Re-empowering Indigenous Principles for Conflict Resolution in Africa: Implications for the African Union

by

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Abstract

This paper advances knowledge on some of Africa's indigenous principles of conflict resolution that could enhance peace efforts within the continent and the globe. The paper particularly explores the relevance of Africa's community, restorative and holistic principles of conflict resolution and the role of the African Union in enhancing their relevance in contemporary continental and global discourses.

Keywords: Indigenous conflict resolution; constructivism; African Union; African solutions to African problems; African Peace and Security Architecture

Introduction

Since attaining independence in the 1950s and 1960s, many African states have done little to explore ways to re-empower indigenous systems that were systematically degraded during the colonial era. Rather, post-colonial elites that took power from colonial masters made rapid efforts to align states with capitalist and socialist order of imperial powers in a bid to meet up with so-called international standards. Indeed, colonialism portrayed indigenous knowledge, religion and practices as primitive and irrational expressions of an inferior race (Ani 2017). The coverage of Africa in popular literature and media networks in the post-colonial era continue to lean on negative practices in such a way that many Africans also feel negatively about their traditional values. This is evident in the way Africans continue to depend on external actors for solutions to their contemporary challenges.

In terms of peace and security, the African Union which leads Africa's conflict resolution initiatives have also not made remarkable efforts to build on indigenous values and systems. Yet, many authors highlight the crucial role of indigenous conflict resolution mechanism in bringing fresh solutions to contemporary security issues alongside mainstream approaches (Boege 2011; Run 2013).

An African Union commissioned research that explores the viability of a 'United States of Africa' surmises the on-going concern that the expertise and education in Africa are over-dependent on foreign systems thereby requiring African actors to collectively enhance the capability and capacities of Africa to fully participate in shaping continental and international norms and agenda (AU 2006: 6-8). This paper thus revisits some common traditional values in Africa and the role of the AU in providing legitimacy and support. This is to ensure that Africa plays a key role in conceptualising solutions to its security challenges and by extension contributing in constructive global debates on peace and security.

Increasingly, there is a growing recognition that the foundational paradigms for peace and security in Africa are based on models of imperial powers to the detriment of society-centric outlooks that could contribute to sustainable peace and stability in the continent (Avruch 2002; Lacroix and Neufeldt 2010, Salem 2007; Bukari 2011). For Salem (2007), the mainstream conception of conflict resolution portrays fundamental ideas, assumptions, beliefs, values and thought processes of western powers. Jeng (2012, 6) affirms that the "dominant peace advocacy had generally conceptualized peace and peacebuilding in the context of Eurocentric thinking". In *Culture and Conflict Resolution,* Avruch (2002) maintains that even though mainstream conflict resolution tends to be presented as being neutral and objective, culture has a significant sway in people's action at the subconscious level. Avruch (2002) continues that western actors have intentionally and unintentionally dominated conflict resolution method with western cultural values and approaches.

Bob-Manuel in *A cultural approach to conflict transformation* (2000) notes that the upheavals and tensions in Africa are consequent from the breakdown of the order and context that African values and principles were developed and applied. The intractability and resurgences of conflicts in a number of African states and elsewhere point to the failures and limitations of the mainstream state-centric peace and security paradigms that are applied to resolve disputes in the continent. In an Op-Ed in Daily Maverick in June 2017, Tim Muruthi and Ashanti Kunene argue that 'the chaos that is now engulfing the world has a very Western origin. It would therefore be self-defeating for the rest of humanity to permit the self-same authors of chaos to frame the contours of a new global order. It is now time for the rest of the world to assert its right to remake the next international order.' This advances the need for indigenous ideas from other centres to play parallel and/or complementary role in addressing global issues.[i]

Walker (2004) in *Decolonizing Conflict Resolution: Addressing the Ontological Violence of Westernization* argues that the power imbalance in the research and practice in conflict resolution perpetuates colonialism as the worldviews of others are marginalized while the hegemony of western views are upheld. Hence, even though African actors implement some peace initiatives, their fundamental approach to peace and security could be – are often – conditioned by the systems, structures and values of imperial powers that were imposed on the continent through colonialism and imperialism.

Indeed, the growing misgivings about external[ii] interventions, perspectives and impositions – even with the culpability of internal actors – is reflective of the disconnect between local values and those of external powers. Ayittey (1994) in his analysis of the Somalia crises subtitled 'Time for an African Solution' insists that external intervention in Somalia is a complicating factor to the Somalia crises.

