African Union approaches to peacebuilding: Efforts at shifting the continent towards decolonial peace

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Abstract

This article argues that the African Union (AU) approach to peacebuilding, out of Africa's historical experience and lessons from the United Nations (UN), is comprehensive and holistic, but requires the existence of a legitimate government, a functional society and domestic parties for dialogue to begin. Without these conditions, the approach leads to extended peace enforcement rather than peacebuilding. Yet, whatever the conditions that prevail, peacebuilding in Africa has experienced limited success due to the failure to fundamentally transform the inherited post-colonial state, society and politics. The neo-colonial conditions helped to stall the achievement of lasting peace. The African experience with peacebuilding demonstrates a need for a more fundamental peace than is internationally the norm – a peace paradigm that hinges on the continued decolonisation of the African state and society in order to give rise to what may be called a decolonial peace.

Keywords: peacebuilding, AU, OAU, decolonial peace, reconstruction, UN

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Introduction

The African Union (AU) approach to peacebuilding is an outcome of African experience with peace missions and lessons from the global environment, especially the United Nations (UN). Murithi correctly indicates how discussions about peace efforts in Africa have focused on actions, successes and failures since the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and sees them as part of the institutionalisation of pan-African ideals of prosperity for all, peace, development, self-reliance, freedoms and liberation (Murithi 2008:17). This gives the AU approach a fundamental uniqueness: its birth in a particular historical experience, its particular experiences of the structures of power and life that make up modernity/coloniality, and its aspirations born on the periphery of the world system we live in today. A major part of this peacebuilding agenda is contained in the *African Post-Conflict Reconstruction Policy Framework* (NEPAD 2005). The incomplete transition of Africa from colonial to post-colonial, resulting in the persistence of neo-colonial conditions, must be born in mind when analysing efforts at peacebuilding in Africa. This leads to what Ndlovu-Gatsheni terms 'neocolonised postcolonial' conditions where peace and development remain elusive for ordinary Africans (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:3).

By decolonial (Grosfoguel 2009:10) peace we imply the pursuit of peace in a manner that also deals with the colonial continuities in the nature of the inherited state, with its underlying paradigm of war and violence, its coloniser model of the world and its colonial political economy. These continue to haunt post-colonial African societies. The concept is derived from the rich literature in decoloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015:28), a family of theories that places on the discussion table the critical importance of decommissioning the underpinnings of the colonial order of things, including neo-colonialism, and pursuing decoloniality as an imperative for the achievement of full liberation in the global South. Decolonial peace forms part of the number of conditions that describe what the literature calls the decolonial turn, namely: decolonial ethics of co-existence,

political economy, power, being and love, among others (Mignolo and Escobar 2010; Maldonado-Torres 2006; Grosfoguel 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). So, this article seeks a departure from Eurocentric worldviews in the mainstream literature on peacebuilding that discount the fundamental problem of coloniality and constrain the transition to lasting peace and prosperity in African conflict situations. The article does not dwell on explaining the underlying paradigm of violence that lies at the foundation of the Westernised modern world since the late 15th century and how this has remained in place because of the incomplete process of decolonisation of power, knowledge and being. Though this is important, it is a subject that requires a full article on its own.

This article rather focuses on the contention that although the AU has innovated in useful ways in peacebuilding, the failure to fundamentally transform the inherited neo-colonial African society (including the state) limits the achievement of decolonial peace. Africans' experiences with centuries of structural violence and its manifestation in intra- and inter-state conflict demonstrate the need for a focus on a more fundamental peace than is internationally the norm. It requires a shift towards a peace paradigm that promotes the continued decolonisation of the African state and society in order to give rise to what we call decolonial peace.

