

Review Essay

Two Perspectives on Fanie du Toit's *When Political Transitions Work: Reconciliation as Interdependence*

Francis Mading Deng and Brandon Hamber*

Abstract

This review essay offers two complementary perspectives on Fanie du Toit's *When Political Transitions Work: Reconciliation as Interdependence*—each reflecting on the book's assessment of the transitional justice process in South Africa to date and underlining some of the key lessons learned from that history for contemporary human rights and peacebuilding practitioners.

Keywords: peacebuilding; reconciliation; reparations; South Africa; transitional justice

1. Francis Mading Deng: Promises of reconciliation before resolution

When Political Transitions Work: Reconciliation as Interdependence by Dr Fanie du Toit, is an innovative, stimulating, and provocative study which provides much material for thought and imagination. As the argument goes, the first step in reconciliation is for the parties to recognize that peaceful coexistence, mutual recognition and respect, and pragmatic nonviolent cooperation in a process aimed at incrementally reforming the future is the way out of the quagmire. The ideal of solving all the major problems dividing them should be pursued as a promise that cannot be given a time frame for accomplishment. Arguably, 'reconciliation cannot wait for the day when all differences have been resolved

* Fanie du Toit, *When Political Transitions Work: Reconciliation as Interdependence*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

Francis Mading Deng is Ambassador-at-Large, Republic of South Sudan, Juba' South Sudan from 2012 to 2016. His long and varied career at the United Nations includes his service as the organization's inaugural Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons from 1992 to 2004 and as the UN's first Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide from 2007 to 2012; Brandon Hamber is the John Hume and Thomas P. O'Neill Chair in Peace, International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE), Ulster University, Derry/Londonderry United Kingdom.

before it can begin or indeed progress. Reconciliation is a process that is based on the commitment of former enemies to work together non-violently, despite historic differences and the unfinished business of the past on the understanding that issues will be resolved over time' (Toit 2018: 138).

The process rests on recognizing intrinsic interconnectedness and interdependence. Whereas apartheid in the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu aimed at what he called 'unscrambling the racial omelette', the racial entanglement that cannot be undone, 'reconciliation represented a political agenda that, as its point of departure, admitted to the fundamental (unchangeable) and comprehensive (political, economic, social and moral) interdependence of all citizens. Interdependence was acknowledged, not only as a given fact, but as a possible norm for how society ought to organize itself in future, as a promise of justice to come' (Toit 2018: 33).

President F.W. De Klerk reaffirmed this framework when he reportedly said, 'There is but one way to peace, to justice for all: that is the way of reconciliation, of together seeking mutually acceptable solutions, of together discussing what the future South Africa should look like, of constitutional negotiation with a view to permanent understanding' (Toit 2018: 33). Paradoxically, it is usually after an intensive, costly and painfully exhausting violence, what has been described as 'mutually hurting stalemate', that the warring parties can open up to more constructive compromises.

As du Toit explains, 'Arguing that reconciliation is morally or strategically desirable is one thing, but to convince a divided nation that it is actually possible and practically workable—that a new future is around the corner—is quite another'. Post-apartheid government and leaders 'set out to put reconciliation into practice in a country that had never before experienced black and white citizens in intentionally reciprocal and mutually beneficial ways'. As pressing as building trust was being seen to 'directly address the wrongdoings of the past and the lingering resentments these have created. Otherwise, peace is likely to be temporary' (Toit 2018: 8).

As du Toit convincingly argues, 'If a transition is meant to deliver, within a matter of years, the complete erasure and closure of an evil past, then clearly South Africa's transition did not work'. He argues, on the other hand, that South Africa's transition did indeed work in that 'political violence was replaced by largely nonviolent political contest action; the apartheid state was replaced by a constitutional democracy with institutions that since 1994 have acted at least partially effectively in curbing executive impunity...and a vast array of policies and measures have been undertaken to improve the lives of poor South Africans, which has led to the gradual but steady increase in the life expectancy of all South Africans'. Although this does not make the case of South Africa simply 'a good story to tell', the record 'goes a long way to dispel the Afro-pessimism so typical of many "critical" studies of South Africa' (Toit 2018: 9).

