Symbolic Representation and Conflict Management in Africa

Elias Nankap Lamle[1], Felix Ogbewe Aigbovbioisa[2]

[1]*Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies, University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria*
[2]*Peace and Development Studies Programme, Salem University, Lokoja, Nigeria*

Abstract: - **Symbols have enabled a smooth flow of communication in precolonial Africa. It was the major means for which history was stored. Creative artistry works were used by the Africans to communicate their values and educate their people. Symbols were not just a mere aspect of African culture but the major means for which order was reached and formed the bases for enforcement where the need arose. Therefore, this work provides an explanation on symbolic representation and how it was used in time past and still being used by the indigenous Africans to manage conflict and for consensus building within the society. To this end, qualitative method was used to generate data where related literatures were reviewed to elucidate facts with conclusion and recommendations made for the benefit for further researches.**

Keywords: **African culture, Symbols, Symbolic Representation, Conflict Resolution, Conflict Management**

I. INTRODUCTION

"Man is born free, but every where he is in chains" (Rousseau, 1754; cited in Masters, 1964). Conflict, as it were, is inevitable in human society. Anywhere humans are gathered, there is always a tendency for one form of conflict or another owing to the fact that people, most of the times, pursue incompatible goals, interests, status, values, beliefs, resources or positions that ultimately lead to mutual disagreements or conflicts. What the above implies is that Conflict is a natural phenomenon in the life of human beings which occurs in relation of interaction for socio-cultural, economic and political purposes. The above may have informed Aigbovbioisa (2018, p.1) to submit that "in man's quest for survival and relational activities, there come scramble for limited resources, scramble for status or the recognition of it, holding of divergent opinions, views, interests, values, etc owing to differing educational, cultural, political, religious, social and ideological backgrounds which are all potential breeders of disagreement, conflict and even violence if not well tolerated, managed or resolved." This assertion by Aigbovbioisa (2018, p.1) further gives credence to the submission by the renowned philosopher, Thomas Hobbs (1958) that "the human society exists in conflict not by accident but by the very nature of man, which makes him pitch against his fellow." The universe itself revolves through conflict; thus, conflict is impossible to avoid from the life of human beings rather treat in a positive way for functional outcomes. This perhaps, explains the reason Isola (2011, p.110), opined that "conflict, which depicts "differences in our

preferences, are not altogether a negative thing; but that there is progress in working out our differences positively." The above impliedly means that conflict is an integral part of our lives. According to Osaghae (2000), conflict could occur between people of different communities normally over the determination of rights, ownership of natural resources and raid of livestock. As a result, states provide western model of conflict resolutions to minimise the destructive features of conflict in the communities.

Traditional societies also develop conflict management mechanisms through their cultural perceptions. Accordingly, many African societies have traditional institutions to apply indigenous knowledge and laws to settle all types and levels of conflict. In African traditional societies, conflict management through indigenous institutions performed a healing function. It provides opportunity for examinations of alternative positive decision to resolve differences. As a result, acceptable and respected persons and institutions such as elders, clan chiefs, prominent leaders, great hunters, council of elders, king's courts, peoples assemblies were used for dispute settlement and justice dispensation (Nwosile, 2005). This is because elders could have wisdom and knowledge; and respect as trustworthy mediators hence, traditional institutions play a proactive role to promote social cohesion, peace, harmony, co-existence; and a reactive role in resolving disputes which have already occurred (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2008). Moreover, the essence of conflict management in traditional African communities, states and regions include to remove the root-causes of the conflict; reconcile the conflicting parties genuinely; to preserve and ensure harmony to set the right setting for societal production and development. Therefore, conflict management using indigenous institutions in various African communities, states, and regions including contemporary African regional institutions have a chance to embrace this paradigm through the institutionalisation of the panel of the wise (Lamle, 2017). This paper therefore, seeks to examine the symbolic representation in conflict management in Africa. However, relevant literature will be reviewed to unravel the impact of the symbolic representation in conflict management, and recommendation will be made base on facts elucidated.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Symbolic representation is one of many theories in social sciences. This theory claims that facts are based on and directed by symbols. The foundation of this theory is 'meanings'. Symbolic interactionism examines the meanings emerging from the reciprocal interaction of individuals in social environment with other individuals and focuses on the question of "which symbols and meanings emerge from the interaction between people." Symbolic interactionism that perceives individual as a social entity has lost its dynamism since 1970's. New symbolic interactionism is a more different and synthetic perspective than that of the period of Mead and Blumer. It has entered a period that Fine (1992) calls "Post-Blumerist" era, (Slattery, 2007). Symbolic interaction theory has developed in the light of the theorists such as Dewey (1930), Cooley (1902), Parks (1915), Mead (1934, 1938), etc. Symbolic interactionists demonstrate differences in respect of their points of view. All interactionists agree that the source of data is human interaction. Moreover, there is a general agreement among the symbolic interactionists that perspectives and empathy developing abilities of participants are the key subjects of symbolic interaction (Stryker & Vryan, 2003; Berg, 2000). The most important theorist of symbolic school is George Herbert Mead. Mead is a pragmatist and anti-dualist philosopher. He believes that mind and ego are products of society. Mead assumes that symbols develop mind and they are used as means for thinking and communication (Ashworth, 2000). Mead focused on how people interact in their daily lives by means of symbolic interaction and how they create order and meaning from it (Korgen & White, 2008). Blumer, who is a student of Mead, is the first to use symbolic interaction term. For that reason he is also named as the founder of symbolic interaction. According to Blumer (1969), "human forms 'meaning' in two ways: (1) Meaning is something attributed to objects, events, phenomenon, etc. (2) Meaning is a "physical attachment" imposed on events and objects by human" (Lamle, 2017).