For Ayittey (1994), 'outside attempts to resolve Africa's problems have regularly proven [to be] ineffective and even counterproductive'. He argues for African responsibility for the conflict resolution attempts in Somalia. Such is a recurring view in crises states such as Libya, Darfur and low-level conflicts across Africa. Zartman (2000: 3) concurs with this view by noting that despite the intervention of foreign seasoned peacemakers and peacekeepers in the attempt to solve conflicts in Africa, many conflicts in the continent remain unresolved.

Such concern is the basis for the advancement of 'African solutions to African problems' which has become a common maxim in Africa today (Arman 2014).[iii] This is line with growing understanding that African-oriented endeavours can do more to provide long-lasting solutions to Africa's challenges, irrespective of the laudable efforts of external actors (Nhema 2008: 3; Ayittey 1994; Ngwane 1996; Mazrui 2008). During the July 2012 AU summit in Addis Ababa, Jean Ping, the former chairperson of the AU Commission stated that 'the solutions to African problems are found on the continent and nowhere else' (VOA 2012). This resonates with the view of Mehta (1978: 92) who argues that the remedy to European universalisations is for non-Europeans to redefine their path to self-fulfilment because their 'broke mosaic cannot be recreated in the image of the west'. Mehta (1978: 104) further advocates for an indigenous process of social change through the pursuit of goals that are corollary with a society's history and way of life.

However, there remains a paucity of research that appraises indigenous solutions especially at the national and continental level. This led Dersso (2012: 11) to argue that 'despite the fact that the political ideal of 'African solutions to African problems' underlying the APSA is routinely used in the literature and policy circles, questions still remain on what it actually entails and how it informs and shapes African policy making on peace and security issues affecting the continent.' Dominant literary discourses on Africa's peace and security have mainly focused on understanding the achievements, challenges and prospects of the peace and security mechanisms and interventions of African actors.

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They merely highlight the role of African actors as implementers of mainstream security traditions. Yet, there remains limited research on Africa's role in conceptualising security approaches by examining indigenous approaches that are relevant in contemporary times.

This research thus engages with the traditional conflict resolution approaches in Africa and the African Union's responsibility in highlighting these approaches in theory and practice of peace and security. Rather than examine practices within Africa that are used in day to day conflict resolution, the study focuses on guiding principles, ideas or outlooks that highlight the commonalities in African conflict resolution without undermining the particularities in various localities in the continent. Thus instead of considering how practices such as the *Gacaca* practice in Rwanda or the *Mato Oput* in Uganda could aid in addressing national and international issues, the study focuses on the philosophical rationale or principles upon which those practices are undertaken. As such, the paper advances knowledge on Africa's conceptual approaches in peace and security and proffers recommendations on how the AU could negotiate its ideologies and perspectives in the global system where the values of a few has been universalised as the standard.

The paper sets the scene by providing a conceptual understanding of what African indigenous conflict resolution could mean. This is done using the theoretical framework of constructivism, which holds that international relations is influenced by prevailing ideas generated from social relationships as explained below. The paper goes further to discuss the community, restorative and holistic outlook of African conflict resolution that requires indepth engagement on their relevance in African peace initiatives.

Towards Empowering African Indigenous Approaches: A Constructivist Perspective

Relevant to this study, the framework of constructivism explains the idea of common African indigenous approaches and the need to highlight the approaches within mainstream frameworks. Constructivism diverges from the fixation of dominant theories – neo-realists and neoliberalists – on material capabilities as the major influencers of world affairs. Constructivism holds that the international system exists only as an intellectual and ideational phenomenon that is developed from social relations. That is to say that the prevailing ideas amongst people do the better impact than material capabilities (Jackson and Sorensen 2006).

In his *Anarchy is what States Make of it: the Social Construction of Power Politics,* Wendt (1992), illustrates this by arguing that "500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than 5 North Korean nuclear weapons". In this claim, the U.S. perceive Britain as a friend while it harbours an idea of enmity with North Korea whom it views as capable of acting aggressively.

If the case is merely about material capability, the U.S. would be more wary and threatened by Britain than North Korea. For Wendt, such view is consequent from the historical, rhetorical and behavioural interpretations of the relations with Britain on the one hand and North Korea on the other. Thus, material resources only acquire meaning and prompt human action through the structures of ideas they exist in.

Legro (2005, 6) highlights that the constructivist understanding of 'ideas are not so much mental as symbolic and organizational; they are embedded not only in human brains but also in the "collective memories," government procedures, educational systems, and the rhetoric of statecraft.' Hence, concerns relating to security in the world order, for instance, are not just about the consideration of the resources, weapons and other material elements of other states as espoused by neorealists. Rather it is about ideas that prevail in the international system based on historical and behavioural relationships of states. This implies that if the ideas in international relations change, the relationships in the international order change as well.