It moves from the premise that peace efforts undertaken both by the AU and regional economic communities have a fundamental weakness arising from the fact that they take as given the colonial/neo-colonial state and economy established through violent processes of conquest, colonisation and domination; they envisage peace without the decommissioning of the underlying logics of coloniality and its support for perpetual and repeated violence. As a result, these initiatives register progress in peacebuilding that are reversible and fragile because the heritage of structural violence remains in place under neo-colonial arrangements first set in place at independence. Decolonial peace is similar to the act of detoxing a body while applying measures to heal diseases that nest in toxic conditions. This detoxing (decolonisation) is a long complex process that began as indigenous resistance to colonial conquest, and later developed into the

rebellions against colonial rule, the achievement of independence and now the search for alternatives to Western ways of achieving noble purposes of peace, development and justice.

On this basis, the idea of African solutions to African problems becomes meaningless because African problems are neither originated nor sustained by African sources. Therefore solutions will require the decommissioning of the colonial structures that underpin African problems, structures that are actually global in their nature. For instance, Madagascar's incessant conflict is not purely about what Malagasy political actors do or do not do, but also its entanglement with imperial designs of France which have not ceased in spite of independence in the 1960s. The very idea of the AU and regional economic communities seeking to take control of their destinies implies a rebellion against the structures of coloniality that reproduce colonial conditions of dependence, violence, divisions, illusions and other factors in the conflict. Perhaps it is utopian to believe that a completely transformed society will come to exist, but Africa can make great progress towards a decolonial peace wherein the colonial condition is fundamentally transformed.

Elusive peace: What *fundamentally* is the problem?

Given the ubiquity of imported approaches to the subject of peace in Africa, this article must begin with a short discussion on the value of Africa-centred thinking on the whole problem at hand. Ali Mazrui thinks of Africa today as haunted by the curse of Berlin, referring to the 1884–5 European partitioning of Africa into unviable states that embedded the paradigm of violence at the very foundation of African statehood, a paradigm Africa is struggling to disentangle itself from (Mazrui 2010:23). This produced what Ngugi wa Thiong'o calls deep dismemberment that has defied efforts at unity, peace and development long after independence (Wa Thiong'o 2009). For him, this is partly because the African elite that took over were brought up in that same Euro-North American modernity which fashioned the current African condition. For this reason, efforts at peace, development and liberation without re-memberment of Africa

at various levels have only helped provide for temporary respites rather than lasting solutions. It is in this analytical context that we consider the AU's approach to peacebuilding and its efficacy in fulfilling the African dream of peace, where peace means removing the gangrene that set in centuries ago and keeps manifesting as resurgences of conflict, poverty and despair (Césaire 1972). Peace is about a fundamental shift from the paradigm of violence at the root of the African states to a paradigm of peace that fosters the African renaissance (Du Bois 1953). Therefore, it is at the same time a process of decolonising the African colonial condition whose roots are a violent conquest and domination as well as the neo-colonial realities of post-colonial Africa. The article therefore makes a distinction between peace within coloniality, which amounts to mere silence of guns within a state founded in violence, and decolonial peace, which implies peace achieved by transforming the fundamentals on which the modern/neo-colonial state and society in Africa are founded. It is peace pursued alongside decolonisation of power, statehood, and state-citizen relations. This article will show that, while there are unique innovations by Africa in peacebuilding, they come short of this transition to decolonial peace because the African political class has lacked the courage, imagination and revolutionary consciousness to decommission the inherited modern state, its economy and ways of being in order to invent a new African political reality suitable for sustainable, fundamental and lasting peace (Nzongola-Ntalanja 1987:ix).

Continental peace architecture: The basis of AU peacebuilding

When the AU was born, conflict patterns were starting to change from inter-state towards greater incidence of intra-state conflict (Olympio 2004:109–112). New key factors of conflict also emerged, such as: ethnicisation of political and power struggles, competition over scarce resources and access to state power, violence fuelled by proliferation of small arms, armed groups influenced by politico-religious ideologies, and secession-seeking groups who wished to leave their nation states (Bujra 2002).