The reconciliation that ended apartheid now seems to be obviously the right thing to have done, but for decades talking to the apartheid regime was strongly resisted by both Africans and the anti-apartheid international community. In the early 1970s, as Ambassador to the Scandinavian countries, which were in the forefront of the international anti-apartheid movement, and later as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, I persistently spoke out in international fora in favour of talking with the apartheid regime to probe into the rationale for their racist attitude. If the objective of the African National Congress (ANC) was to create a non-racial South Africa, how could that be achieved without talking

to apartheid leaders? The reaction against my position was nearly always unanimous. My views, stated in an African-American Conference we hosted in Khartoum in 1978, were reported by a South African newspaper, which prompted our Ambassador in Tanzania, which was the leader of the frontline countries, to write a report to the Ministry, on what he defensively described as a 'very sensitive development'.

I cannot argue that I was right and those against me were wrong. As du Toit explains, perhaps what was needed was the amount of pressure exerted by a combination of internal liberation struggle, international support for the struggle, and sustained international sanctions that crippled the South African economy for the conflict to be 'ripe for resolution'. As du Toit acknowledges, 'The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 marking the end of the Cold War in its peculiar, radicalized manifestation in Southern Africa, certainly contributed, as did increasing international isolation and condemnation of the regime, as well as sustained waves of domestic protest, pressure, and sabotage from a mix of civil society and other interest groups as well as underground resistance movements' (Toit 2018: 18).

du Toit however argues that a major factor was that South African 'leaders of certain ilk' seized that historic opportunity to lead the country to the desired outcomes, noting 'the inception of reconciliation depended critically on political leadership of a particular kind that came, for better and worse, . . . exemplified by Nelson Mandela, and to some degree as well, Frederick Willem de Klerk' (p.18). According to du Toit, 'Mandela . . . was no naïve political pushover. It was his keen appreciation for concrete opportunities to further the struggle for justice, alongside his hard-fought convictions, which led him to reconciliation' (Toit 2018: 38).

Mandela was well aware of the price that had already been paid in lives lost and the ongoing cost of the stalemate in armed struggle. In his own words, 'We had the right on our side, but not yet the might. It was clear to me that a military victory was a distant if not impossible dream. It simply did not make sense for both sides to lose thousands if not millions of lives in a conflict that was unnecessary. They must have known this as well. It was time to talk' (Toit 2018: 22). du Toit notes that, 'Both Mandela and De Klerk recognized the possibility of combining realpolitik with deeply held conviction, and, crucially, they acted on it. Each extended an olive branch to his enemy and won the chance of a better life for the majority of South Africans' (Toit 2018: 38).

I visited South Africa for the first time when Mandela was still in prison, but intense international efforts to have him released were underway and the momentum for talks was building up. Former President of Nigeria, General Olusegun Obasanjo, invited me as a resource person of the Inter-Action Council of Former Heads of State and Government to accompany him and former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Edward Heath. The visit to South Africa was a follow up to the 1986 Mission of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons. I remember Obasanjo telling me, after our meeting with De Klerk and his Cabinet, 'They must release Mandela. Only he can save this country'. I was impressed by the emphatic tone of Obasanjo's statement. But it has always been my view that putting an almost exclusive faith and hope in Mandela, as the international community was doing, risked an inevitable fall into abyss, once he was gone. While that has not happened, I believe my concern was realized to a degree.