In the context of constructivism, the idea of Pan-African unity and destiny have remain a motivating factor for inter-African cooperation through continental and regional organisations such as the African Union. Despite some divergences in the economy, infrastructure, values and priorities, the idea of a common destiny and value system dominates policy and inter-state discourses of African actors. The African Union, through its Constitutive Act and its documents relating to the formation of a Union Government and recently on Agenda 2063 have emphasized that Africa's integration agenda is rooted in the cognizance of Africa's shared culture, traditions and values. As such, the unity in Africa is not so much about tangible material elements but rather intangible ideas of Pan-Africanism, which reflect the collective memories and notion of Africa's common identity and need for unity against common challenges.

Common identity in Africa is most reflected in the intangible notion of common culture and values including commonalities in the approaches to conflict resolution (Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo 2012; Lacroix and Neufeldt 2010; Brock–Utne 2001; Bukari 2013)[iv]. These commonalities that reflect African indigenous model is based on traditional principles that have been practiced over a considerable period of time in African societies. For Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo (2012) 'traditional conflict resolution processes are part of a well-structured, time-proven social system geared towards reconciliation, maintenance and improvement of social relationships.' Komey, Osman, and Melakedingel (2013: 1) notes aptly that 'one can learn that African solutions are usually based on either ownership i.e. of being African-led or of being 'working' solutions rooted in African identity manifested in its culture, values and realities of societies.'

The common conflict resolution outlook in Africa includes claims around Africa's value for community and restorative approaches, which accords greater value to communal harmony and the mending of broken relationships that result from conflicts. This is not just for the continuation of orderly-living but for harmonious and cordial existence in societies (Boaduo 2010; Boege 2011; Brock-Utne 2001).

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In this approach, the African model is not limited to seeking a physical resolution, rather it seeks holistic solutions including emotional, social and spiritual resolutions to conflict so as to address the impacts of conflicts in its totality rather than a mere one-sided approach (Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo 2012; Brock–Utne 2001). Although these values are shared by some communities outside Africa, African communities have been observe to prioritize these values as primary rather than secondary approaches. The following sections will provide a more indepth understanding on this.

On the other hand, common identity and values in Africa provides a platform for Africa's united engagement in global debates. As indicated in the introduction, imperial powers hold sway in highlighting their indigenous values as though it's a global standard. Given that ideas in international relations could change based on new realities, closer analysis and criticism of African indigenous values in conflict resolution will play a key role in enabling Africa to contribute to the global construction of mainstream conflict resolution approaches.

The Community-Based Approach to Conflict Resolution

While conflict exists in every human society, the nature, analysis and resolution of conflict had differed from society to society (Run 2013). Thus, in terms resolving conflicts, context specific models provide an avenue for societies to own resolution processes. Where indigenous models are wanting, other approaches across the globe play a complementary role. In Africa, one of the emphasised ideas about African value system is the community-centric approach as opposed to individualism (Malan 2012). Concepts such as kparakpor (Yoruba-Nigeria), Ubuntu (Zulu-South Africa) and Ujamaa (Swahili-Tanzania) – which simply refers to the notion of 'I am because we are' – have become trending terminologies that denote the value of communal relationships in African systems.

A vivid example of the community based approach in Africa is that despite the fact that migration and refugee flows is on the rise within Africa, many communities in Africa have welcomed migrants and refugees despite some indications of xenophobia in some countries. This is in contrast to the magnified reaction of rich communities in imperial states that receive few migrants.

The community focus in Africa is grounded in the discourse on African epistemology where knowing is based on a social context in such a way that the individual thinks in, for and through his/her society (Ani 2013). It is based on this observation that Placide Tempels (1959: 41), who sparked the debate on African philosophy, stresses on the notion of the *world of forces (beings)* as the African philosophical/epistemological tradition. The *world of forces* perspective entails that each being – inanimate and animate – exert influence on the other like 'a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network'.

Pertinent to conflict resolution, literary discourses on traditional African approach highlights that the African system accords greater value to social networks in the comprehension, analysis and resolution of conflicts. The analysis of the roots of conflict thus does not start from the immediate conflict cause but from the possible web of relationship deteriorations that led to the conflict. It becomes imperative that many actors, in fact the entire community, become part of conflict resolution process. Hence, an experienced African mediator situates the conflict within a social framework rather than the isolated incident (Boaduo 2010: 171). This helps to unearth the social network clues and historical perspectives that precipitated the immediate conflict. This could go deeper to reveal long-standing rivalry and grievances between the parties and seek measures to mend the social networks and restore the social harmony that deteriorated. In doing so, the entire community – including those directly involved in the conflict and those who are not – take responsibility for the conflict and seek ways to address it.