This revealed the underlying problem of the failure of the African state to protect and provide for its population. It became a state that was fragile and without full control over the whole of its territory. Rebel groups and militia could thrive outside protected capital cities and resourced towns. It turned out that this state was elitist, factionalist, tribalist, militaristic and autocratic, implicated more in oppressing and brutalising its people than offering social and economic development or ensuring security or building peace.[1] It is in this context that the AU refined and expanded the OAU experience with peace missions, to build its approach to peacebuilding, but this remains a work in progress.

The continental peace architecture provides an institutional framework for implementing the concept of a comprehensive peace that encompasses conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. At the pinnacle of this architecture is the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) established in 2004 with ten members elected for two-year terms and five for three-year terms in order to provide some stability and continuity to the Council's leadership. The focus of the PSC is similar to that of the OAU Central Organ, i.e. to prevent and resolve conflicts by monitoring potential security threats throughout the continent (Baregu 2011:14–25). It sends fact-finding missions and can authorise AU interventions in the form of peace envoys, observer missions, mediators, good offices, technical support teams, and armed forces to keep peace after agreements. Article 7(e) of the Protocol Relating to Establishment of the Peace and Security Council operationalises the AU Constitutive Act's principle of non-indifference by empowering the Council to recommend military interventions for authorisation by the AU Assembly in cases of crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes (African Union 2002). This is a new dynamic in Africa's peace agenda – a continental decision-making platform for peacebuilding plus the principle of non-indifference towards violence within states. Its success will be related to whether and

1 There is a large literature on this failure to transform the state. See, for instance, Nzongola-Ntalanja 1987; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; Nkrumah 1965.

how the continent manages to undo the curse of Berlin which infects the states, the economies and society in general. Otherwise, this architecture will be remembered only for its great promise rather than its actual effect on the ground.

AU-Regional Economic Communities (RECs) interface

The African Standby Force consists of five regional brigades and enables the AU to intervene in a coordinated fashion in a conflict situation. In this regard, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECASS) and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) have responsibilities to make, secure and build peace in the regions. In this way, the AU framework for peacebuilding encourages regions to take responsibility for peacebuilding in conflict situations; thus the AU implements the principle of subsidiarity in order to build the capability of RECs to ensure peace in the regions (Adibe 2003:105–114). No other continent in the world uses regional structures for peacebuilding in the same fashion.

The SADC role in successful peace processes in Madagascar, Lesotho and Zimbabwe is a case in point. It took the lead in facilitating mediation processes, in deploying security forces in the case of Lesotho to secure peace, and in peacebuilding measures like training, confidence building and humanitarian assistance. Its leaders reported regularly to the AU PSC where they also sought endorsement of their peacebuilding efforts and looked for refreshed mandates; and the AU relied heavily on the ability of the region to provide political, security and financial resources to these peace processes. As a result, the burden of supplying resources shifted to the regional organisation whereas in many other peace missions, the AU shoulders the bulk of the burden with the help of outsiders. The analysis shows that this devolution of peacebuilding responsibilities strengthened the capacity of the regional organisation to respond swiftly to prevent, manage and resolve conflict for purposes of building permanent peace

(Zondi and Khaba 2014:1–17; Zondi 2013:49–79). The recent work of the EAC in bringing peace back to Burundi in 2015 (ICG 2016) and the IGAD role in facilitating South Sudan's peace negotiations after a devastating civil war in 2016[2] vindicate the AU approach of devolving responsibility for peacebuilding to regional organisations closest to the situations. In all occasions, the impact is, among others, a stronger capacity to building peace at the regional levels. It is an approach that is designed to help strengthen regions and promote a regional integration that transcends the limitations of involved nation states with their logics of power as dominance rather than cooperation (Adejumobi 1998:29–53).