I was glad to see du Toit 'humanize' Mandela, and 'saving' him from being idolized and turned into a mythical character. He portrays him instead as a towering leader of his people, but one who closely collaborated with others to do what he did. I was particularly moved by the passage in which du Toit wrote about the idealization of Mandela:

I am unsure which Mandela is being referred to...the real historical figure, flaws and strengths included, or an idealized, even fictional, figure. Mandela was undoubtedly a giant of his time, but his reputation posthumously seems to have grown even larger, perhaps too much so. He now seems to enjoy a kind of secular beautification that makes it virtually impossible for any contemporary leader to emulate him, far less to improve on his ideas. I believe this would have horrified the real Mandela. (Toit 2018: 7)

I particularly appreciated the way du Toit argues for a degree of parity between Mandela and De Klerk, although he also makes clear that there was no question of moral equivalence between their respective political agendas. Although their relationship was and continued to be understandably agonizing, 'a growing sense of their interdependence—the indispensable role of their adversary in realizing the aspirations of their respective struggles—provided a firm platform for cooperation. They were "in this together"' (Toit 2018: 32). du Toit concludes:

Apartheid was an egregious crime against humanity and the struggle against it a justified defensive war for basic human rights. But it is my position that, although De Klerk remains controversial and in some ways the 'lesser partner' in the reconciliation story, even his staunchest critics today must admit that he too played a key role. Without De Klerk, it is difficult to imagine a nonviolent end to apartheid. (Toit 2018: 19)

The pursuit of reconciliation by Mandela and De Klerk was by no means a feat of lofty idealism but the exercise of 'visionary leadership'. It is possible, indeed probable, that reconciliation arose not out of any notion of personal forgiveness but from a pragmatic acknowledgment of the intractability of a military stalemate, and of the power of reconciliation to change things fundamentally' (Toit 2018: 38). As Mandela reportedly stated, 'there are times when a leader must move out ahead of the flock and go off in a new direction, confident that he is leading his people in the right way' (Toit 2018: 22).

I witnessed, under rather fortuitous circumstances a reflection of Mandela's personal attributes that may help explain the shrewd yet humanistic qualities of leadership he displayed in negotiating with the apartheid regime. It was at an intimate dinner in Cape Town, attended among others by his wife-to-be, Graca Machel, as well as Lisbeth Palme, the widow of the Swedish Prime Minister, Olof Palme, and the Nigerian Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka. People were very critical of African leaders generally, and Mandela argued that he had come to know many good African leaders and that lumping African leaders together as bad was grossly unwarranted. His position was dismissed as a reflection of his well-known goodness and forgiving attitude. I noticed that Mandela was visibly getting restless and impatient. Looking at his watch, indicating that he was about to leave, he made his concluding comment: 'Every human being, however bad, by virtue of being a human being, there is some goodness in him. If you want to cooperate with him, look for that goodness and build on it. That is how you can make the best of the situation'. With those words, he got up and left. I was in full agreement with him in the discussion, but it was after he left that I strongly spoke out in support of his position.

Laudable as the South African reconciliation is, considering the economic and social disparity that racially divided South Africans, finding a common ground was a nigh impossible undertaking. When I visited South Africa with Obasanjo and Heath, I was struck by the differences between Cape Town, one of the most beautiful cities I have seen, and Crossroads, just outside the city, one of the worst slums I have ever seen anywhere in the world. In sharp contrast to my chronic optimism, I concluded that reconciliation could not be possible. No

amount of investment to lift up black South Africans would be enough to bridge the gap with the whites. Furthermore, any amount of resources taken from the whites to uplift the blacks would be too much for them to accept. I am glad that my pessimistic prediction was wrong and that reconciliation was achieved.

I was impressed by du Toit's account of Mandela's background, born and raised as he was in a cohesive society, regulated by the principles of *Ubuntu*, a concept which embodies the social norms of unity, harmony and respect for human dignity. *Ubuntu* stipulates a framework of shared humanity in which the interests of the individual are in harmony with those of the community. According to du Toit, *Ubuntu* 'is a cultural ideal which affirms that people become fully human only through their interactions with other with other people' (Toit 2018: 53). According to the norms of *Ubuntu*, 'disregarding the human dignity of others fatally wounds one's own humanity'. Archbishop Desmond Tutu calls *Ubuntu* the 'the very essence of being human' and 'Africa's gift to the world' (Toit 2018: 195). *Ubuntu* has been credited as the African moral foundation of reconciliation based on interdependence that led to the eradication of the apartheid system in South Africa.