The Problem: The Individualisation of Contemporary Peace Efforts

There are commendable efforts by some states, the AU and UN to include different factions of the society in peace processes through the emphasis on inclusive dialogue. In practice however, the state-centric nature of post-independent Africa have consistently leaned towards engaging and addressing the interests and needs of individuals to the disadvantage of the community. Indeed, the dominance of individualist approach in contemporary African affairs thrives because the new governance system did not emerge from the socio-economic and political realities of indigenous populations, but rather from the state order introduced by colonial powers. In Nigeria for instance, indigenous leaders where side-lined for colonial stooges such as warrant chiefs and, later-on, educated elites who maintained colonial leadership order. These leaders who do not emerge from indigenous dynamics live in disconnect with the people. As such, the analysis and resolution of conflict is often based on the interest of individual elites while engagements with the wider community remain a secondary initiative (Boaduo 2010: 171; Uwazie 2011).

In South Africa for instance, authors such as Mamdani (2002) argue that the failure of the reconciliation effort in the country is consequent from the individualisation of apartheid injustices. The post-apartheid peace effort did not engage apartheid injustice as a community issue, rather the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) only sought individual confessions to politically motivated crimes during the apartheid regime. As such, the rest of the entire white population who gave a collective backing for apartheid are indifferent and do not feel obligated to acknowledge their role and responsibility to make reparations to restore order (Mandani, 2002). This does not mean punishing the entire group, rather the focus is on accepting direct and indirect communal responsibility to a crime.

Additionally, few individuals were identified as victims of apartheid through the process. The rest of the community of victims of the economic, psychological and social impact of apartheid remain acrimonious and seeking redress several years after apartheid.

Other efforts at economic empowerment for the community of victims only came as secondary and tokenistic initiatives that benefit few individuals. For Ramose (2011), the Ubuntu understanding of law requires the whole family and community to take responsibility for the wrongs and ills committed even by an individual member even if the individual is dead. The reparation process also involves the direct and indirect victims that are dead or alive. Such move helps a more encompassing community effort for remorse, reconciliation and practical effort to address grievances. Although the peace process in South Africa was mainly led by African players, they operate within a mainstream state order that prioritizes individuals to the detriment of the community.

Philosophically, this mainstream approach is tied to the individualism in western epistemological tradition where knowing tends to be an individual expedition as palpable from the works of philosophers such as Renê Descartes, Francis Bacon, Augustus Comte, David Hume, John Locke, Bishop George Berkeley, etc (Ani 2013). In their quest for universal truth, they sought to attain absolute certainty in knowledge by regarding whatever becomes unquestionable to them as universal truths as evident from Descartes' proclamation: Cogito Ergo Sum.[vvi] Hence, as individual entities, they become the ultimate bearers and determiners of truth unlike the African approach where an individual alone does not determine truth. With the seventeenth century Scientific Revolution in the west, science further highlighted the capacity of the individuals to solely observe, experiment and rationalize reality (Ani 2016).

In terms of conflict resolution, Salem (2007) further elaborates that the universalism of Thales and the atomism of Democritus gave rise to a western view of conflict as the result of the thoughts and impulses of the individual, a view that has become a dominant perspective in global debates and interventions. From this viewpoint, conflict is perceived to originate from an individual's interests and rationalizations and is better resolved by identifying, analysing and addressing the interests of individuals (Lacroix and Neufeldt 2010: 13). Contemporary African interveners pay greater attention to the interests of individual elites than that of the community.

In South Sudan, for instance, questions abound on why the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) facilitated peace agreements that focused on the interest of the warring leaders President Salva Kiir and the rebel leader Riek Machar. The two leaders repeatedly signed agreements that fail to end the conflict.

In this approach, the trusts that the leaders will be law abiding' have only led to worsened violence after the signing of Agreements by the two main rival leaders because the understanding of the conflict is primarily seen around individual interest. Undoubtedly, the focus on the individual leaders is because of the individualistic-based international order that informs conflict resolution approaches. Many individuals have taken advantage of individualistic order by breaking away to form rival movements so they can sit on the negotiation table to gain recognition and power. This is evident from the South Sudan case where many rebel groups have emerged from the major opposition movement.

In the case of Somalia, there were several (over fourteen) internationally sponsored peace conferences since the state collapse in 1991 before the formation of the transitional government in 2004. The conferences provided an avenue for Somali domestic elites to engage in a political economy of 'peace agreements'. The Somali leaders gladly participated in the peace talks organized in fancy hotels outside Somalia with considerable allowances and prestige (Menkhaus 2008). These peace talks, which are like "holiday programmes" resulted in agreements which were broken as soon as the parties return to Somalia. Then, another peace talk is set again. With the current progress on state building in Somalia, the elites still have not proven to reflect the interest of local population.