But there is uneven performance and effect in the AU-RECs vertical coordination for peacebuilding with some RECs, like SADC and EAC, showing signs of maturity in taking responsibility for peace in their respective regions, while others, like ECCAS and Communauté Économique et Monétaire des États de l'Afrique Centrale (CEMAC), struggle in the absence of a willing and capable state or two to underwrite regional agency. Of course, the AMU remains moribund as a result of the broader geopolitical contestations over the Mediterranean and the Saharawi question. The pursuit of opportunities arising from the principle of subsidiarity in the AU Constitutive Act requires a willing and able set of leaders motivated by common good, but not all regions have this advantage. Secondly, the AU-RECs interface still suffers from poor coordination, the AU having failed to develop mechanisms to coordinate implementation of its decisions at regional levels and to assist regions to communicate their interests to the AU (Obouga 2016).[3] The envoys now exchanged between the regions and the AU have poorly defined roles, and very little of this is about ensuring cohesion between the two levels of governance. Thirdly, there is still limited horizontal coordination and harmonisation among

2 For reflections of the UN Security Council's Expert Panel on this, see United Nations Security Council 2015.

3 For a ground-breaking critical analysis of these peace efforts from below, see Maphosa and others 2014.

RECs and as a result there is no notable case of REC-REC coordination of a peace initiative. Fourthly, the RECs require well-developed institutional mechanisms to deliver on the promise of regional responsibility for peace, which includes the full operationalising of standby forces, institutions for political coordination of peace efforts, capacities for mediation and peace-making, and structures for driving regional post-conflict rebuilding. For instance, while ECOWAS established the long-awaited Mediation Support Division in the ECOWAS Commission only in 2015, other elements of the peace architecture – as the Mali crisis of 2012 showed – including an early warning capability, a rapid military response force and post-conflict peacebuilding, remain work in progress (Odigie 2016).

There is room for building the capacity of RECs to take on the responsibility for peace in regions and between regions, but this is not yet a major consideration in the upper echelons of the AU Peace and Security Architecture. Part of the reason for this is that Africa is battling to overcome the curse of Berlin that is manifest in what Ngugi wa Thiong'o called dismemberment and what Mazrui called fragmentation of the African polity (Mazrui 2010:xii; Wa Thiong'o 2009:1–31). Until these weaknesses are remedied, the AU will be forced to rely on UN peacekeeping forces or former colonial powers like France to respond effectively to urgent security crises as it happened recently in Mali. Under these conditions, there can be no decolonial peace. A lasting peace must accompany the building of national unity, regional cohesion and continental integration – a set of conditions opposite to those arising from the curse of Berlin.

The AU thinking and the African Post-Conflict Reconstruction Policy Framework

Many of the lessons learned from various experiments in peacebuilding during the latter years of the AU were integrated into the *African Post-Conflict Reconstruction Policy Framework* whose development began when in 2002 the implementation committee of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) decided that Africa's peacebuilding approach would be an all-embracing strategy including a) restoring security;

b) managing political transition; c) anchoring socio-economic development; d) promoting human rights and justice; and e) resource mobilisation (NEPAD 2005).

These five dimensions are designed to be mutually reinforcing and complementary. The AU believes that there is no need to place these in a sequence, because it does not accept the logic that you need one element to be fully in place before the next phase kicks in, as is often the case with the UN and Western approaches to peacebuilding. It is assumed in the mainstream literature that conflict prevention, conflict resolution, reconstruction, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding form a linear framework that must be followed in that order. Therefore, the actual implementation of this AU policy differs from one conflict situation to another. The need to be context-specific and flexible in implementing this policy is an important feature of the AU approach to peacebuilding. Central to the policy is the need to pursue security, development and peace simultaneously at all times. Yet, in practice the AU follows the Western and UN approaches that assume the sequencing of interventions from prevention to post-conflict reconstruction as both the 2003 Protocol Establishing the Peace and Security Council (Art. 20) and the policy framework referred to above suggest. Actually, the failure to deploy troops to quell terror attacks on Mali in 2013 (Aning 2016:120–33) and the failure to send troops alongside mediators in the Central African Republic illustrate the pitfalls of the commitment to a linear process of sequencing interventions (AU Election Observation Mission 2016). In this approach, the underlying sources of problems, including the inherited violent neo-colonial state, economy and organisation of society, are maintained, giving Africa only temporary respite from violence and/or a merely fragile peace. More than a decade ago, the literature already pointed to shallow peace processes that failed to transform the state and society so that they become pillars of peace and development (Baregu and Landsberg 2002:2). The following analyses of key AU peacebuilding interventions will enable us to determine whether the AU has evolved a unique approach to peacebuilding and, if so, what this implies for the renaissance of a peaceful and prosperous Africa.