Viewed from a different vantage point, it was arguably the denial of the values and the dignity associated with *Ubuntu* that propelled Mandela from a free, happy childhood in the countryside to an angry and eventually determined freedom fighter. According to du Toit:

Mandela attributed his driving force towards the horizon – his quest to be free – to his experiences as a Xhosa child growing up in the deeply rural, peaceful hills of Eastern Cape of South Africa. As a boy there, herding cattle across the rolling fields of Transkei, he wrote of feeling free in every way – free to swim in the streams that criss-crossed the local village, to roast mealies (corn) under the stars, and to ride the oxen he guided along the narrow footpaths. (Toit 2018: 20–1)

As du Toit observed:

Mandela seemed to be able to adopt ever-widening allegiances and causes, yet it is equally clear that he never renounced the traditional loyalties and deeply held beliefs that first promoted him to join the liberation struggle. . . . By not abandoning his identity as a Xhosa and an African, and by valuing the universal dimensions reflected in his local identity, he was able to demonstrate how the universal should be anchored in, and justified in terms of, the local and the particular. In other words, it is possible to conclude that his embrace of the fight for the rights of all South Africans while drawing on his particular identity and heritage to do so, played some role in his decision to pursue reconciliation as political strategy. (Toit 2018: 11–2)

du Toit goes on to explain that it was indeed the contrast between the identity and dignity Mandela enjoyed in his local background and the indignities of discrimination under apartheid that provoked him to rebel:

When he moved to Johannesburg as a young lawyer some years later, Mandela discovered that his boyhood freedom had in fact been limited to those idyllic childhood days, and that the freedom to be a professional adult simply did not exist for him as he set out to start a career in law. That began his fight for basic individual rights. . . . In time, after he experienced first-hand, the incalitrance and racism of the regime, he joined the ANC and eventually turned freedom fighter, beginning a new clandestine life in pursuit of rights for his people. (Toit 2018: 21)

Did the peace and reconciliation Mandela negotiated achieve for his people what he had struggled for on their behalf? The obvious answer is 'Yes, but'. Since the end of apartheid, I have been to South Africa on numerous occasions and have witnessed conflicting

perspectives on what has been achieved. Chatting with taxi drivers, as I generally tend to do, I got two contrasting views that reflected both dissatisfaction with the reconciliation for not having adequately addressed the grievances of black South Africans and acceptance of the incremental approach to peace and its incremental benefits. One driver posed a rhetorical question to me: 'Is this what we have been struggling for, only to have some black faces in the government, while we remain in poverty and the whites still control the wealth of our country?' Another taxi driver presented an opposite view: 'We know the whites still control the economy, but we also know that it will eventually accrue to us. We will wait patiently; we do not want to rock the boat'.

Accommodating conflicting positions that are seemingly irreconcilable, but can and must be made compatible and reconcilable, without being oblivious to their inherent incompatibility, reminds me of my differences with a colleague who is a leading figure in conflict resolution. He argued that conflict is inherent in human relations and that it is futile to try to prevent or resolve it; the most that can be done is to manage it. My position was that the normal state of human interaction, if the moral code of conduct stipulated by the social order is observed, is one of peaceful and cooperative relationship. Conflict, especially if violent, is a breakdown of the normal state of affairs; the aim of conflict resolution is therefore to restore the normal state of peaceful and harmonious relations.

I agree with the social restorationist paradigm as described by du Toit that 'Human society is not...an arena of danger and violent competition, but rather...a delicate web of cooperation, through which sufficient levels of trust exist, or can be generated' (Toit 2018: 134). According to this framework, 'war is...what happens when things go fundamentally wrong in the community of human relations. Unlike liberalism, where violence is often seen as an inevitable, violence is understood as a disastrous denial of how the world does and should work' (Toit 2018: 135). Peace and reconciliation should aim at restoring the disturbed order.

