Region with an alternative way of achieving security. Major challenging insights from the text are outlined below. These include the ideas of overcoming fear, achieving security without retaliation and the willingness work to peace.

⁷⁰ Guy F. Hershberger, *War, Peace and Nonresistance* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 2009), 49.

⁷¹ Leo Drieger and Donald Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1994), 23.

G VIOLENCE OUT OF FEAR

According to the story of the text, in response to his frightened servant who, being aware of the supernatural power of his master expects him to do something, Elisha challenges the servant to overcome fear. It has been noted that those who opt for violence often do it out of fear that the adversary may hit first and cause harm to them. Like in the case of the Syrian king who dispatches horses and chariots to capture one man, fear often leads to unreasonable over-reaction. Such fear is part of what is fueling conflicts in the African Great Region and elsewhere.

Overcoming fear becomes possible when one ceases to focus on the magnitude of the threat to the extent of becoming blinded to the available means of security. The eyes of Elisha’s servant needed to be opened to enable him to realise that there was no reason to panic. Such an attitude is difficult to those who are convinced that their opponents have the intention and the power to destroy them. Violence in the African Great Region was too often grounded in such an assumption which was not always verified.

Security is possible when the eyes that tend to see violence where there is none, are closed. The Syrian army came looking for a man who was a serious threat to their security. After they were given the opportunity to see with different eyes, they discovered that they were looking for a wrong man. This is true to many situations of conflict including the African Great Lakes Region. More often than not, the people deemed to be a threat to the security of their rivals are simply people who are equally concerned about their own security, and who would respond with peace to a sincere offer of peace. Kavwahirehi rightly argues,

As long as [*each group*] hasn’t learnt that other lives are equally grievable and require to be mourned – in particular lives we contributed in eliminating – it is not certain that we are really on the way to overcoming the problem of dehumanization in order to start building space for humanization.⁷²

H SECURITY WITHOUT RETALIATION

The king of Israel seemed not satisfied by the fact that he was safe, now that his enemies were under control. He still wanted to use his position of strength to take revenge over his defeated oppressors. Elisha’s response was that violence was no longer justified since there was no threat to respond to (2 Kgs 6: 22a). Unfortunately, in most conflicts witnessed today, the use of violence is not

⁷² Kasereka Kavwahirehi, “For a Common Ascension in Humanity: The Intellectual’s Mission,” in *Violence In/AND The Great Lakes: The Thought of V-Y Mudimbe and Beyond*, ed. Grant Farred, Kasereka Kavwahirehi, and Leonhard Praeg (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014), 23.

even limited to containing real threat. Many casualties result from acts of vengeance and retaliation where even people who are not posing any threat like women and children are the victims.⁷³

The biblical text advocates for security strengthened by positive acts of making peace. The prophet told the king of Israel not only to refrain from retaliating but also to serve a banquet to his defeated oppressors. The prophet's suggestion is not as demanding as that of Jesus when he speaks to his disciples about "turning the other cheek" to "giving away also the tunic" and "walking an extra mile" (Matt 5:39-41). It is not necessarily similar to the ideology that includes making the sacrifice that is necessary to accept an injustice without demanding satisfaction in return. What Elisha seems to mean is that once your former enemy is no longer a threat, you do not need to treat him/her as an enemy anymore, lest you encourage him/her to remain a threat. Indeed in the Great Lakes Region or anywhere else, none of the parties in conflict wants to be naïve and take the risk of being betrayed. Each part believes that the only way to remain safe is to be in control and keep the rival in check. But the narrative read proposes a better way of keeping the rival in check: turning the enemy into a friend and by so doing, killing the enmity and not the perceived enemy.

