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JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION IN AFRICAN THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

Justice and reconciliation are important concepts as far as human affair is concerned. In the face of unending tension and conflict of interest in human interactions, breakdown of law and order, the concepts of justice and reconciliation will remain an important topics of discourse. In African societies, justice and reconciliation are restorative rather than punitive. This paper discusses these important concepts in human relationships while contextualizing to African thought. What does justice mean for the African? How do Africans approach justice and reconciliation in the bid to maintain an ordered society? What is the role of traditional reconciliatory approach of the African in the face of law courts in today's governance system? Through an analytical research method, the papers discovers that the traditional mechanism in the traditional Africa is anchored on the communal life of the Africans, aiming at restoring peace and harmony to bring orderliness to a disordered society. The research reveals that in the African society, there are both the traditional and the modern approaches to conflict resolution. The traditional approaches employ such methods as the mediation of the elders, coming together to reach a consensus, or the use of some symbols such as kolanut which signifies peace. The modern approaches make use of the legal institutions such as the court or some other modernized mediation. The paper proposes for a balanced integration of both traditional and modern approaches to justice and reconciliation for a more peaceful co-existence and harmony in the society.

KEY WORDS: Justice, Reconciliation, Conflict, African thought, African philosophy.

Introduction

The level of development of every society is based on the level of peace obtainable in such society. This is based on the saying that peace brings progress. Then, for peace to exist in any society, there is also a need for a fair treatment of the every member of the society, and also to ensure that everybody is at peace with one another. This is why Justice and reconciliation are so much important for peace building and community development. Justice and reconciliation are pivotal concepts in societal governance, ensuring social harmony and addressing conflicts. These two concepts are essential for a peaceful and harmonious existence among people, communities or states. Justice respects that idea that every human being have the same nature, and equal rights and should be treated as such. There should be no room for unfair treatment of people which could be born out of prejudices, such as: races, status, or even colour.

There are different kinds of justice such as: distributive justice, procedural justice, retributive justice and restorative justice. All these kinds of justice are important and needs to be applied contextually. For instance; in distributive justice, it is just that in sharing common property, attention be given that everybody gets what is due to him and not otherwise. Then, in making decisions, procedural justice comes to play, where the decision must be in such that it hurts nobody, in giving punishments for wrong done, retributive and restorative justice come to play.

In the course of man's day to day relationships, there is bound to be disagreement, conflict of interest. This breeds friction and in worst case scenario, this leads to war. These are inimical to progress and development hence, efforts are made at restoring peace and order. Reconciliation helps restore broken relationships and fosters peaceful co-existence among people. Both justice and reconciliation are essential for nation building.

However, this discussion is limited in scope, focusing only within the context of African philosophy or thought. Addressing the questions such as what is justice? What is reconciliation? And the understanding of these two concepts are understood within the context of African philosophy, and how the Africans approach and administer justice and reconciliation, especially with the practice of modern governance system and practices. In African contexts, these concepts are deeply intertwined with indigenous philosophies that emphasize community cohesion and restorative practices. Unlike Western paradigms that often focus on punitive measures, African approaches prioritize healing, restoration, and the reintegration of individuals into the community. This paper discusses both the traditional and the modern approach to conflict resolution in the contemporary African society and how integrating the two approaches will be of help to building justice and reconciliation, and thus ensure a peaceful co-existence among the members of the society.

The Concepts of Justice and Reconciliation

In African philosophy, justice and reconciliation are deeply intertwined concepts that are rooted in the cultural, social, and historical contexts of the continent. However, before contextualizing these concepts to African philosophy, it is necessary to briefly discuss them in general.

Justice: Justice is the principle of fairness and moral righteousness, ensuring that individuals receive what they are due based on laws, ethics, and equity. "It is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought." (Rawls, 1971, p. 3). According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, justice has to do with the fair

treatment of people. It is the quality of being fair or reasonable. It is the offshoot of the adjective "Just" which means that which people consider to be morally fair or reasonable.