Two eminent Africans, Wole Soyinka and Professor Mahmoud Mamdani, have criticized South Africa's reconciliation for falling far short of addressing the economic and social injustices of the apartheid regime. Soyinka, referring to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), asked the question, whether the 'truth shall set you free' and offered an answer, 'maybe... but first the truth must be set free'. According to him, and quoted by du Toit, 'Where there has been inequity, especially of a singularly brutalizing kind...that robs one side of its most fundamental attribute—its humanity—it seems only appropriate that some form of atonement be made, in order to exorcise that past...reparations, we repeat, serve as a cogent critique of history and thus a potent restraint on its repetition' (Toit 2018: 91). He went on to pose a rhetorical question: 'What really would be preposterous or ethically inadmissible in imposing a general levy on South Africa's white population?' (Toit 2018: 91).

du Toit seems to concur: 'There can be little disagreement that reparations as a whole have fallen well short of expectations. Importantly though, this failure cannot fully be laid at TRC door in terms of either the design or implementation of its mandate. Arguably, it is more about a lack of political will and institutional capacity, as well as about competing priorities in government, than about the work of TRC as such' (Toit 2018: 104–5). Reportedly, the recommendations of the TRC included proposals for wide-ranging institutional reforms, especially with respect to the role of big business that had supported and benefitted from apartheid. These included a call for the establishment of a Business Reconciliation Fund and the imposition of a wealth tax, 'a once-off levy on corporate and

private income, a once-off donation of 1 per cent the market capitalization of each company listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, as well as a retrospective surcharge of corporate benefits and of all golden handshakes given to senior public servants since 1990'. Such funds 'could provide non-repayable grants, loans, and/or guarantees to business-related funding for black small entrepreneurs in need of either . . . skills or capital for the launching of a business'. The rationale was that business had at least a 'moral obligation to assist in the reconstruction and development of post-apartheid South Africa through active reparative measures' (Toit 2018: 105).

Mahmoud Mamdani characterized the South African peace accord as 'reconciliation without justice'. While acknowledging South Africa's reconciliation as commendable, he argues, and quoted by du Toit, that 'the transition failed to transform power relations between white and black citizens beyond the limits of the political elites... Victims and perpetrators continue to live together in a context in which perpetrators still wield considerable power. . . This makes the transformation of historical power relations even more important' (Toit 2018: 92).

Accountability for the crimes committed under apartheid is an issue which du Toit addresses in depth but remains seemingly unresolved because the government allegedly did not implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is the subject of ongoing debate between the advocates of peace and those for justice. This has often been perceived as a conflict between the African approach, which is more oriented toward forgiveness and reconciliation, and the European approach, which leans more toward punitive justice.

I have always argued that South Africa aimed at bridging the two positions. According to du Toit, 'The TRC Act eventually settled on a form of amnesty that depended on the condition that applicants made full disclosure, established political motive, and demonstrated proportionality of the crime to the stated political objective. The conditionality of the South African amnesty provisions meant that no blanket amnesties were granted' (Toit 2018: 69).

du Toit's thorough analysis of the different theoretical schools of thought on the central themes of reconciliation portrays the complexities of each school focusing on a piece of the puzzle. Clearly each piece alone cannot stand the scrutiny of the cross-cultural world in which we live. As du Toit argues, 'It is therefore important, even as differences and contestations are acknowledged, not to give up on pursuing theoretical clarity that at least attempt (sic) to account for what can be expected, offered, and hoped for when societies seek to reconcile' (Toit 2018: 124).

I would like to end this review with the dilemmas with which I began. The dilemma presents two options. One is to end the violent manifestations of conflict and agree to reconcile, coexist and cooperate in a process that provides some remedies, without full redress of the causes of the conflict. The other is to continue the violent struggle for change until the major grievances generating the conflict are addressed. In the case of South Africa, the conflict had already gone on for so long and the damage done was so great that the choice was arguably not as difficult as it might sound. While the case of apartheid was admittedly extreme, what happened therefore is what eventually happens in protected conflict situations.