The AU record of peace interventions

Burundi

The AU inherited from the OAU several peace interventions, the first being in Burundi where the OAU had been involved since 1994 in de-escalating conflict, using good offices, peace envoys, esteemed mediators in Julius Nyerere and Nelson Mandela, peacekeeping and confidence-building measures (Muyangwa and Voigt 2000:10). The OAU had succeeded in bringing the parties to a power-sharing agreement in 2001 that led to a three-year transitional government. The AU got involved in April 2003, half-way through the transition, when the AU itself was barely a year old. The AU approach became apparent right at the beginning, with the establishment of a multi-disciplinary African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB) deploying just over 3 000 troops from Ethiopia, Mozambique and South Africa to provide security for returning political activists and other refugees, and assist with the demobilisation of armed groups and general peacekeeping. A 43-member observer team was tasked with monitoring the implementation of the agreements. Political envoys in the form of former ambassadors were deployed to politically support the transition from one government to another through dialogues with all key political parties.

An experienced diplomat, Mamadou Bah, was placed in charge of the entire mission with a largely political role to ensure a coordinated peacebuilding effort. The special representative in this model of peacebuilding is expected to be a peace envoy available on the ground to help the stakeholders resolve any issue that crops up, to promote the transformation of politics from acrimony to continuous dialogue and to catalyse the positive role of international actors on the ground. As Bah explained, the AU orientation was that the AMIB was focused on creating conditions for permanent peace and for development rather than merely silencing the guns (Interview with Amb. Mamadou Bah 2003). For this purpose, the AU focus was on continuous confidence-building measures to enable the affected country to sustain on its own the peace thus built. Central to this approach, the

AMIB mobilised the UN and donor agencies to support the rebuilding of state capacity to deliver development, fight natural calamities like drought and promote the country for international investments.

Indeed, the UN played a critical role in reinforcing the AMIB even before the UN took over the control of the peace mission and converted it into the UN Operation on Burundi (ONUB) (Murithi 2008:75). With greater resources and lots of expertise in complex processes of demobilisation and reintegration of armed forces, the UN helped complete the AU efforts by demobilising thousands of armed persons. This laid the ground for the return to relative normalcy by 2009. However, the flare up of conflict in 2015 when armed forces sought to suppress political activists opposed to attempts by President Pierre Nkurunziza to extend his presidential term taught the AU that it was not wise to see the election of a post-transition government as marking the end of a peacebuilding process. The AU has not been able to re-engage its peace mission and complete the process that was ended prematurely. It was left to the East African Community (EAC) to facilitate inclusive political negotiations between Nkurunziza and his nemesis. While the teaming up with the UN, the central role of the regional body (EAC) and the privileging of political dialogue distinguish the AU approach from the OAU and other international approaches, negotiations led to the bankrupt idea of elite pacts involving top leaders of major political parties. This elitism undermines the role of civil society actors, indigenous structures on the ground and the rooting of peace in communities.