Justice is sometimes concerned with the legality of an act. Whether an action is performed in line with accepted laws governing the society. In this context, one could define justice as "an action done in accordance with requirement of the law" (Maiese & Burgess, July 2020). When one is treated according to the law or is given fair judgment, justice can said to have been done. But when an action or judgment is taken without adherent to the law or one is not given fair judgment, an act of injustice can be said to have been done. Justice brings a sense of stability, well-being and satisfaction among the members of the society while injustice breeds dissatisfaction, rebellion or revolution (Maiese & Burgess, July 2020).

In African communities, justice is not just about punishing the offender or restoring individual rights. Rather, it is about restoring balance and harmony within the community. This concept is often referred to as "Ubuntu" or "Communal Justice." Ubuntu emphasizes the interconnectedness of all individuals within a community. When one member of the community commits a wrongdoing, it affects the entire community. Justice, therefore, involves not only punishing the offender but also restoring the community's balance and harmony.

TYPES OF JUSTICE:

There are different types of justice which shall be discussed below:

i. Distributive Justice:

This is also known as economic justice. This is concerned with giving all members of the society a fair share of the benefits and resources available (Maiese & Burgess, July 2020). This type of justice demands that people be given a fair share of the nation's cake. The question here now is what is a fair share of the nation's resources? This has brought an argument as to what is the criteria for giving a distributive justice? Some argued that it should be based on the principle of "Equity" which implies that everybody be given a share according to his contribution to the society. Some favours "Equality which implies that everybody gets an equal share of the nation's cake irrespective of their input while other proposes that it should be based on the "Needs" of the people which implies that those who need more be given more (Maiese & Burgess, July 2020). Distributive justice is necessary for maintaining order, peace and stability in the society. Each country should then choose the criterion that works for them according to the three criteria discussed above.

ii. Procedural Justice:

This has to do with making and implementing decisions according to processes that ensure fair treatment (Maiese & Burgess, July 2020). This type of justice proposes fair consideration in making and implementation of decisions. What this means is that those who make decisions and implement them should be neutral to avoid biased judgments. The reason for this is that people will seemingly accept decisions which they know to be fair than the one they are suspicious about (Maiese & Burgess, July 2020).

iii. Retributive Justice:

This is a type of justice which justifies punishment as a way of making up for people's mistakes. This type of justice demands that people be treated in the same way they treat others. For this type of justice, punishment will help set right what has been done wrong and deters people from engaging in illegal act again (Maiese & Burgess, July 2020). For retributive justice, punishment will serve as an amelioration for the wrong done as well as a deterrent to others

who might harbour the intention of committing similar act in the future.

iv. Restorative Justice:

This type of justice sees justice as a way of bringing an offender back to law-abiding lives and repairing the harm done to the interpersonal relationships and the community. The purpose of restorative justice is to strengthen the community and prevent similar occurrence from taking place in the future (Maiese & Burgess, July 2020).

The Concept of Reconciliation

Reconciliation involves the restoration of friendly relations or resolving differences between people, groups, or entities that were previously in conflict, disagreement, or separation. It involves bringing harmony, peace, and mutual understanding after a period of estrangement, hostility, or division. Reconciliation between individuals occurs when people who have had a disagreement or conflict come to forgive each other and rebuild their relationship. It often involves acknowledging past wrongs, apologizing, forgiving, and re-establishing trust. From a religious point of view, reconciliation refers to the restoration of the relationship between a person and the divine which is mostly based on repentance, forgiveness, and spiritual renewal (Volf, 2000, p.125). Politically, it refers to efforts by governments or societies to heal divisions caused by historical injustices, such as war, colonization, apartheid, or civil unrest (Lederach, 1997, p. 126). Reconciliation also means the process of addressing the legacy of the past violence and rebuilding the broken relationships (Bloomfield et al., 2003). In reconciliation, the parties involved have to examine the past relations and address them to achieve a peaceful co-existence. Reconciliation deals with the residues of conflict and trauma: events that have brought pain and suffering to a great number of people. According to Swanson (2020), the result is a deep sense of emotional dislocation. This is because every conflict is different. But all of them - from civil wars to terrorist attacks - leave deep emotional wounds. Scholars who deal with trauma have examined the numerous ways in which the lives of survivors have become uprooted and altered in irreconcilable ways. This process goes well beyond physical scars and beyond feelings of fear and anger that inevitably accompany death and suffering. Less obvious emotional scars are just as deep, in part because conflicts often defy our capacity to reason: a traumatic event is simply too powerful to be comprehended through the type of reasoning we acquire during the normal course of our lives (Swanson, 2020, P. 35).