Perhaps the real question is whether this policy framework for managing conflicts can be applied to early phases of conflicts to save lives and end the suffering of masses of the populations. Although the objective of full redress is the normal demand of liberation

struggles, most violent conflicts eventually get resolved on the bases of principles that were quite apparent from the start. This means that the suffering and the loss of lives are really unnecessary and morally unwarranted. Nearly always, these conflicts end with compromises that are not far from the framework analysed by this book. What might be required is aiming at the best compromises that can gain optimum acceptance and support from both sides. How such an equation can be developed and how the parties who at early stages of the conflict can be persuaded to mutually agree to this more constructive, though not perfect, alternative, is the daunting challenge. Given the element of pride and the need for face-saving in such situations, third-party mediation is critically needed to break the deadlock. This book is a must-read and the innovative strategic approach it implicitly proposes must be taken seriously.

2. Brandon Hamber: Reconciliation as pragmatic inter-dependence

The review essay by Dr Francis Deng has an interesting origin. On reading the book *When Political Transitions Work: Reconciliation as Interdependence* by Dr Fanie du Toit, Deng felt moved, from his own experience as a politician and diplomat, to write a detailed response to the book. He then shared his response with du Toit and myself. I then encouraged Deng, give his practical insights from South Sudan, and as former ambassador to the UN (2012–2016) for his newly independent country, to seek publication of the review. I felt this was important, as having read and studied du Toit's book myself, Deng offered, and also captured, the essence of what du Toit was seeking to argue in the book; in short, a pragmatic and process-driven, yet profoundly human and social justice-orientated, approach to reconciliation based on a recognition of inevitable interdependence. du Toit embeds his approach in the theoretical and also the experiential and practical.

Theoretically, du Toit seeks to rescue the concept of reconciliation from those who individualize the concept and see reconciliation as personal transformation and repairing individual relationships. He also challenges the liberal peacebuilding approach to reconciliation that relies on building political institutions as the bedrock of accountability and inter-community trust-building. From du Toit's perspective, the individual approach puts too much faith in individuals to change society, and the liberal framework underestimates what it takes to make peace (Toit 2018: 179) in terms of political realities and relationship-building. Equally, du Toit takes aim at the more recent agnostic position that sees reconciliation as a verb (Toit 2018: 174), that is, reconciliation is an active and dynamic process that requires a continuous and contentious debate about difference and how to live together (Toit 2018: 178). Although du Toit is seemingly drawn to the process element of this approach, he is concerned that the agonistic approach can reify conflict and notes it also suffers an inception problem (Toit 2018: 183). By inception, du Toit means the agonistic position never makes it clear how in a deeply divided society people can get to a position where they can learn to tolerate diverging positions and live with and manage such divergences in a democratic, ever-changing and creative way. The route to agonism, and even ultimately delivering social justice, requires according to du Toit a more complex array of leadership skills and the recognition of interdependence, and this is difficult to prescribe and requires a social and political 'alchemy' (Toit 2018: 203).

du Toit's notion of interdependence is rooted in the experiential, and as Deng outlines in his essay, this is specifically related to observing and participating in the South African transition. The relationship between Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk is a touchstone

for du Toit. Despite what is written about South Africa and its rainbow nation aspirations, du Toit is at pains to point out that the relationship between the two leaders was far from comfortable, and Mandela was not the forgiving and mythical peacemaker many assume he was. Mandela never forgave De Klerk or the apartheid generals and was not a naïve political pushover (Toit 2018: 38). Rather he recognized the interdependence of all South Africans and the dangers of ongoing conflict, and as such invested in a future-orientated strategy of negotiation as an ‘unavoidable socio-political reality’ (Toit 2018: 191). Mandela demanded De Klerk’s engagement and co-operation, and De Klerk recognized their interdependence (Toit 2018: 32–3). This approach is the product of visionary leadership (Toit 2018: 38) and embodies what du Toit understands by the term reconciliation, that is, a pragmatic and process-driven approach to relationship and peacebuilding which entails compromise but does not mean giving up self-interest (Toit 2018: 205). To this end, interdependence is not about how we feel about each other but what we do together (Toit 2018: 5). In Mandela’s case, his approach to co-operation was always aimed at delivery social justice for the black majority.