Ayittey (2010) notes that there have been over 30 peace agreements in Africa since 1970 but these peace accords that focus on power-sharing between leaders have failed to bind conflict parties; 'only Mozambique's 1991 peace accord has endured, while shaky pacts hold in Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, and Niger' (Ayittey 2010). In this regard, the individual focus of power-sharing deals challenges democracy and efficient resolution of conflicts in Africa.

State Failure and the Opportunity for a Society-Centric Order

Ngwane (1996: 3) insists that 'the assumption that only those parading the corridors of power, that only political leaders know what the people need has remained a universal fallacy'. Uwazie (2011) argues that many citizens in Africa have lost faith in the capacity of the state to address their grievances. Many rebel groups have risen in this regard to assert their interests, and sometimes, with the aim of toppling state governments. This is evident from the crisis in Somalia, Mali, the DRC, CAR and Burundi as well as the so-called revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Some rebel movements that do not see a prospect of toppling the government merely continue benefiting from the economic gains of war. Indeed, the political economy of war has led to the rapid emergence of warlords, militia groups, radical criminal networks and private military companies. These players have no interest in upholding state sovereignty or territorial integrity (Boege 2011).

Increasingly, state incapacities have led to growing discourse about society-centric order. Brock-Utne (2001) and Reamaykers (2005) postulate that the collapse of the Somali state and the thriving of societal organizations are clear signs of the significance of societal resilience and order in contrast to state imposed order. Reaymaekers (2005) notes that state collapse in countries such as Somalia saw the emergence of various societal organizations that provide order in the society.

In Somalia, different clans made alliances and formed various forms of organizations and local conflict management mechanisms. Others resorted to the traditional method of social and political organization and formed decentralized governments such as Somaliland, Puntland, Galmudug, etc.

In Somaliland, the *gurti* system of Clan Elders was restored to settle conflicts and mediate the resolution of conflicts between different warlords. For Brock-Utne (2001), such system highlights the relevance of societal systems in 'the hostile environment created by social relations and politics of modernity'. For Raeymaekers (2005), the failure of states increasingly point to the relevance of a society-centric world order rather than the rigid state-system that provides greater powers to individual elites.

Boege (2011: 444) notes that traditional approaches are relevant in many Third World states that are characterized by state weakness and fragility. Indigenous approaches improve the legitimacy and effectiveness of third party attempts to address conflicts. Thus, while attention ought to be paid to individual state elites who have become very powerful figures with the power to guarantee peace or war in African states, African interveners including the AU are obliged to explore mechanisms to ensure the primacy of the community. This requires a concerted effort of African actors including the Africa Union to push for a community-based approach to conflict resolution rather than an individual-based approach that focus on the interest and claims of individuals. This is to ensure that interventions are not myopic but holistic in such a way that they encompass political, economic, social and spiritual resolutions so as to reintegrate conflicting parties and re-establish the energy flow in communities. In this context, political elites and renowned actors in conflict are not the only ones to be involved in negotiation or finding resolution to conflict. Rather, all the conflict parties including the entire community engage in the peace process.

Restorative Approach to Resolution and Reconciliation

Another key aspect of African conflict resolution approach is the restorative approach, which seeks to resolve conflict by focusing on the reintegration of warring factions into community. Drawing on the communal focus, conflict is seen as an ailment in relationships in societies, an ailment that requires the restoration of harmony and order (Boege 2011). Hence, the traditional African conflict resolution approach 'follow the line of restorative justice instead of (western-style) punitive justice' (Boege 2011: 439) which places emphasis on punishing offenders as evident from the coercive and military interventionist approach of some imperial powers.

In this regard, the traditional African approaches favour the atonement route where the offenders atone for their offences. Depending on the offence, wrongdoers in some African societies compensate for their offence using material goods, gifts, blood money, etc. Here, compensation takes the place of vengeful violence. Among the Acholi people in Northern Uganda for instance, Mato Oput, which literally means 'to drink a bitter potion made from the leaves of the Oput tree' is a mechanism for forgiveness and reconciliation (Katshung 2006). The reconciliation process, which entails drinking the bitter herb means that the conflicting parties accept the bitterness of the past and vow not to taste such bitterness again. This ceremony is followed by the payment of compensation to the victim by the perpetrator.

This however does not mean that there are no punishments in traditional African practices (Bukari 2013).[vii] Rather, the focus is not on adjudicating blame or exterminating offenders but on enabling the conflict parties to transcend their differences and attain reconciliation for continued mutual and harmonious existence. It is in view of this approach that Ruch (1984) notes that Africans seek the order that ought to be in the universe.