Objects, humans, conditions and events don't feature an intrinsic meaning. Meaning is attributed to these elements by means of human interaction. For instance; a video player in a college can be defined as a means of education utilised in order to demonstrate educational videos by the professor. If a student uses this video player in order to watch the films that he/she has rented, then it is defined as a source of entertainment and enjoyment. Similarly, for people in a jail watching the films sent by their families, this device shall be defined as the window opening to the outer world (Berg, 2000). As it can be understood from this example, humans form meanings as a result of their experiences. In order to understand human behaviors, it is necessary to understand definitions, meaning and processes formed by humans first. Elements such as social roles, traditional structures, rules, laws, purposes, etc. provide raw material to the individuals for forming definitions. In this context, symbolic interaction stresses social interaction, debate of definitions and taking emphatic role between people (Lamle, 2017).

III. CONCEPTUALISATION OF TERMS

Symbolic Conflict

The anthropologist Simon Harrison notes that "a shared symbol can become a site of struggle," as "groups with a long history of conflict may in fact be particularly likely to have much of their history and culture in common." Elsewhere, Harrison in Lamle (2017) posits a situation he calls "symbolic conflict." As he writes: "Competition for power, wealth, prestige, legitimacy or other political resources seems always to be accompanied by conflict over important symbols." Just as Gabriel did, many slaves who rose against their masters chose to hoist a flag as one of the symbols of their cause. As Africans transplanted to the New World struggled to assert their self-mastery in the face of European subjugation, they either supplanted European flags with their own, or else adapted European flags to assign alternative meanings to them (Harrison, (1995).

Conflict: The Latin word for conflict, according to (Albert, 2000) as cited in Wali (2008, p.172) is 'confligere'. 'Confligere' connotes "to strike together." Conflict represents a felt struggle between two or more interdependent individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values and goals, or over differences in desires for esteem, control and connectedness (Hocker and Wilmont, 2011). For Robert North, "conflict emerges whenever two or more persons (or groups) seek to possess the same object, occupy the same space or the same exclusive position, play incompatible roles, maintain incompatible goals, or undertake mutually incompatible means for achieving their purposes" (Williams, 2011, p.13). Similarly, Atubi, (2013, p.1) sees conflict as "arising from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and groups in defined social and physical environments." Thus, the takeaway from the above is that two objects must come in contact with each other before we can conclude there is a conflict. The word bears a physical representation but this is not always the case (Wali, 2008, p.172).

Conflict Resolution: This implies a reduction, elimination or termination of conflict; it involves mediation, negotiation, bargaining and arbitration which fall into the conflict resolution category (Robbins, 1978). According to Aigbovbioisa (2018, p.7), "conflict resolution in peace studies has to do with the conscious attempts by an intervenor to facilitate peace between or amongst conflicting parties. Such resolution in peace studies favours the application of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms such as negotiation, mediation, arbitration, reconciliation, conciliation, etc. Therefore, conflict resolution in this sense, embraces the use of a mechanism that encourages either both conflicting parties fostering solutions to their problem as it is done in 'negotiation', or the application of a neutral third party intervention mechanism to broker peace between and

amongst conflicting parties as applicable to 'mediation' and other ADR mechanisms of conflict resolution.

IV. CONCEPT OF SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION

A symbol is commonly defined as an image or object that suggests or refers to something else, and symbolic representation is indeed a process in which something by association or convention represents something else; much as Marianne symbolically represents France and the circle of 12 golden stars on a blue background represents the European Union (EU). Symbolic representation is a key dimension of political representation and deserves critical attention when the agenda is to rethink popular representation. Lamle (2017) defined the symbolic dimension of representation as the representation of a group, nation, or state through an object to which a certain representative meaning is attributed. Or put in terms of agents and principals, symbolic representation is the representation of the principal through an agent to which a certain representative meaning is attributed. Agents or objects generating symbolic representation include, for instance, national flags or anthems (Cerulo 1993), public buildings and institutions (Edelman 1964), statues, and the design of public spaces and capitals (Parkinson 2009; Sonne 2003). Thus, the particularity of symbolic representation resides in the capacity of the symbol, the agent, to evoke or suggest a meaning, belief, feeling, and value related and appropriate to the principal (Childs 2008; Northcutt 1991; Parel 1969). These symbols themselves 'make no allegations about what they symbolise, but rather suggest or express it' (Pitkin 1972, p.94). Pitkin famously distinguishes between representation as 'standing for' and representation as 'acting for' another; that is, a distinction between what a representative is and what she does (Lamle, 2017). Within this classification scheme, symbolic representation is presented as one way of standing for a social group. Although descriptive representation means that a representative body reflects the composition of the people that are being represented, symbolic representation implies that a representative symbolises a constituency; for example, the way a king is a symbolic figure for the nation. Symbols might be arbitrary or natural, but this is of little relevance because the connection between a symbol and its referent is about feelings rather than likeness, in contrast to descriptive representation. What matters for symbolic representation is the extent to which people believe in a symbol. Emanuela Lombardo and Petra Meier (2015) stand with Pitkin in the aspect of her definition of symbolic representation that points out the evocative (but not necessarily explicit) function of symbols as recipients of feelings, as made up of 'beliefs, attitudes, assumptions of people' (Pitkin 1967, pp.99-100). This includes Pitkin's argument that the link between symbol and principal is arbitrary and relies on people's emotional responses 'rather than on rationally justifiable criteria' (Pitkin 1967, p.100). Thus, an important part of Lamle (2017) definition of symbolic representation we draw from is that the response to the symbol depends on training people and on forming their