The challenge, however, is that social justice remains undelivered in South Africa. As du Toit, Deng, and many others have pointed out, it is inequality that remains stark between black and white South Africans, and the equality and racial justice agenda remains fragile and unfulfilled. However, what makes du Toit’s approach unique is that he essentially argues that such an outcome was not incompatible with a pragmatic, interdependent view of reconciliation. Although many have blamed the Mandela-vision of reconciliation for the failures of current-day South Africa, du Toit argues this misses the point as it is the other failings over the last 20 years and the lack of tough follow-up to the negotiated settlement that is the problem, not the notion of reconciliation as such.

Pragmatic interdependence requires an ongoing commitment from many sectors of society. The white community, in particular according to du Toit, has not taken sufficient responsibility for the past and this has limited the horizon for potential change. The failure of the Mbeki government to follow through on the TRC, for example implementing the wealth tax it recommended, is another unresolved issue. The lack of ‘moral leadership’ (Toit 2018: 219), particularly during the Zuma presidency, also stymied progress. As such, the transition in South Africa, and Mandela’s vision of reconciliation as the road to justice through tough inter-dependent engagement, opened the door to change (Toit 2018: 228) but the potential was not maximized (Toit 2018: 152).

It is the nature of the South African transition as outlined by du Toit that seems to appeal most to Deng. Deng served as the Ambassador of Sudan to Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States, and as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons from 1992 to 2004, and du Toit’s pragmatic approach appeals to his own practical experience. This approach recognizes that co-operation and trust-building is a delicate and ongoing social process, as du Toit argues. Conflict is not the driving force of society, and it cannot be ameliorated through the delivery of justice or the creation of new institutions alone if the complex socio-political conditions and relationships of inter-dependence are not recognized. Deng, in his experience of a wide range of conflicts, agrees with this analysis. As such, and drawing on Deng’s visits to South Africa and meeting Nelson Mandela over the decades, he points out that talking and negotiating with the apartheid regime was always the pragmatic and challenging destiny of the country; the negotiated settlement was not about liberal romanticism or individual

transformation, but *realpolitik*, and the South African transition bridged the gap between peace and justice.

To this end, Deng's essay, and du Toit's book, bring the discussion of reconciliation back to earlier debates in the field of transitional justice about the nature of reconciliation as a concept, and the nature of negotiated settlements in a deeply divided society in particular. The views that du Toit and Deng share are less in vogue these days; some contemporary scholars have dismissed the concept of reconciliation as a vague empty universal having little intrinsic value (Renner 2014) that should be de-emphasized, if promoted at all, in transitional justice (Evans 2018). In contrast, Deng and du Toit's practical and process-orientated approach, steeped in deep experience and reflection, calls for ongoing engagement and visionary leadership, beckoning us to think again before we reject the concept of reconciliation. Reading du Toit's book, and Deng's review essay, one is left pondering whether perhaps the dismissal by some of the role of reconciliation in political transition as ill-defined, naïve and impractical is a somewhat naïve claim in itself. Reconciliation is not a road to Damascus, as du Toit reminds us, but rather reconciliation, as defined by him, is a hard-fought process built on 'courageous realism' (Toit 2018: 38) that demands a gradual response to changing conditions (Toit 2018: 27). Such an approach, far from being the soft underbelly of transition, is 'radical' as it seeks to realize equality and deliver social justice, while acknowledging interdependence at the same time.

References

- Evans, M. 2018. A Future without Forgiveness: Beyond Reconciliation in Transitional Justice. *International Politics* 55(5): 678–92.
- Renner, J. 2014. The Local Roots of the Global Politics of Reconciliation: The Articulation of 'Reconciliation' as an Empty Universal in the South African Transition to Democracy. *Millennium* 42(2): 263–85.
- Toit, D. 2018. *When Political Transitions Work: Reconciliation as Interdependence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.