Reconciliation is aimed at brokering peace; it helps in restoring relationships, which could be between individuals, communities, or nations. When past issues are resolved and the victims reconciled, the consequence would be the initial peace and harmony that existed between them. This is to say that reconciliation helps to bring back already existing peace and harmony. For reconciliation to take place, honest dialogue, forgiveness, and concrete actions to repair trust are inevitable. Reconciliation is also necessary in interpersonal relationships, helps in mending broken bonds. Conflicts can be as a result of misunderstandings or betrayal. . For an effective reconciliation, the both parties must be willing to engage in empathy and genuine efforts to address grievances (Smith, 2020, p. 45) without which, reconciliation may not be possible.

In African philosophy, reconciliation is a deeply rooted concept that goes beyond simply ending a conflict. It is a holistic process aimed at restoring balance, harmony, and communal unity after discord or wrongdoing. African philosophy views life as interconnected

because the individual exists in and through the community unlike the westerners who emphasize individuality over communal living. In this context, reconciliation is both a personal and collective discourse. The Ethical principle in Africa especially among the Bantu culture is summarized as “I am because we are” (Mbiti, 1969, p. 108), that’s is why reconciliation in Africa is mainly based on restoring relationships rather than punishment. Even if someone has committed a serious offense, the goal is not just punitive, but restoring their humanity and reintegrating them into the community. As African culture and traditions are based on communalism, African cosmology also emphasizes cosmic balance which exists between people, nature, spirits, and ancestors, when conflict or wrongdoing occurs, it disrupts this harmony. Therefore, reconciliation is thus a spiritual and social responsibility involving rituals, dialogue, and ceremonies to restore equilibrium. That is while traditional African justice systems favour restorative over retributive justice, aimed on truth-telling, compensation, forgiveness, and healing. Elders or spiritual leaders often mediate reconciliation processes that involve dialogue, confession, and symbolic acts (like shared meals or libation pouring). Because of the emphasis on communalism, in many African cultures, an individual’s actions affect the entire community. Therefore, reconciliation may involve both the offender and their family or clan working together to repair the harm done, this reflects the collective nature of African societies, where relationships are more valued than material compensation. In order to ensure peaceful co-existence through reconciliation, a public discussion is often held lead by elders where parties speak openly to resolve conflict, sometimes, it may involve libation and sacrifice to seek forgiveness from ancestors or deities. Some symbolic actions are also taken as a physical sign of acceptance of apology which is often done by shaking hands, embracing, or eating together to signify the restoration of peace. That is why reconciliation in African is not just about ending disputes, but about rebuilding relationships, restoring dignity, and ensuring harmony within the community. It is grounded in Ubuntu (I am because we are, and because we are therefore, I am (Mbiti, 1969, p. 108), restorative justice, and spiritual awareness, reflecting the deep belief in interconnectedness and collective healing.

In Christianity, the concept of reconciliation encompasses several other notions including redemption, conversion, reparation, forgiveness, penance, repentance, salvation etc. It suggests settlement, reaching understanding, squaring off, arriving at a resolution or a compromise, making a reunion, or in case of war agreeing to a ceasefire, bringing together, making an appeasement. It is also about conflicts and their resolutions, and about issues bordering on matters concerned with divisions caused by growing disproportions between groups, social classes, ideological rivalries, matters of opposition due to economic interests or political divergences, issues provoked by tribal differences and those caused by discrimination for socio-political and even religious reasons. Take a look at these phrasings of the same subject by a certain Peter Effink. He writes: “Reconciliation is an achievement, a process, and a goal in the life of the human community. It suggests the divisions and hostilities found among nations and peoples, within societies and families, between people and their environment, and even within each person”. (Effink, 2014, P. 78). Peter must have been writing without thinking of religion specifically. The Constitution on the Church n.11 of Vatican II Council states: “Jesus, however, not only exhorted people to repentance so that they would abandon their sins and turn wholeheartedly to the Lord, but welcoming sinners, he actually reconciled them with the Father...” The Church then sees