Somalia

The AU intervention in Somalia was conditioned by factors quite different from those that prevailed in Burundi because Somalia had experienced a complete collapse of government in the early 1990s and had become a complex den of militia-driven and terror-linked conflict (Murithi 2008:81). Central to the AU approach was the OAU idea of establishing a transitional government with a semblance of stability in Somalia because the AU approach requires the establishment of a government to be at the centre of dialogue, stabilisation, legitimation of international interventions and to

be the institution to which peace missions hand over the task of building peace in the long run. Restoring constitutional normalcy is for the AU the basis for peace intervention and that is why it places so much emphasis on brokering a political agreement providing for transitional government. In this case, like the OAU, the AU bases its approach on the establishment of even a weak government. The AU supported the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) in its efforts to achieve peace through the establishment of several fragile transitional governments since 2003 and thus the whole peacebuilding endeavour has also appeared weak, stuck in its first phase (establishing a government and beginning political dialogues) and there are no clear prospects for the AU approach to find expression in Somalia under these conditions. Such an approach to Somalia took the form of the UN Security Council Resolution 1725 of December 2006. This is why the AU formally established the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in January 2007 with the usual mandate of political dialogue, constitution building, confidence building, coordination with international agencies and security sector reform. But the mission has hardly been able to go beyond very basic tasks of political dialogue and propping up a fragile transitional government. It has also focused on humanitarian assistance. Yet, the AU has gone on to seek UN Security Council mandate to give the IGAD-AU mission international legal standing.

The UN deployed a force of 1700 peacekeeping troops from Burundi, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria and Uganda in 2009, to first secure a political dialogue called the Somali National Reconciliation Congress. Since then, however, it has mainly been focused on protecting the fragile transitional government and helping to contain the security threat posed by the emergence of Al-Shabaab militants (AU Peace and Security Council 2015). The mission seems stuck in its infancy. NATO powers increased military operations in Somalia in the name of the War on Terror, and have further complicated the situation, helping to deepen conflict rather than reinforcing peace interventions. Therefore, the AU approach to peacebuilding has proved ill-suited to conditions where complex theatres of conflict continue even during peace attempts. This international cooperation is essential for

conflict resolution and subsequent peacebuilding in Somalia due to the entanglement of regional and extra-regional forces in problems facing Somalia. While the AU approach helped to contain the deteriorating security situation, it has not provided the conditions for peacebuilding further than relative stability or a security stalemate between government and militia.

According to the Peace and Security Council Report for 2015, AMISOM struggled to make headway because there are no conditions for peace in Somalia. Weak government and violence involving Al-Shabaab and other militia mean that national dialogue towards some constitutional normalcy and transitional political arrangements cannot take root. Under these conditions, AMISOM has become a force focused on managing conflict rather than keeping or building peace. AMISOM accepts that state formation, reconstruction of societal systems and the rebuilding of political processes are difficult to achieve in the absence of conflict resolution (AU Peace and Security Council 2014). If this leads to a greater focus on rebuilding the state, state-civil society relations, strengthening indigenous structures of peace, and securing the integrity of the territory, it might lead to some progress towards peace in Somalia.

Sudan

The AU peace intervention in Darfur in Sudan showcases a dimension of the AU peacebuilding approach which differs slightly from that in the cases outlined above, namely: co-ownership of the peace efforts between the AU and the UN. It is clear that this is an experiment born out of the realisation that without adequate financial and technical resources, international networks and the force of international law, good AU peacebuilding models will have a limited effect. As indicated earlier, the AU idea of peacebuilding is broadly similar to the UN peace framework. Of course, the AU approach takes peacebuilding as an overarching purpose of intervention rather than a phase that must only follow peacekeeping right at the end of the cycle of transformation from conflict to peace. The AU sees continuous political dialogue, confidence building, and institution building as central from

beginning to the end of the peace processes. This is why cooperation with the UN tends to happen long after the AU started with peacebuilding.