In post-colonial African countries however, the use of force to respond to dissent has become the trending approach to conflict resolution. Notably, response to protests in many African countries today is greeted with high-handed security responses to silence dissent. In Nigeria for instance, the high-handed approach used to tackle the Boko Haram leaders at the initial stage is at the heart of the rise of the extremist group. Over the years, the extremist group took on radical and terrorist stance given the government's restriction of opportunities for dialogue and negotiation. Like Boko Haram, many terrorist movements of today got to where they are today due to the limited space for dialogue and accommodation of people with different perspectives. Such forceful state response gave rise to terrorist groups such as the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Ansar Al-Shariya in Tunisia, the Al-Qaeda-linked Mulathameen Brigade (the 'Masked Ones') in Algeria as well as the Ansar Dine led by a former close ally of Gaddafi, Iyad Ag Ghaly. Despite their unjustifiable means, these extremist groups are bent on making an impression against the state and the imperial influence that has blocked the traditional channels of resolving grievances.

Additionally, the case of the U.S.-led UN mission in Somalia between 1992 and 1995 is considered as an intervention based on the belief that military or coercive actions could address issues across the globe (Ayittey 1994; Menkhaus 2008). Yet, the intervention turned into a debacle when the mission began attempts to coerce the conflict parties to negotiate. The UN forces became party to the conflict as they tried to rein in the excesses of the different factions with the aim of restoring a predictable state-system. The UN forces remained in Somalia until 1995 when they too withdrew from the state, realizing the futility of their effort.

The Al-Shabaab militants that have continued to destabilize security in Somalia and in neighbouring Kenya were also brought to birth after the defeat of the Islamic Court Union (ICU)'s forces by the U.S backed Ethiopian forces. As part of their war against terrorism, US forces conceived the ICU to be linked with Al-Qaeda. The latter was alleged by U.S intelligence units to be using Somalia as a base for operations. Thus, the ICU, which provided governance in Mogadishu, was ostracized and eventually routed by US backed forces. What followed after the end of the group was the growth of the Harakat al-shabaab al-Mujahideen (Movement of Warrior Youth known as Al-shabaab) a militant group of the ICU that became one of the fiercest militant Islamist movements domestically and internationally. This highlights the limited space for the tolerance of alternative systems in the contemporary international order.

In the Bawku region of Ghana, Bukari (2013) argues that the conflict resolution outlook used in finding solutions to the conflicts fail because western legal processes and the use of force were employed to resolve them. For Bukari (2013: 88), 'many of the conflicts in Ghana are traditional because many of them revolve around traditional quest for power (chieftaincy) intricately linked to land ownership.'

In accord with Bukari (2013), the uncritical use of western legal means and the use of force to resolve the conflicts in the Bawku region of Ghana that are deeply rooted in tradition have only led to the protracted nature of conflicts in the region. Bukari (2013: 90) notes that the western conflict resolution practice that seeks to apportion blame and punishment using the court or security system only end up aggravating hostility among conflict parties. This is mainly because the legal and coercive means do not provide grounds for reconciliation and restoration of harmony; it merely ends at apportioning blame.

However, the atonement and restorative route of African traditional conflict resolution helps to ensure that different groups in the community are able to look beyond differences to a greater harmony and respect for the interdependence of communal living (Boege 2011). The restorative outlook pays cognizance that the disputants, offenders and victims are all linked to one another and the attempts to exterminate or punish offenders also have impacts on their family, clan and group members. The restorative outlook thus creates mechanisms for the re-integration of different parties into society to avoid the resurgence of conflict by aggrieved families and groups.

Hansen (1987) argues that despite the value attached to peace, there are divergent views on what constitutes peace and how it should be achieved. Peace in some localities could be a psychosocial state while in some societies, peace entails the absence of physical crisis. Based on the latter, Boaduo (2010: 171) argues that western actors conceive peace as the absence of widespread physical violence and the existence of rational order. In Africa however, peace requires cordial and harmonious relationships. In this context, if people in society merely condone each other and do not relate with each other properly, the work of conflict resolvers is not yet complete. This is unlike the retributive approach that merely apportions blame and punishment with less consideration of the impact on the society as a whole.

Indeed, the AU and African leaders have argued in line with the restorative approach in some crises situations like Kenya, South Sudan and Sudan. The AU has been at the forefront of condemning the International Criminal Court (ICC)'s supposed retributive "witch-hunt" for Africans since its establishment in 2002. In the cases of Sudan and Kenya, the AU rejected the move by the ICC to prosecute Presidents Omar al-Bashir of Sudan and Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya as well as the Deputy President William Samoei Ruto of Kenya on charges of war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

The AU argues that the ICC's indictment is mainly divisive than resolving or restoring peace in the society. But the worrying concern is whether this stance is about restoring broken relationships in African societies or merely supporting the represented leaders of the AU who have been summoned by the ICC.