reconciliation as something more than just repentance. We need to be brought back to the Father, for things to be again as they were in the days before man sinned: 'Restore us, O God of hosts; let thy face shine, that we may be saved!' (Psalms 80:7). The Constitution adds that in the sacrament of penance the faithful, "obtain from God's mercy pardon for having offended him and at the same time reconciliation with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, example, and prayer seeks their conversion." (Fink, 1991, p. 1036). Christians saw reconciliation as one of the key words to name the life and mission of Jesus Christ, since He Himself said; "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself. This is what God was doing in Christ (2 Cor 5:19): reconciling the world to Himself. But the term also names the mission given to the Church. Paul tells the Corinthians that the message of reconciliation is entrusted to us. The Church uses reconciliation to name that special sacrament which is also entitled sacrament of forgiveness; of confession; of penance.

Maybe at this point we should figure out what reconciliation represents in a broad sense. Let us consider it, the process of restoring an original harmony after that harmony has, in some way, been disrupted. Where this disharmony resides within oneself, we say it is personal. It is interpersonal, where disruptions have occurred between persons. When families, churches, nations and other forms of society are concerned it gains a group dimension. If we are true to the reality of creation, then it assumes a cosmic dimension when it addresses a fundamental disharmony in the "way things are." As Christians, we recognize the need for there to be reconciliation in all these areas and we even name the source of disruption and disharmony sin (personal, interpersonal, social or original sin). (Too religious than philosophical, I pray they don't point this out) We mean to establish how reconciliation is crucial to our faith communities and how these communities of ours must of necessity be centers where reconciliation is experienced to the full in spite of our human limitations. But before doing so, it would be significant to present what we perceive as the nature of our faith communities which warrants them to be projected as centers of reconciliation.

The Understanding of Justice and Reconciliation in African Philosophy

African philosophy is deeply engrained in the values of communalism, moral reciprocity, and social harmony. Within this philosophical tradition, justice and reconciliation are not confined to legal or institutional interpretations but are fundamentally viewed through ethical and relational perceptive. Justice in African philosophy is predominantly communal and restorative. It emphasizes the restoration of relationships and the maintenance of social harmony over punishment or inhumane treatment, which is notable in the philosophical ideology of Mbiti, "I am because we are," is central to African notions of justice. Ubuntu underlines interconnectedness, human dignity, and mutual responsibility (Mbiti, 1990, P. 84). Within this ground, justice is meant to heal rather than divide, and to reintegrate wrongdoers into the community while affirming the worth of the victim, because African traditional justice systems prioritize restorative justice over retributive justice. This approach seeks to address the harm done by focusing on reconciliation and reparation rather than punishment (Gyekye, 1996, P. 94). The objective is to restore equilibrium in the community through dialogue, compensation, and forgiveness.

In Africa, justice processes are typically guided by elders or councils that rely on consensus and dialogue. These communal processes are

designed to reflect the collective values of the society and promote long-term cohesion (Wiredu, 2004, P. 58). The elders and the council help the two conflicting parties to acknowledge their wrongdoing and also to express their pain to foster reconciliation. Truth-telling creates space for empathy and mutual understanding (Tutu, 1999, P. 85) which is aimed at forgiveness and Healing. Forgiveness is considered a conscious and voluntary act that allows individuals and communities to transcend bitterness and reestablish peace. In African thought, reconciliation is incomplete without the mutual willingness to forgive and restore broken ties (Menkiti, 2004, P. 49). In some cases, reconciliation often includes cultural rituals and communal ceremonies that affirm the mending of relationships and restore moral balance within the society (Bujo, 2001, P. 67).

Modern African societies have drawn on traditional principles of justice and reconciliation in post-conflict settings. In order to enhance peaceful co-existence between Africans, some notable examples are below; South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was a prominent example. Guided by the philosophy of Ubuntu, which focused on healing the nation by promoting confession, forgiveness, and restorative dialogue over punishment (Tutu, 1999, P. 93). Rwanda's Gacaca Courts, established after the 1994 genocide, reflected traditional justice methods by enabling communities to participate directly in the reconciliation process. These courts emphasized confession, forgiveness, and reintegration (Clark, 2010, P. 63).