habits so that certain meanings are associated with a particular symbol and end up generating particular responses towards symbols, as Pitkin's example of showing national pride by not letting the flag touch the ground shows (Pitkin 1967, 100–101). The discursive turn in the theory on symbolic representation that we propose here implies adopting a perspective that pays attention to the meaning of the agent and what that implies for those being represented, the principals. Symbolic signs play vital roles in African affairs. For example, visual literacy for communication like ethnic marks, emblems of clans and the *Adinkra* symbols in the Akan culture also transmit special sacred messages (Addo, 2001), aside playing significant roles as forms of identification. For instance, symbols such as the chameleon and a hand holding an egg signify that in life there are limits to human possibility. This symbol further admonishes politicians that power is fragile like an egg and needs to be handled with utmost care. The uses of such visual symbols provide benefits such as motivation, increased creativity, mental scaffolds, and aesthetic appreciation (Fang, 1996).

V. CHALLENGES THAT BREED CONFLICTS IN AFRICA

Breeders of conflicts in Africa include: corruption, bad leadership/bad governance, ethno-religious intolerance, inequality/poverty, lack of democratic tenets, etc.

Corruption

Corruption kills the development spirit. Nothing is as destructive to a society as the rush to quick and easy money which makes fools of those who can work honestly and constructively – Frisch, D.; quoted in Igwe, (2010, p.95).

Corruption is one of the most frequently employed vocabularies in the political dictionary irrespective of whether we are in political, social or business arena. Yet, the word has no precise definition; neither does it lend itself to easy understanding. It is not a word that is quite simple to measure or interpret (Adekunle, 2013, p.387). The nebulousness of the concept 'corruption' therefore, elicits different nuances from different scholars base on their respective biases. Although it is not arguable that corruption is the misuse of entrusted power for private gain (Transparency International 2006; cited in Igwe, 2010, p.123), it however, has different nuances across different jurisdictions in Africa and world over. For instance, in Nigeria, Section 46 of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Act, according to Adekunle (2013, p.388), gives the Commission power to investigate, prevent and prosecute offenders who engage in:

Money laundering, embezzlement, bribery, looting and any form of corrupt practices, illegal arms deal, smuggling, human trafficking and child labour, illegal oil bunkering, illegal mining, tax evasion, foreign exchange malpractices, including counterfeiting of currency, theft of intellectual property and piracy, open market abuse, dumping of toxic wastes and prohibited goods.

The nuance ascribed to the concept by the above provision, no doubt, is too bogus hence, some scholars have advanced some attributes to the concept 'corruption.' According to Williams (1987, pp.12-17) as quoted by Adekunle (2013, p.388), corruption has four nuances: organic corruption, biological corruption, moral corruption and legal or public corruption. Organically, it refers to condemnation and deterioration or decline of states and misbehavior of the political class. Biologically, corruption could imply the infection, spoiling or making putrid by decay or decomposition. Morally speaking, corruption means prevention, degradation, ruin and debasement of integrity, virtue or moral principle. Legally, it is the contravention of specific rules laid down by law by the acts of individuals.

Corruption is one of the social maladies plaguing the African continent. That is, most of the conflicts in Africa ranging from family to larger society have their links to corruption. As the old saying goes, "where there is poverty, there is corruption" (Igwe, 2010, p.126). Corruption is a worldwide phenomenon that is endemic on the African continent, especially in the sub Saharan Africa. The monster has been responsible for the instability on the continent as most of the countries, especially Nigeria, Kenya, Congo DR, Egypt etc have prominently been on the lowest rating of international corruption index. According to Lerrick (2005, p.2) as acknowledged in Igwe (2010, p.126), "corruption is not just one of the causes of intractable poverty in Africa; it is the root cause." And where poverty is pervasive in the society, there is bound to be conflict because of the feeling of deprivation on the part of the poor. In Nigeria, corruption has become an endemic problem, threatening the country's socio-economic and political development (Ikyase, 2014). Yes, corruption occurs throughout the world but it is of special concern in developing countries, where those who pay and receive bribes can expropriate a nation's wealth, leaving little for its poorest citizens (Enoma and Asemota, 2007; cited Johnson, 2013, p.287). Ojuade, (2011) in Danjibo (2013, p.493) lamentably highlighted the consequences of corruption in Nigeria thus: "Nigerian citizens cannot boast of a single nutritional meal, there are no good roads, no access to affordable healthcare, no affordable housing scheme, and no good remuneration packages for workers and no energy to boost even small scale and local businesses. Perhaps, the only thing tangibly visible is corruption!" these consequences of corruption are much the same across Africa. This is why the endemic or systemic nature of corruption in Africa, particularly in countries with abundant natural resources like Nigeria usually breeds lethal antagonism between the poor and the rich few in the society thereby causing instability in the polity.