The African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) was established in the year that the PSC was born, i.e. 2004. The mission was to minimise the impact of the conflict between government forces, militias and rebel groups on civilian populations in Darfur as well as to secure the environment for political interventions aimed at finding peace agreements among key political actors. Fought largely through proxy forces like militia and armed bandits, this conflict in western Darfur descended into deadly ethnic conflict and banditry pitting indigenous Africans against Arabic Africans. The news of mass killings and the displacement of two million people from western Darfur led to the AU intervention through President Idris Deby of Chad in September 2003. This led to the Abeche Agreement signed by the main rebel group, Sudanese Liberation Movement (SLM), and the government that agreed to observe a ceasefire, to disarm irregular armed groups and to provide a safe passage for humanitarian assistance (Murithi 2008:81–82).

From March 2004, the AU became fully involved in attempts to de-escalate the conflict through a series of political negotiations seeking to ensure that all rebels and armed groups were involved in the peace agreements. It was also involved in confidence-building measures like facilitated dialogues among affected communities in the region. To give even more weight to this pressure for a peace agreement as basis for a structured AU peace mission, the then Chairperson of the AU Commission, President Alpha Konare, became directly involved in facilitating dialogue alongside other peace envoys. But this led only to another piecemeal agreement involving some and not all major players in the conflict: the Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement signed by SLM, the Justice and Equality Movement and the government. The terms agreed were similar to previous peace agreements mentioned above. At last, the AU was able to ensure that peace agreements allowed for humanitarian corridors, observer missions, and peace envoys to explore comprehensive and inclusive agreements. Thus, the AMIS was born with the hope that it would implement the AU peacebuilding

approach (Toga 2007:214–244). But this approach has been of limited effect on conditions on the ground because the government remains unwilling to enthusiastically support the AU or UN interventions and because there are many splinter militias left outside the complex peace agreements.

The AU was central in peace negotiations designed to bring previously excluded actors within the fold of peace agreements, as in the talks that took place in Abuja, Nigeria. Each round concluded with a declaration of principles, which resulted in five agreements from five rounds of Abuja negotiations, showcasing the AU commitment to a patient nurturing of shared understanding and vision as the basis for agreements in cases where the situation was not on its own ripe for an agreement. The last round that took five months of facilitated negotiations culminated in the Darfur Agreement of May 2006. But it turned out that the agreement included only one faction of the SLM and excluded the JEM because both and a few others still believed that a military victory was more desirable and possible (Fadul and Tanner 2007:285). Under such conditions, the AU model on peacebuilding just does not work.

The first three phases of AMIS (April–September 2004; October 2004–March 2005; and April 2005 onwards) confronted challenges relating to operational unreadiness, poor planning, delays in deployment, weak supplies, and logistical deficiencies. Inadequate financing of the mission meant that it relied on Western funding for its essential capacities, thus undermining the pan-African ideal of self-reliance. The reliance on NATO to transport AU troops to Darfur between 2005 and 2007 meant that this Western military alliance was given legitimate presence on African soil. Thereafter NATO would not depart from the African space, and played a prominent role in the Western military campaigns against the government in Libya in 2011 that led to the assassination of Muammar Qadaffi and undermined African diplomacy (NATO 2008; Campbell 2012:97–105). The AU peacebuilding approach has this serious weakness: it is one of those great African ideas that Africans cannot fund. They have to look to the West for finance, and this obviously brings divergent political visions, peace orientations and priorities which weaken the AU model to the point of failure.

AMIS over time grew into a big military contingent made up by Nigeria (3 infantry battalions), Rwanda (3 infantry battalions), South Africa (1 infantry battalion, FHQ (Force Headquarters) Reserve, 1 engineer company), Senegal (1 infantry battalion), Kenya (1 Military Police Detachment), and Gambia (1 FHQ company) (Toga 2007:221). Late in 2007, a hybrid mission between the AU and UN, called United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), replaced AMIS, further reinforcing this military force. This force proved crucial for the implementation and protection of humanitarian interventions, including the return of refugees in some areas, the resumption of economic activities in some villages and the prevention of further escalation of conflict. It also provided extensive training and capacity support for national security and policing, but given the central role of government in the conflict this formula was ill-advised and could not ensure better security for all and peace for the population. UNAMID became a greater hope for the people affected by conflict than government. But in the process, the mission turned into peace enforcement rather than peacebuilding as defined by the AU. With peacekeepers dying regularly in skirmishes with armed groups that continue to fester in Darfur, UNAMID has become entangled in the no peace-no war stalemate in Darfur (Ekengard 2008:26–33). However, the holistic nature of the AU-UN approach in this case means that the mission is still of value for helping to avoid a further meltdown of security in this area.