Despite their strengths, African justice and reconciliation practices, some critics argue that an overemphasis on reconciliation may sometimes compromise justice for victims, particularly when offenders are not held adequately accountable (Murithi, 2006, P. 89). Some are also in the opinion that African traditional systems can be patriarchal, potentially marginalizing women and other vulnerable groups during justice and reconciliation processes (Nussbaum, 2003, P. 83).

Dispute/Conflict Resolution

African traditional dispute resolution efforts is founded on communal values, restorative principles, and the belief in harmony over punitive measures. Unlike formal court systems, these methods emphasize reconciliation, community cohesion, and the restoration of social relationships rather than simply assigning blame or punishment (Barkan, 2006, P. 61). In many African societies, disputes are seen as matters affecting the whole community. Resolving conflicts is not just about the individual's involved but about restoring balance and maintaining the social fabric. To achieve this the elders, community leaders, and sometimes representatives from extended families participate in dispute resolution, ensuring that decisions are widely accepted. Which the objective is to repair harm, restore dignity, and rebuild relationships. Offenders are often reintegrated into the community rather than being ostracized which is one of the worst thing one can due to an African person. In order to restore relationships, discuss and dialogue normal occur in communal settings the process aims to reach a mutual agreement that addresses both material and emotional aspects of the conflict. In many African setting, the elders, being respected for their experience and impartiality, act as mediators and decision-makers. Their authority is derived from cultural norms and traditional legitimacy rather than formal legal credentials. Some minor issues, disputes or conflicts are initially handled within the family or clan, where informal discussions are held. This method helps preserve unity and avoids escalating conflicts. In some cases, to enhance mutual understanding and co-existence some acts are being performed to restore a relationship, acts like; sharing of meals, restitution

gestures, or public apologies. (Fisher, R., & Ury, 1981, P. 64).

In the other hand, when a dispute affects a larger group, community gatherings allow for open deliberation. Decisions are reached collectively, reinforcing the idea that justice is not only for the individual but for the community as a whole. The communal nature of these proceedings serves as a form of social regulation, where the collective opinion reinforces moral and ethical norms. In some instances, spiritual dimensions are acknowledged. Traditional healers or spiritual leaders may be called upon to address underlying issues such as curses, ancestral displeasure, or spiritual imbalance. These rituals are believed to cleanse the parties involved and restore natural order, often complementing the practical aspects of dispute resolution. This process is deeply aligned with our African local customs and values, whereby ensuring that resolutions are culturally acceptable. (Deutsch, 1973, P. 162).

Despite the effectiveness of these traditional African methods in dispute resolution many African states now operate with both formal legal systems and traditional mechanisms. Integrating these approaches while respecting human rights and legal standards poses an ongoing challenge to our culture. (Van der Walt, 1999, P. 55). As societies modernize, there is a need to update traditional practices to reflect current values while preserving their cultural integrity. Despite the other challenges orchestrated by modernism, African traditional dispute resolution remains a dynamic, culturally embedded system that offers valuable lessons in restorative justice and community cohesion. Its emphasis on collective responsibility, mediation, and the restoration of social bonds contrasts with the adversarial nature of many Western legal systems. (Murithi, 2014, P. 152).