Bad Leadership/Bad Governance

Bad leadership leads directly to bad governance. Bad governance is a denotation of government's lack of respect for the rule of law, lack of due process, perceived bad and discriminatory policies of government by the citizens, lack of accountability on the part of the political leaders to the electorate and lack of transparency in the activities of government. Therefore, endemic conflicts in Africa arise as a result of bad governance. This bad governance is exercised through bad leadership (Lamle, 2017).

Achebe (1984) using Nigeria as a frame of reference states that the problem with Nigeria is simply a failure of leadership. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian law, climate, water, air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is unwillingness or inability of her leaders to rise to their responsibilities, to the challenge of personnel which is the hallmark of line leadership. Also, Alhaji Sa,ad Abubakar, Sultan of Sokoto, and spiritual leader of Muslims in Nigeria squarely blamed the elites for all the woes in the country. To him, the elites are the main problem of Nigeria and most of the woes of the nation as they currently are. The elites are the problems and not the colonial masters nor the people of the country who are toiling daily to put food on their tables. The above exposition underscores the imperativeness of good leadership in Africa if Africans must succeed in attaining their individual and collective political, economic and social aspirations.

It is not contestable that the characteristics of bad leadership and bad governance calibrated and encapsulated above do precipitate conflicts in Africa. For instance, the unwillingness by an incumbent government to accept defeat in an election and relinquish power as was witnessed in the Gambia under Yahya Jammeh in 2016, the purported manipulation of the Nigerian Constitution in 2007 to allow for a third term in office for former President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, the willful manipulations of the Constitutions of Rwanda and Uganda by Paul Kagame and Yoweri Museveni respectively in order to continue to remain in office all portray lack of accountability, capable of igniting national conflicts in these countries. Besides the above, perceived bad governance and unpopular policies against the then Southern Sudan by the Sudanese President, Omar Al-Bashir was majorly cited as the cause for the protracted Sudanese conflict that eventually saw to the secession of South Sudan on 9th of July, 2011. Similarly, the flagrant abuse of the rule of law by the Libyan government under Muammar Gaddafi precipitated the Libyan conflict that eventually took the life of that country's leader, Muammar Gaddafi on 20th of October, 2011.

Ethno-Religious Intolerance

Ethnic and religious chauvinism by Africans has continued to act as a clog in the wheels of development on the African continent. The way and manner the Africans flex primordial muscles over ethnic issues and colonial-imported religions call for scientific diagnosis. Religion and ethnicity are two relevant issues that cannot be ignored in social/cultural life of human society but if the application is not properly placed, they have power to rock the peace and stability of any nation (Ogunbunmi, 2013, p.326). Ethnicity or ethnic group may be defined as a community of people who share common primordial characteristics such as origin, history, culture,

language, geography, etc. Similarly, Armstrong, 1982 as cited in (Akin-Otiko, 2019, p.53) sees "ethnicity as the social identity built on the history, cultural practices, myths, symbols and geographic location. This is why ethnicity reinforces the consciousness of 'us' versus 'them'. Religion, according to Durkheim, "is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, uniting into a single moral community all those who adhere to these beliefs and practices" (Okau, Okiri and Gomment, 2003).

Thus, the foregoing illuminates us on the reason ethno-religious intolerance breeds conflicts in Africa. In Nigeria for instance, there have been different ethnic conflicts such like that between Tiv and Jukun conflict over land, Ife and Modakeke conflict over the location of a Local Government Administrative Headquarters, Sara-Kaba/Yakoma of Central African Republic conflict over political differences, herders/farmers conflict over grazing and farming resources which has claimed many lives. In Rwanda, the hostility between the Hutus and Tutsis in 1994, had claimed the lives of over 800,000 people, mainly Tutsis (Lamle, 2017). Also, the Boko Haram insurgency in the North Eastern part of Nigeria is another debilitating conflict that has hampered development not only in Nigeria, but in neighboring countries of Cameroun, Chad and Niger.

An insight into while ethno-religious conflicts have persisted in Africa can be demystified by some theoretical traditions as unveiled by Aigbovbioisa (2018, pp.22-23). For instance, the "mobilisation hypothesis" establishes a link between religion and conflict by arguing that particular religious structures are prone to mobilisation; once politicised, escalation to violent conflict becomes more likely. According to the mobilisation hypothesis, certain religious structures such as parallel ethnic and religious identities or changing religious demographics are prone to mobilisation in politics; once politicised, violent conflict becomes likelier. Therefore, the overlap of ethnic and religious identities, with the politicisation of them increases the risk of [religious] conflict onset.

The psycho-cultural theory of conflict is another theory which shows that psychological, religious and other cultural contradictions are the basis of conflict. And it must be emphasised here that psycho-cultural conflicts take long to resolve. In this kind of conflict, the zest for the protection of one's identity, religion and culture usually overwhelms reasoning and thus inflames conflict behavior.