The king of Israel, in the text, was challenged to take a practical action of making peace. Sharing food was gesture that went beyond reconciliation to materialise fellowship and friendship. In the king's thinking, which is similar to the thinking of today's belligerents, the way to eliminate the threat for good is by destroying the enemy.⁷⁴ The prophet's wisdom was that the best way to eliminate the threat is to turn your enemy into a friend. This may involve paying a price to convince the enemy that you are sincere about peace. The banquet served by the king of Israel was of course costly but surely not as costly as the cost of the conflict that he avoided. Bonk clarifies how responding to conflict by conflict and war is costly. At the time of writing of his book in 1988, he argues,

There have been at least 150 wars since the end of World War II, with an estimated combined death toll of over 16 million ... The year 1987 has been the best ever for manufactures of military equipment and supplies. In total \$930 billion U.S was spent, \$1.800 per minute.⁷⁵

⁷³ Using Rwanda as an example, Vandeginste explains how retaliation sometimes does not necessarily and exclusively affect only the real threat but mostly the innocent people most of time women and children. Vandeginste, "Rwanda," 125.

⁷⁴ Mwesiga Baregu, ed. *Crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo* (Harare, Zimbabwe: Bardwell Printers, 1999), 6.

⁷⁵ Jon Bonk, *The World at War, the Church at Peace: A Biblical Perspective* (Winnipeg, Canada: Kindred Press 1988), 1.

In Elisha's wisdom, the expenses incurred in efforts to bring peace through destroying the enemy could be better used to reach peace through cementing sincere friendship. This wisdom challenges not only politicians and army leaders in regions ravaged by conflicts, but also to thinkers and ideologues in such regions. As Kavwahirehi has observed some of those in the Great Lakes Region who were expected to play the role of good advisers choose to shy away from the right responsibilities. This is the way he puts it:

It is always easy and popular for intellectuals to fall into modes of vindication and self-righteousness that blind them to the evil done in the name of their own ethnic or national community.... What is happening in the Great Lakes region, where intellectuals, when they do not choose silence, rally behind the cowardly positions of their community leaders is proof enough. Certainly the terrible accusation of betraying the cause of his nation or her people falls upon any intellectual who refuses to fulfil the role of ideologist that expected of him/her. However, the risk of being treated as such is what characterises intellectuals.⁷⁶

Kavwahirehi challenges those in the affected communities whose positions allow them to be opinion leaders to champion the idea that

human existence has its meaning in the bond with others ... by opening the inside bridge, to prevent his/her community from folding back on itself against the other and protecting it against all forms of closure that contain within them the threat of totalitarianism.⁷⁷

The present work mostly urges leaders of the countries in the Great Lakes region, to seek to understand the importance of letting go all kind of mistrust, and to overcome fear and anger so as to create a safe space for good relationship. From Farred's observation of the act of the Samaritan in Luke of saving the other's life, creating good relationship

means tending to the Other and assuming responsibility for his well-being. In any state, for any government, this is the Law's first obligation: to adjudicate between friend and enemy – to order, if and where possible, those relations.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Kavwahirehi, "Common Ascension," 24.

⁷⁷ Kavwahirehi, "Common Ascension," 27.

⁷⁸ Grand Farred, "Life, 'Life,' and Death," in *Violence in/AND The Great Lakes: The Thought of V-Y Mudimbe and Beyond*, ed. Grant Farred, Kasereka Kavwahirehi, and Leonhard Praeg (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014), 41.

I CONCLUSION

The present essay undertook to read the story narrated in 2 Kgs 6:8-23 in conversation with the context of conflict in the African Great Lakes Region. The literary analysis of the text pointed out some insights which may serve as an inspiration toward ending conflict among the antagonistic parties in the region. It was observed that the cycle of conflicts between Israel and Aram/Syria was fueled by fear and insecurity that prompted each party in conflict to want to be in control. It was noted that the resolve of the victorious party to subdue or destroy the enemy could perpetuate the conflict rather than ending it. In the story of the text, significant change occurred when one party, once in position of dominance, received and followed good advice and accepted to use his position to break the chain of retaliation. "The bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory" (v. 23), not because the Arameans had been destroyed but because it had been proved to them that their own security could be granted without them being necessarily the ones in control.