Conflict also occurs in situations where two or more interdependent parties (either individuals or groups) have interests, outcomes, and/or goals that are incompatible in some way (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000, P. 31). If the parties are completely independent or if their interests, outcomes, and goals are completely compatible, then no conflict can exist because, to put it colloquially, there is nothing to fight about. Conflict can occur in both cooperative and competitive contexts (Deutsch, 1973, P. 12), as well as in “mixedmotive” contexts that are marked by a combination of competitive and cooperative features (Kelley et al., 2003, P. 65). When the parties’ interests are generally compatible or positively correlated, then resolving the conflict requires coordination (Kelley et al., 2003, p. 69). Coordination involves working together to find a solution to a common problem. Consider a situation in which a husband and wife must decide how to spend their evening. The husband would prefer to go to a baseball game while the wife would prefer to go to the movies, but both would rather be accompanied by their spouse than attend either event alone. One possible solution to a conflict of this sort would be coordinated alternation, such that on one evening both go to the husband’s preferred destination, but on the next evening both go to the wife’s preferred destination. Communication, assuming it is trusted, is extremely helpful in resolving coordination conflicts because it allows the parties to work out mutually beneficial agreements (Fisher & Ury, 1981, P. 34). Unfortunately, not all conflicts are marked by compatible interests. Difficult and destructive conflicts generally occur when interests and outcomes are incompatible or negatively correlated, and the parties perceive them as such. One effective way of resolving conflicts of this sort is to reframe the situation into one that is marked by compatible rather than incompatible conflict Resolution interests (Cohen & Insko, 2008, P. 71).

Three additional conflict resolution strategies that are particularly

effective at promoting cooperation between groups are; future-oriented thinking, empathy, and independent leadership. Conflict Resolution encouraging groups to consider future consequences of competitive behavior increases intergroup cooperation. A simple strategy for inducing future-oriented thinking is to ask each side to consider how their own competitive actions will likely affect the other side’s future actions. Future-oriented thinking can also be promoted by using a tit-for-tat strategy to interact with opponents and making it salient that there will be multiple interactions with the other side, as opposed to just one. Future-oriented thinking is effective at reducing conflict because it makes group members realize that the long-term costs of competition are often far greater than any short-term benefits. This realization tends to reduce distrust of the other side, and cooperation is promoted by reductions in distrust (Cohen & Insko, 2008, P. 81).

Fostering feelings of empathy is another potential conflict-resolution strategy (Cohen & Insko, 2008, P. 92). Individuals who feel empathy for other individuals are less likely to behave aggressively toward them and are more likely to behave prosaically and cooperatively. Although empathy for opposing groups is sometimes difficult to generate, it can be helpful for reducing conflict. One way to promote empathy for opposing groups is through intergroup contact. Contact can help promote positive relations between groups with long histories of conflict.

Resolving or managing conflict effectively requires implementing strategies that promote cooperation. Cooperatively reframing the conflict, encouraging future-oriented thinking, fostering empathy for the opposing side, and giving group leaders a measure of independence in their decision making are several strategies that can be used to promote cooperation. (Bundi, 1998, P. 145).

Conflict Resolution in Traditional Africa

Conflict is one of the common features of human interaction. This is due to the differences in temperament and the difference in personalities and characters. Given the fact that due to these factors above, people’s opinion sometimes do not seem to be compatible with each other and so, conflict comes in. In traditional Africa, there are certain approaches to conflict resolution which reflects the communal life of the Africans. In respect to this, like in many other places, in a traditional Africa, in conflict resolution, the interest is more on how to rebuild the broken relationship rather than on inflicting punishments.

In traditional Africa, elders are known for their wisdom and experiences, and thus they serve as the major judiciaries in the local villages. The elders most times, serve as the mediators and adjudicators in conflict resolution. In the words of Mbiti, “Elders serve as the custodians of peace and justice, using their knowledge of customs and oral history to guide proceedings” (Mbiti, 1991, p.132). The elders having lived so long in the village are believed to have the wealth of knowledge and knows the dos and don’ts of the society, and therefore, are in a better position to resolves conflicts that arose among the members of the community. The elders do not take these decisions in their separate homes. They usually come to the village square where everybody will make his suggestions and at the end, they make a decision as a body.

The traditional Africans also believe that the gods administer justice, i.e. if you commit any sacrilege, the gods will dish out punishment on you. This was the case of Okonkwo in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, when Okonkwo desecrated the week of peace, the earth goddess, *Ani* scolded him and gave him the punishment which he must serve to appease the land. (Achebe, 2008, pp. 23-24). In some

places, they believe that when one commits an atrocity, the masquerade will visit him and serve him punishment.

Aside from the intervention of the elders, in traditional African, conflict resolution also involves public assemblies where parties involved in conflict, engage in dialogue with the community members. This gives room for open discussion, with the aimed of unveiling the truth and reaching a consensus. In this view, Osaghae notes, "the process was aimed not at establishing guilt but at restoring harmony and reaffirming shared values" (Osaghae 2000, p. 11). This reflects the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which emphasizes collective humanity and the interconnectedness of individuals.