Another important way we could equally view and understand the nexus between ethnic/religion and conflict is through the lenses of the three contending theories in political science and peace studies on identity and religion; these are: primordialism, instrumentalism and social constructivism. The key tenet of primordialism is that differences in ethnic and religious traditions are among the most important causes of conflict. According to this view, there is an inherent or primordial animosity between ethnic groups and/or religions that renders conflict quasi-inevitable. No scholar has done more to propagate this view than Samuel Huntington with his

"Clash of Civilisations" thesis (1993, 1996; cited in Danjibo, 2009). Thus, given the importance of religious frameworks in the psyche of adherents, when such frameworks are challenged, adherents will also feel challenged at the most basic level. Such challenges, according to primordialism, can thus provoke defensive and sometimes violent reactions. Instrumentalism emphasises "The Utility of the Sacred" (or the "Opium of the Warriors"). In this regard, Instrumentalism rejects the view that differences in religion or ethnic biases are the real causes of political conflict. Conflict, like all politics, has always been and will always be about "who gets what, when, and how". From this realist perspective, the causes of conflict are material. If the world is witnessing a rise in violent religious movements, we should not attribute this to any dogmatic dispute but, rather, to growing economic, social, and political inequalities in and between nations. Constructivism on the other hand, focuses on account of the crucial role that ideational or cognitive structures play in shaping social actors' identities and, consequently, realities. Examples of ideational structures include ideology, nationalism, ethnicity, and religion. From a constructivist perspective therefore, the ultimate role of religion or ethnicity in conflict depends not on a "clash of civilisations", but, rather, on a "clash of interpretations".

Inequality/Poverty

Remove the secondary causes that have produced the great convulsions of the world and you will almost always find the principle of inequality at the bottom. Either the poor have attempted to plunder the rich, or the rich to enslave the poor. If, then, a society can ever be founded in which everyman shall have something to keep and little to take from others, much will have been done for peace (De Tocqueville 1835, quoted from 1954 edition, p.266; cited in Stewart, 2009, p. 1).

Poverty as a concept is often difficult to define or measure because of its elusive and nebulous nature. However, attempt would be made to describe its characteristics. Poverty could be described as "lack of economic resources to arrest hunger, lack of shelter, lack of economic power to access healthcare services when being sick, lack of access to school and/or quality education, lack of job, fear of what the future will bring, etc."

Indeed, when people are poor and cannot afford food to eat, conflict is inevitable, especially violent conflict (Lamle, 2017). The nexus between inequality/poverty and conflict can be explained through the lenses of the theory of relative deprivation as found in the social sciences. Relative deprivation is a term often used in social sciences to describe feelings or measures of economic, political or social deprivations that are relative rather than absolute. Social scientists, particularly political scientists and sociologists have cited 'relative deprivation' as a potential cause of social movements and deviance, leading in extreme conditions to political violence and revolution.

The theory holds that in society where some are very rich while some are equally very poor, there would surely exist,

some pockets of agitation and conflict. The point of departure of this theory rests on the fact that resources are not evenly distributed across board hence, it leads to the feeling of being deprived of something to which one believes oneself to be entitled. It is the feelings that the less-privileged and discontented people in the society usually have when they compare their positions to the privileged and realise that they have less of what they believe themselves to be entitled than those privileged ones around them. This perhaps, explains why Schaefer (2003) defines 'relative deprivation' as "the conscious experience of negative discrepancy between legitimate expectations and present actualities."

Deductions from this theory is that 'relative deprivation' produces feelings of 'social exclusion' on the part of those who feel deprived and alienated from their common patrimony hence, recourse to conflict behavior. Indicators of 'relative deprivation' in human society include mass unemployment, deliberate imbalance educational policies and opportunities for citizens, sectional marginalisation, wide-spread poverty and hunger.

Lack of Democratic Tenets

Democracy can be described as a system of government in which ultimate power rests with the people. This is why the former American President, Abraham Lincoln gave the popular definition of democracy as "the government of the people, by the people and for the people". The above classical definition of democracy by Lincoln implies that power belongs to the people who are also at liberty to review the social contract, either renewing or terminating it altogether. In this connection, the main instrument through which the renewal or termination of the said contract is effected is election (Oladipupo, 2013, pp.306-307). This is to say that election is the defining characteristic of modern democracy (Rokkan, 1970; cited in Oladipupo, 2013, p.307). However, in achieving this, there are tenets or ethics or processes that must be followed to guarantee its productive practice by those concerned, otherwise it could lead to undesired outcome. This is particularly true because the stability of a nation, especially in a democratic setting, to a very large extent, depends on how the nation is able to manage its transition from one government to another in a collective resolve to uphold the democratic ethos guiding such practices. To this end, elections play a critical role in democracy, allowing citizens to peacefully articulate their preferences and hold government accountable. Yet, in many Sub-Saharan African countries, with weak institutions, and a history of political conflict, intense competition in high stakes elections often lead to periods of violence and turmoil. Violent elections, in turn, threaten democratic institutions and processes, particularly in transitional democracies (Forero et al, 2013).