It is crucial to note that if the AU wants to advance a restorative approach there is a greater need to ensure that the focus is on communal interest rather than the interest of individuals. Indeed, the restorative-approach exists within a community-based approach to conflict resolution not in an individualistic framework which many states in Africa lean towards. On the ICC case, the AU, which has initially been the advocate of the court, fell out with the court when it issued an arrest warrant in 2009 against a sitting Head of State, President Omar Al Bashir of Sudan. Ironically, the AU has not raised objections against the cases involving the indictment of so-called rebel leaders.

The major demand of the AU is that sitting leaders should be immune from prosecution. If the AU is about pursuing restorative justice, it should equally denounce all indictments against persons in Africa and develop its context specific judicial system to ensure that legal processes follow a restorative approach. Unfortunately, the African Court that is yet to be functional also provides for the immunity of individual elites. The AU ought to ensure that African leaders do not hide behind a set of 'selected traditions' while they engage in human right violations. A better way to advance restorative approach entails that leaders and elites become more responsive and reflective of community interests rather personal interests.

Holistic Approach to Conflict Resolution

The holistic approach is a remarkable aspect of African indigenous conflict resolution that should guide the efforts of Africa interveners. Indigenous conflict resolution in Africa is holistic in the sense that it adopts a more encompassing approach to conflict resolution/reconciliation because it involves resolutions and reconciliation at various levels including rational, emotional, artistic, religious and spiritual aspects. Supposed mainstream conflict resolution approach tend to esteem rational political initiatives over supposed 'non-rational' ones (Avruch 2002; Gellman 2007). Culture, emotions, religion and other non-rational expressions are only considered as impediments to societal growth. Thus, while peace efforts are initiated and concluded at the political level, cultural, religious and emotional aspects are often suppressed in contemporary efforts.

However, conflict is not only experienced at the rational or physical level, it is felt also at spiritual, emotional and cultural levels. A number of authors insist that initiatives that pays less regard to cultural, religious and belief systems is oblivious that people's thinking and initiatives are unavoidably swayed by societal beliefs, emotions and values (Avruch 2002; Jean-Emmanuel Pondi cited in Ngwane 1996: vi).

Notable postmodernist thinkers such as Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) and Paul Feyarabend (1924-1994) are instructive in noting that scientific studies including pure sciences are socially constructed in such a way that one's judgement inevitably reflect the background beliefs, values and imagination of people in society (O'Hear 1989; Ani 2016). Gyekye in *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought* (1987: 25) insists that rationality is fundamentally a cultural phenomenon that reflects the cultural experience and background of people.

Along this thinking, Gellman (2007) argues that while western conflict resolution principles view culture as a barrier and challenge to conflict resolution, culture is actually an asset, not a barrier, to conflict resolution. Conflict resolution attempts that respect people's humanity, traditions, beliefs and ways of life have the capacity to ensure lasting solution than those that ignores or undermines them. Thus, if one is to consider conflict in logical and strictly analytical manner, one neglects the diverse aspects of humanity. It is based on this wisdom that traditional conflict resolution in Africa transcend efforts aimed at addressing issues rationally and physically by also addressing them at emotional and spiritual levels so as to satisfy the entirety of people's wants, needs and interests. Based on the holistic approach of African practices, Ruch (1984:46) affirms that African indigenous knowledge 'does not follow the fragmenting activity of abstractive knowledge, its contact with the real is more immediate and involves the whole man (sic) and not only his intellect'

In the African context, spiritual ceremonies, rites and rituals are pivotal in ensuring that one's commitment is not only at the physical level but also at the spiritual level. It is counterproductive to suppress the spiritual aspects merely because the mainstream experts do not understand it. Indeed, many people still have strong spiritual beliefs and justifications that need to be addressed irrespective of their scientific relevance. For Gyekye (1987: 15) and Ruch (1984), spiritual and mythical expressions address the deeper issues that are incomprehensible to the human intellect. The spiritual and religious elements fill the void that empirical and scientific facts cannot reach (Ani 2016). It is on this point of view that Lacroix and Neufeldt (2010: 22) insists that conflicts are not straightforward, logical, reasonable and orderly. Indigenous conflict resolution in Africa encourages interveners to pursue efforts that encompass rational, emotional, mythical, experiential, intuitive, symbolic, and spiritual elements (Boege 2011: 449). This then demands greater creativity for the AU in terms of responding to conflict challenges. The AU should ensure that resolution attempts do not remain at the political level. Support should also be provided to conflict parties to find closure not only at the political level but emotionally and spiritually.