Another conflict resolution mechanism taken by the traditional Africans is Rituals and traditional symbols. The use of the use of symbolic items such as kola nuts in West African cultures signifies peace and a willingness to reconcile. In some communities, spiritual leaders, invoke ancestral blessings and ensure that resolutions were upheld. As was pointed out by Nwolise (2005), "conflict resolution in traditional Africa was not merely a social act but a spiritual duty that ensured the balance between the physical and spiritual realms" (p. 46).

The focal point of conflict resolution in traditional African is "Restorative justice". To bring the disordered community to an order, the offenders were expected to compensate victims, either materially or symbolically, and make public apologies or community service. This contradicts the retributive systems of conflict resolution where punishment is prioritized over restoration. According to Murithi, "restorative justice in African traditions aimed to heal wounds, restore dignity, and build a peaceful future for the whole community" (Murithi 2006, p. 30).

The African traditional means of conflict resolution has been enormously affected by colonialism, and the rise of formal legal systems. However, it has stood the taste of time, and is now being improved in contemporary Africa. This is evident for the fact that in rural areas, many people still rely on customary courts and local chiefs for conflict often because they are more accessible, affordable, and culturally relevant than the formal institutions. According to Aremu "These systems continue to be effective because they are embedded in the local culture and enjoy legitimacy among the people" (Aremu, 2010, p. 54).

Conflict Resolution in Contemporary African Society

As an evolving society, African societies do not just rely on the traditional means of conflict resolution, but also employ the modern means of settling disputes in the contemporary African World. Unlike the traditional means of conflict resolution which is majorly anchored on the traditional approaches like the mediation of the elders, community gathering, use of certain symbols and other traditional approaches, the modern conflict resolution in African often involves formal institutions such as: peace agreements, truth and reconciliation commissions, and mediation from the international bodies such as: the African Union (AU) or the United Nations (UN). The African modern conflict resolution approach places precedence on national healing and like the traditional approaches, avoids retribution.

In this modern approaches, the role of women and youth in peace building has also played a role, and unlike the traditional African approaches that emphasize only the elders, they are now being included in peace processes and local reconciliation. This women's

active participation in conflict resolution was evident in Liberia, where the grassroots initiatives led by women's groups helped to quit the country's civil war and establishing long-term peace (Gbowee, 2011, p. 142).

However, this modern approaches are not without some certain challenges. Such challenges may stem from the rise of violent extremism, land disputes, climate change, and youth marginalization which is prone to conflict. But by integrating both the traditional and the modern approaches to conflict resolution, these challenges can be easily surmounted.

Integrating the Traditional and the Modern African Approaches to Conflict Resolution

For an effective conflict resolution, there is a need for a balanced integration between the traditional and the modern approaches to conflict resolution in the contemporary African society. This involves applying the traditional mechanism when and at where due, and also employing the modern approaches when and where due. However, while the modern approaches can offer supports, for a more, peace building in the society, there is a need to encourage the communities to resolve disputes based on their cultural, social, and political approaches. This is because, the people inhabiting in those rural areas, will know the more effective ways to maintain peace and orderliness in the society, and in settling disputes, the traditional mechanisms can be more accessible to the people.

Integrating the both approaches will be more effective as one will always supply for the weaknesses of the other, where the traditional approaches will be less effective, the modern approaches will have to take over, and vice versa. This will ensure community participation and also ensure the legality of the conflict resolution results (Murithi, 2006, p. 29).

Conclusion

Justice and reconciliation as seen above, work in *pari passu* for peace building in the society. This is because nobody who felt being treated unjustly will ever be at peace with the other especially with the person he or she felt has maltreated him or her. In like manner, any society where there is no peace, such society will never grow, as the saying goes "peace brings progress." For this very fact even though people will always offend one another, it is necessary that amendments be done when such harm has been caused to someone or the community. By applying contextually the above discussed types of justice, and the above traditional and the modern approaches to reconciliation, there will be a sustained order, happiness and unity in the society.

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