Orderly transfer of power from one government to another in accordance with democratic norms and ethos has met with series of challenges in Africa since the waves of democracy began on the continent. For instance, as Fagbehun, (2013, p.8)

noted in Okoli and Iortyer, (2014, p.4), "…campaigns preceding elections in Nigeria are invariably marked by pettiness, intolerance and violence." Electoral violence is "all forms of organised acts or threats – physical, psychological and structural aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during, and after an election with a view to determining, delaying or otherwise influencing electoral processes (Albert, 2007, p.133; cited in Ojo, 2014, p.8). No wonder scholars have argued among others that political conflicts in Nigeria are consequences of irreconcilable struggle for power, reflected in antagonism and warfare characterised by politics of alienation, exclusion, and domination, accompanied by an incredible variety of micro-nationalism and pseudo-nationalism. The above exposition characterises African practice of democracy as witnessed in the Kenyan post-electoral conflict of 2007 between President Uhuru Kenyatta and his erstwhile arch-rival and leader of opposition, Raila Odinga over the outcome of the 2007 presidential election. Same with Morgan Tsvangirai and late President Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe; the protracted conflict between Reich Macha and President Saval Kiir in South Sudan is equally instructive here; the Gambian 2016 post-electoral conflict between former Gambian leader, Yahya Jammeh and incumbent President Adama Barrow over the outcome of the 2016 presidential election; the Ivorian 2010 post-electoral conflict between former President Laurent Gbagbo and incumbent Alassane Ouattara over the outcome of the 2010 presidential election; the 2011 post-electoral conflict in northern Nigeria over the perceived variance in outcome of the 2011 presidential election; and even the just concluded Bayelsa and Kogi states elections in Nigeria where many lives and property were lost. The list is obviously endless across Africa.

From the foregoing, the non observance of democratic tenets in Africa and which are responsible for various instabilities on the continent can be summarised thus: structural imbalances in the state, power of incumbency to manipulate electoral processes, exclusionary politics, politics of domination and alienation, acts of brigandage/ballot box snatching, rigging, intolerance on the parts of political gladiators, campaigns of calumny by politicians, political intimidation and harassments of oppositions, perceived connivance and contrivance of electoral body, security agents and state-owned media outfits, kidnapping cum killing of political opponents.

VI. CONCEPT OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA

Conflict management refers to the process of using preferred strategies to handle a conflict with goals of limiting negative impact and enhancing positive impact. Conflict refers to attitudinal, behavioral, or resource-related incompatibility perceived by at least one of the interdependent parties in a given context (Rahim, 2002). However, Conflict management has a natural fit with intercultural dialogue because cultural differences make conflict preordained. People are often unaware that such conflict tends to be pseudo-conflict:

Perceived incompatibilities often result from lack of familiarity of the other's cultural values and norms rather than discordancy. Open, ethical, and empathetic intercultural dialogue is essential for successful conflict management. However, conflict management in Africa is an attempt at unraveling how Africans have been dealing with their interpersonal, inter-group and communal misunderstandings before the advent of the 'Whiteman' or foreign conflict management mechanism. There is no gainsaying the fact that before the advent of slave trade and colonialism, African societies had well-established mechanisms for conflict management, peace-making, peace education, peace building, conflict monitoring and conflict prevention mechanisms. These institutions and methods were effective and highly respected and their decisions binding on all the parties concerned. The methods are relatively informal and thus, less intimidating. Those who use them are also more at ease in a familiar environment. The role of the monarchs, chiefs, elders, family heads, and others is not only to resolve conflicts but also to anticipate and arrest conflicts. The usage of these personalities in arresting conflict in indigenous African societies, perhaps, explains why Olaoba (2011, p.146) concludes that "resolution of conflict in Africa entails communication through divination, perception and intuition with the ancestors." Africans were also very conscious of the fact that conflict can occur when two or more parties pursue incompatible interests or goals through actions that the parties try to undo or damage each other. The parties could be individuals, groups or villages or towns or clans; and the parties' interests can differ over access to resources, the control of political or traditional power, their identity and values or ideology. We doubt if the foregoing assumptions or facts about conflicts differ from that held by those from the West (the Europeans and Americans). What is peculiar to the Africans, however, is the place of symbolic representation of family, traditional rulers, in conflict management processes. Therefore, traditional conflict management processes in Africa are part of a well-structured, time-proven social system geared towards reconciliation, maintenance, improvement of social relationships and reengineering of the social fabrics of the society. For instance, the Akans traditional court in Ghana (Okrah, 2003); the Tswana culture in Botswana (Ngcongco, 1989); the endogenous Gacaca courts in Rwanda (Mutisi, 2009); the Acholi Justice System in Northern Uganda (Wasonga, 2009); the Kpelle people of Liberia and the Ndendeuli of Tanzania (Bob-Manuel, 2000); the Yoruba peoples indigenous law (Olaoba, 2001); the Igbo traditional institutions (Bennett, 1993, & Olaoba, 2001); and the Pondo tribe of Zulu in South Africa justice system (Olaoba, 2001; Ajayi and Buhari, 2014) are some of the structured African traditional institutions that play major roles in conflict resolution. In this way, African societies emphasised social harmony as the overriding ideology of social control. This has been well-demonstrated in the conception and application of the philosophies of Ubuntu among the indigenous communities of Southern Africa (Masina, 2000); The beginning of slave trade, and later colonialism, however, truncated the indigenous mechanisms for peacemaking and conflict resolution in Africa with the obscurity of the place of the Kings and traditional chiefs. Colonialism, most importantly, portrayed everything that is African to be incapable of serving any useful purpose. The result of all these is that African indigenous peace institutions were destroyed, or where they could not be destroyed completely, became weakened to a state of ineffectiveness. Courts were created by the colonialists to adjudicate cases based on western legal system while the police force was also evolved to take cases that used to be taken before the African indigenous peace institutions for amicable settlement.