Conclusion

This paper has thus far engaged with some of Africa's traditional principles for conflict resolution that require greater attention by interveners especially the African Union which leads conflict resolution efforts in Africa. This requires challenging the foundational basis for so-called mainstream approaches. Nicholas Onuf who first coined the word constructivism in his *World of Our Making* (1989) emphasised that the values we hold dearly in the society and the globe are socially constructed. Hence, why should a particular perspective dominate the theory and practice of conflict resolution across the globe? In his *The Conversation of Races*, W.E.B. du Bois (2007: 12) maintains that Africa should strive to enhance their mode of existence by adapting to current realities and at the same time ensuring that its values are not subsumed by the views, ideologies and values of others.

Hence, the African Union, which provides a greater platform for a combined cooperation of African countries, should play a key role advancing African common values. Indeed, the African Union has made some efforts to introduce indigenous perspectives in conflict resolution. For instance, the AU's peace and security architecture (APSA) was developed to include the Panel of the Wise, which was officially inaugurated in December 2007 in accord with Article 11 of the 2002 PSC protocol. Representing the five regions in Africa and appointed by the AU General Assembly, the POW is composed of five members with outstanding profiles of past contributions to peace, security and development. The Panel is expected to use their expert knowledge and moral influence to advice the Peace and Security Council (PSC) and facilitate the peaceful resolution of conflicts via diplomacy and mediation. The Panel of the Wise is akin to the traditional system where chiefs, priests, healers and elders play a key role in mediation and diplomacy. Speaking during the opening address of the 14th Meeting of the African Union Panel of the Wise, the Commissioner for Peace and Security, Ambassador Smail Chergui notes that:

> *Since its inception, the Panel of the Wise has captured African (and one could add international) curiosity and imagination. After all, we created a structure at the heart of our organisation – of our decision-making on conflict prevention, management and resolution – inspired by the centuries' old practice of African elders' centrality in dispute and conflict resolution in our communities. Indeed, in creating a Panel of the Wise, the AU has in many ways recognised the importance of customary, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and roles and the continuing relevance of these mechanisms in contemporary Africa. Independence, experience, maturity, respect – these are but some of the characteristics of our Panel's members (AU PSC 2014).*

However, since its establishment, the Panel of the Wise has not been effective and it has played marginal role in addressing security challenges. Moroever, their intervention so far, like many other AU efforts to resolve conflicts, fail to show that they are grounded on indigenous principles.

To address this, the AU needs to invest on a strong research base on context-specific and indigenous approaches of addressing crises challenges in Africa. This requires deeper critique of indigenous values and how it could inform day-to-day conflict resolution efforts. Indeed, western outlooks of conflict resolution still thrive because they are founded on strong research grounds that are still taught in academic institutions across the globe. The AU needs to learn from this and explore ways to leverage on shared values and use them 'at the national, regional and continental levels to devise and implement developmental policies and programmes that are people centred and well rooted in African traditions' (AU 2006: 21). This includes working closely with African think thanks, civil society and the media in understanding and promoting African shared values.

To implement initiatives founded on indigenous principles, the African Union should also push its member states to pursue people-centred and accountability-based governance. This includes working for the local development and the generation of local funding in Africa rather than the dependence on external actors. Such move will ensure that Africa's values are not subsumed by the values of imperial actors.

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Notes

[i] Kofi Annan (2006: 2), in his final report to the UN General Assembly as Secretary-General in September 2006, advocated for an international order that opens up to other views and perspectives from other locations besides those of powerful actors.

[ii] For the purpose of this paper, the terms, external, imperial and foreign interventions are used to refer to interventions by 'non-African' actors unless stated otherwise.

[iii] The calls for African solutions to African problems resonate with Marcus Garvey's Pan-African arguments in the early 1900s. Garvey argued for Africa's self-governance through his motto: "Africa for Africans". However, the maxim is sometimes misused by some African leaders to say that Africa's problems is solely external in nature.

[iv] This paper notes that generalizations about geographical, cultural and social groupings as expressed in terms such as "western" and "non-western", "Africa" and "non-African" are faced with the risk of essentialism, over-simplification and reductionism. This study notes from the outset that the use of the foregoing categorizing terms is not meant to essentialize the interests and values of a group. Rather, they are meant to refer to the identified patterns of values and interests of groups of people with shared experiences, culture, norms, beliefs and value system.

[5] Simply translated as 'I think, therefore I am'

[vii] Indeed, there are a number of research materials on the gruesome practices in some African societies in the past. Such practices like in many other geopolitical locations are indeed worth condemning. Yet, it is crucial to note that in many African societies, the emphasis is on how to get rid of the "evil in the person" rather that getting rid of the "person". Hence, in most societies, perpetrators could pay compensations for their crimes to enable them be reintegrated into society.