Such insights from the text are relevant to the context of conflict in the African Great Lakes Region. For the cycle of violence to be broken, it will take each of the warring parties to be convinced that the security of members of one group depends on the security of members of the other group.⁷⁹ For security in the region to be achieved, it will take political leaders to understand the absurdity of looking at those outside their zone of influence as enemies to be subdued or destroyed. Like it was observed in the story of the text, however, those in power may not always have their mind set on a peaceful, magnanimous resolution of conflict. They will need to have access to wise advice.

The wisdom that is needed should come from opinion leaders at different levels of the society. These could be the intellectuals in the region, peace activists, non-government organisations that educate the people on peace and reconciliation. The clergy should occupy a significant place in this as most of the inhabitants are known to be not only religious but overwhelmingly Christians. It may be noted for instance, that one country of the region, Rwanda, has acquired the reputation of being a Christian country so that it was dedicated to *Kristu Umwami* (Christ the King) since 27 October 1943 in a ceremony that lasted three days.⁸⁰

More importantly, the wisdom that prefers peace over conflict and reconciliation over retaliation should be grounded at the level of individuals. The international community looking at the often volatile situation in the region has devised some regional approaches to respond to the situation. Sikenyi observes that,

⁷⁹ Kavwahirehi, "Common Ascension," 23.

⁸⁰ Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder*, 10-11.

The focus on regional approaches has often ignored the power of building relationships and involving local actors to address the root causes of conflict. Similarly, a regional approach tends to overlook issues that are unique to individual countries yet have an overarching influence in the region.⁸¹

Kerr seems to hold the same view arguing that safety in the social environment of the Great Lakes Region must be established in the environment, within the individual's thoughts, emotions and body.⁸² The kind of wisdom described here may be helpful to a number of initiatives that Villa-Vicencio alludes to in his assertion about some initiatives in facilitating dialogue in the region: "Peace education is the focus of a large number of local organizations that work for reconciliation through dialogue."⁸³

The determination to build healthy relationships requires from anyone who can have the opportunity to promote the wellbeing of everyone without barriers of race, tribe gender *etcetera*. Besides promoting dialogue, it is also vital for them to "let go any anger and desire for retaliation and opt for sharing a banquet as covenant of peace."⁸⁴ This leads to a proper healing of wounds of conflicts rather than the exposition to lawsuits which does not create a conducive atmosphere for healing. Porter might be right in his observation that,

Such healing ideally involves a journey of apology, making things right for offenders and forgiveness for victims, and reconciliation for both in the creation of a new relation. The adversarial-retributive system does not open space for such a journey, a space conducive to overcoming social distance. It does not provide opportunities for empathy and recognition of the other. Instead it creates a space for combat. It is about winning. Lawsuits almost always exacerbate anger, wounds, divisions, greed, and desire for revenge. The process can deepen societal wounds and conflict.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Maurice Sikenyi, "Challenges of Regional Peacebuilding: A Case of the Great Lakes Region," *Beyond Intractability* (June 2013): (pages 1-9), <http://www.beyondintractability.org/casestudy/sikenyi-great-lakes>.

⁸² Laura Kerr, "A Phenomenology of Violence." In *Violence in/AND The Great Lakes: The Thought of V-Y Mudimbe and Beyond*, ed. Grant Farred, Kasereka Kavwahirehi, and Leonhard Praeg (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014), 125.

⁸³ Villa-Vicencio, *Building Nations*, 60.

⁸⁴ Thomas, "2 Kings", 550.

⁸⁵ Thomas W. Porter, "Justice Matters! Theology and Relational, Restorative Justice," in *Healing God's People: Theological and Pastoral Approach: A Reconciliation Reader*, ed. Thomas A. Kane (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2013), 59-60.

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