VII. AFRICAN APPROACHES/ STYLES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Before the advent of colonialism, communities living in Africa had their own indigenous ways of resolving conflicts. Many regions in African societies still hold unto the traditional conflict management mechanisms. These traditional values lay emphasis on togetherness/harmony over and above individual interest, and humanity can be seen in practices such as Ubuntu, which emphasis principles of "I am because you are". This is because the community is a living organism whereby the presence of individuals are recognised and affirmed, and their potentials enhanced. It is a bedrock of 'I-Thou' phenomenon (Edema and Abam, 2013, p.25). Illustrating further on the 'I-Thou' principle, Mercier (2002, p.106) in Edema and Abam, (2013, p.25) argued that "in a living community, the 'we' precedes the 'I' which however, does not mean the subjugation of or the denial of the identity of the 'I'. This idea, according to Edema and Abam, (2013, p.25), blends with that of Mbiti (1969, pp.108-109) that "the individual can only say I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am." Almost all communities in Africa in one way or the other have Ubuntu principle in their cultures as well in the concept of Gacaca "judgment on the grass" as practiced in Rwanda (Tanko, 2019). Tanko (2019) gives us three case studies of African approach to handling and managing conflict traditionally.

a.   *Ubuntu:* The Ubuntu philosophy arose during the South Africans Truth and Reconciliation Commission which was more of rehabilitative, restorative justice process instead of retributive form of justice process. The fundamental philosophies of Ubuntu are caring, compassion, unity, tolerance, respect, closeness, empathy, compromise and hospitality. To this end, it uses both formal and informal processes like traditional methods of "truth telling" to encourage reconciliation. Derived from the Bantu language principles of East, Central and Southern Africa, Ubuntu seeks mainly on reconciliation done collectively by members of a community, by way of placing the generality of interests of peaceful co- existence above an individual or personal interest to that of the whole community. People treat each other as human beings and not simply as tools or a means to an end.

b.   *Gacaca:* According to Lamle (2015), *Gacaca* comes through as that strategy for conflict management through restorative justice, while saving its historical role as the lubricant that guarantees unity and cohesion in the society. *Gacaca* are traditional councils and tribunals comprising elders who resolve conflict and administrative justice. Gacaca as a traditional judicial system is a bottom-up approach; that is, it comes from the people themselves.

Gacaca literally means "grass" with its origin in traditional community method of conflict resolution. It is a session held on the grass and presided over by the *Inyangamugayo* (people of integrity) in the community. The original purpose of *Gacaca* was to help facilitate a resolution of the Rwandan genocide of 1994 where at least 800,000 people were killed between the Hutus and Tutsis. After the violence subsided, Rwandan government had numerous goals among which was to rebuild the country, establish a historical record of genocide, ensure that those who committed crimes did not go unpunished, impart to survivors and victims' that justice was being done and to also reintegrate the vast number of perpetrators into their own community without retributive violence against them. However, Rwanda's courts were in shambles and persecution and imprisonment of perpetrators seemed impossible and that was why the government came up with the idea of *Gacaca* which was believed had the potential for grounding conflict, re-integrate suspects back into the societies and of course, the "truth telling" nature of confessions offered hope for reconciliation.

c.   *Acholi Concept:* The Acholi ethnic group was chosen because it occupied the Northern part of Uganda in both Gulu and Kitgum districts where war had been raging for a long time. The word, "Mato-Oput" means reconciliation among the Acholi. It was adopted by the Ugandan government to reconcile the former Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) combatants with their victims and the community. The Acholi justice system predates colonialism in Uganda. Its practice entails a detailed ceremony meant to reconcile conflicting parties. Persons in conflict would appear before the council of elders who patiently listen to each party and cross-examine them in order to establish the root causes of the conflict. After scrutiny, a prescribed therapy is given to the guilty party of which it must lead to harmony and peace. An animal is usually sacrificed and its blood is sprinkled on the shrine of the gods of truth and reconciler. The two parties will then share the meat and drink beer together. Mato-Oput is performed in an isolated place, or at the bank of a river to chase away hatred and revenge (Tanko, 2019).

VIII. NEXUS BETWEEN SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA

The socio-cultural norms and values embedded in African indigenous institutions have remained an integral part of every organised society in Africa before the slave trade, colonialism and independence. Apart from being the powerful tool for human survival, as described by Thomas Hobbes, and unlike

