

## Editorial

Dear reader

This will be an editorial about... conflict!

A year ago, we commented in this editorial on the upcoming independence of South Sudan. We suggested that this event could be viewed as the first birth of a 'new' nation since the (in)famous Berlin conference of the late 1800s. A year later, the young nation is still fighting its way through, and against its former motherland. It fights to be recognized and to define its position in the continent. Petroleum, however, remains the key issue where greed and the drive to control supplies intersects with international interests. It is a deadly 'game' in which South Sudan holds only a few cards.

In the meantime, Libya lost its dictator, Mouammar Khaddafi, who was nobody's friend and fuelled most of the subregion's conflicts. The country is still in turmoil, and the question is when, if at all, it will recover from the civil war it went through. Most of the former Khaddafi militia have fled the country, often to reintegrate their former homelands. In the case of Mali, this has led to the self-proclaimed independence of Azawad, in the north of the country. War lords, terrorism, illegal arms trade, drugs, violence, are just a few of the terms that characterise a bleak situation in which the national government and the international community are helpless to intervene. In the face of ruthless violence, it is extremely difficult to establish a positive discourse based on reason, mediation and a will to find solutions.

Kim De Raedt's article discusses a post-conflict setting by examining South Africa's efforts to peacefully construct a rainbow nation identity through architectural projects (especially state-driven projects where the apartheid memory occupies a central position). The article focuses on the construction of urban community services through which both the everyday needs of society and the imperative to conceptualize the rainbow nation are addressed. Conflict, but at a more conceptual level, is the bottom line of main author Tabuti's article on how to preserve indigenous knowledge (with regard to botanicals) in a country that has been extensively affected by acculturation and exposure to dominant, foreign cultures. Irit Eguavoen also discusses conflict, albeit against a more peaceful backdrop: her article deals with the socio-economic impact (relocation of households, increased poverty, food insecurity, rural-urban migration) of establishing an irrigation scheme in the Blue Nile river basin. Or: conflict as a result of a poorly-prepared – read development – intervention.

The interaction between individual citizens/households on the one hand and state intervention on the other (an irrigation scheme, urban community services, war, accepting the dominance of foreign cultures) often leads to conflict. Individuals (including

researchers) always try to and/or have to position themselves *vis-à-vis* the way the state imposes itself upon them. Positioning oneself can refer to finding an answer to increased levels of poverty, insecurity, acculturation, but also to how to identify yourself with a new nation – without losing sight of the material problems with which this new nation is confronted. This means that citizens have to defend themselves against a wide range of threats and challenges, and find a place for themselves and their families in new (sometimes globally inspired) constellations, with or without the help of their leaders.

These articles might illustrate the (moral) power of the individual, especially in Africa – how people (women, researchers, city planners, and so on) carve out a meaningful life for themselves while facing state oppression, war, cultural loss, socio-economic hardship or criminality.

In most cases, however, this bid results in exercising or falling prey to power, and power games. It is often about hegemony and how to dominate others. Ruthless misunderstanding and the denial of others' rights to live their own life according to their own cultural values are the driving forces behind numerous ruthless systems and the actions of so-called politicians. Africa's challenge is how to survive these often desperate situations. And yes, we are pessimistic...

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