Hall Pike endless war, they bring order which in turn makes the society devoid of any state of lawlessness (Olusola & Aisha, 2013). In Africa, family ties and community networking are constantly respected, maintained and strengthened. When there is a dispute between different parties, priority is given to restoring the relationships. The immediate objective of such conflict resolution is to mend the broken or damaged relationship, and rectify wrongs, and restore justice. This is why Olaoba (2011, p.148) submits that "in African conflict resolution principle, there exists the room for give-a-little-get-a-little, suggesting 'no victor, no vanquish' philosophy in the process of reconciliation." Of course, the manifestation of this kind of conciliation and compromise is what Ali Mazrui in Williams (2011, p.24) calls the adoption of "the African Short Memory of Hate" which involves demonstration of love, tendering of apology, forgiveness, magnanimity and forgetting the past. Mazrui's notion of 'the African Short Memory of Hate' is a symbol of African jurisprudence; that is, African legal theory and African judicial system which is unlike that of the west (Williams 2011, p.24). Another aim is to ensure the full integration of parties into their societies again, and to adopt the mood of cooperation (Brock-Utne, 2001). Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo (2012) in their study have confirmed the importance of cultural processes, institutions, and values in conflict resolution and peace building among the *Akans* of Ghana and the *Tswana* of Botswana. Similarly, Olaoba (2010, pp.250-251) has demonstrated the usefulness of proverbs, maxims, taboos and folktales in dispute settlements among the Yoruba ethnic group of Nigeria. Application of the above traditional mechanisms, according to Olaoba, agrees with Julius Nyerere's "Palava Tradition" which involves arriving at a resolution through the medium of discussion (Williams 2011, p.24). It is evident that most individuals, families and communities in Africa still prefer indigenous conflict resolution processes in these aforementioned countries because they are based on cultural concepts, values, and procedures that are understood and accepted. Similarly, other authors such as (Kariuki, 2015; Midodzi & Jaha, 2011; Bukari, 2013; Emanuel & Ndimbwa, 2013; Ladan, 2013; Theresa & Oluwafemi, 2014) also studied indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms of various communities in Africa and noted their roles in conflict resolution. Malan (n.d) also pointed that indigenous methods have definite values, approaches and practices embodied in them that deserve to be maintained. However, he stated that there are also criticisable aspects, such as old-fashioned ideology [e.g. gender inequity] or methodology [e.g. pressurising mediation]. Another study established that the continuing role and influence of traditional leadership in modern Africa is hard to miss. Nonetheless, there is no clear-cut formula regarding the interactions between the state and traditional institutions (Ladan, 2013). Abebe, Samson and Tessema (2015) investigated the role of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms among the Kembata society in Ethiopia. The study found that the local communities prefer customary laws than courts due to the following reasons. Firstly, customary

laws are flexible. Secondly, customary law provides a central role to maintain order in the communities. Thirdly, the law itself is more immediate and meaningful to all people concerned since it is developed and imposed by the community itself.

IX. ADVANTAGES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA

- The rules and procedures of indigenous conflict resolution are more immediate and meaningful to the local people.
- Unlike the formal court processes, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms are important for reducing the delay and cost of conflict resolution. Many poor people are deprived of access to justice simply for the reason that they cannot have enough money to pay the transportation, accommodation and legal representation costs to go through with the court processes.
- Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms are also important mechanisms of overcoming the barrier of illiteracy and thus service rural populations in their vicinity which makes it easier to access justice.

X. CHALLENGES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMNET IN AFRICA

- Despite the huge benefits of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, their reliance is being undermined by lack of proper recognition and integration with the formal (modern) justice system.
- Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms do not possess the overt force for coercing conflicting parties who may decline to participate in the resolution process.
- Indigenous conflict resolution has been greatly downgraded and weakened in the formal justice system which makes them to be largely unrecognised and unknown.
- Lack of appropriate and effective enforcement strategies has also reduced the relevance of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms for the wider community.

XI. RECOMMENDATION

- Promotion of these indigenous conflict resolution systems also requires featuring them in curricula of higher education programs related to peace and justice.
- For speedy and sustainable conflict resolution, especially in developing countries, requires paying attention to indigenous systems of conflict resolution practices.
- Strategies have to be developed to develop, protect, promote and disseminate indigenous knowledge on conflict resolution so that they can be easily accessible and utilised for the development of local communities.
- African governments should float a scholarship to students of African origin in researches in African history and indigenous conflict management and resolution practices with a view to unearthing and reviving their richness and uniqueness, and of course, sustaining them.
- Indigenous conflict management and resolution practices should be revisited because of their crucial role; they can support the formal court system by reducing case load in courts, easing shortage of judges, and reducing court budgets.
- There is a need to develop effective enforcement mechanism for indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms by elders so that the decision of elders will be more respected and obeyed by parties.
- They are effective, accessible and affordable for the poor rural communities since they are located within the community and derived from the community's culture, customs and traditions.

XII. CONCLUSION

States are in constant flux. Political representation and justice require a discursive capacity that only an authentic conversation between traditional groups and the modern structures can truly satisfy. Indeed, state and traditional systems can work together cooperatively, complementing each other. However, this would require a fundamental re-orientation towards mutual respect and understanding, away from hostility and neglect. To pave the way for this re-orientation it might be advisable to consider focusing on synergy, on what each system could contribute to the constructive evolution of the other. Traditions and states are never static. They change over time. Engaged respectfully, they can strengthen each other through legitimacy, effectiveness, and capacity to support all citizens in resolving their conflicts. A successful example in this area could also contribute tremendously to the evolution of political structures worldwide. Local traditions must be able to interact with and contribute to the state formation process. A shared focus on conflict resolution strategies and patterns might provide a very fertile and promising ground for this to take place.

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AUTHOR

Elias Nankap Lamle (Ph.D: Leuven-Brussels) is a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Conflict Managements and Peace Studies, University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria. Dr. Lamle is also a member of the International Advisory Board of the Peace Fellows / Center for African Peace and Conflict Resolution / California State University, Sacramento, USA.

Felix Ogbewe Aigbvobioisa (M.A.: Ibadan) is an Assistant Lecturer on the Peace and Development Studies Programme at the Salem University, Lokoja, Nigeria.