However, UNAMID has achieved in seven years not much more than AMIS did before it. This is because the conditions for peacebuilding simply did not change much under UNAMID's watch. The government remained recalcitrant and rebel groups continued to hope for greater advantage in military confrontation than in peace dialogue. If preventing a deterioration of the security situation is an achievement, then AMIS and UNAMID have been a relative success. Otherwise, there has been no real progress on the conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding fronts. Protracted mediated dialogues with various parties to the conflict have also been harmed by poor coordination between Western actors imposing sanctions

and an arms embargo on the government and African actors trying to find a political settlement on the ground. If sanctions are the proverbial stick needed to support the diplomatic measures on the ground, then the two must be undertaken in a coordinated fashion. Mathew Leriche would make the same point. He found that Western-driven sanctions on South Sudan had by 2015 become obstacles to peace (Leriche 2015).

Which factors contribute to the uniqueness of the AU peacebuilding approach?

'Unique' describes and specifies an approach to peacebuilding which is particularly African and born out of the African experience. This does not mean features that cannot be found in some form in peacebuilding outside Africa. But it does mean that these features are from Africa's contribution to thinking and practice about peacebuilding. What is principally unique about the AU approach to peacebuilding is its historical genesis from peace initiatives driven by the OAU and then the AU. Part of it has to do with the contextualisation of central tenets of the UN's Agenda for Peace. Methodologically speaking, we have learned from the writings of Archie Mafeje (2000:66–71), Georges Nzongola-Ntalanja (1987), Tiyambe Zeleza (2006), Molefi Asante (1990), Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981) and Paulin Hountondji (1997) that the authenticity of what is African arises from the fact that Africa's unique history presently produces particular African realities, thought patterns, approaches and orientations. This is true of all areas of public policy and politics including peacebuilding. No serious study of an African idea or reality can avoid the historical evolution of today's realities. The following discussion is on the key tenets of the particular AU approach to peacebuilding. We begin with unique AU tenets of peacebuilding.

An all-encompassing concept of peacebuilding is used

The AU approach has benefitted from the comprehensiveness of the conceptual basis of its peace interventions. This mirrors the Agenda for Peace conceptual framework that sees four key pillars of the peace

agenda (prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding) as interconnected, interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The AU sees peace as linked to development as the basis of this framework. Therefore, the AU approach has benefited from this holistic approach to thinking about peace and this leads to comprehensive peace interventions.

In line with the comprehensiveness of the conceptual framework, the AU peace interventions are multi-disciplinary in the sense that they include capacities to anticipate, de-escalate, secure, monitor and support post-conflict development. The capacities to prevent conflict, to resolve on-going conflict, to protect peace processes and to build new and peaceful societies are central to the AU approach. Where there is a strong leadership on the ground in the form of a Special Representative or peace diplomat, and where there is strong coordination among key players in an AU peace mission, the chances for success are much enhanced. Challenges have arisen, however, when the AU peace intervention is undertaken after conflict has broken out but before any meaningful peace process takes root, because it then gets translated into an endless peace enforcement intervention.

AU intervention in domestic affairs is legally justified

The qualitative difference between the OAU and AU approaches to peacebuilding is in the legal framework. Unlike the OAU Charter, the AU Constitutive Act permits intervention in member states in cases of crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide. This removes the old problem where the pan-Africanist ideal of peace and prosperity is hampered by the Westphalian principle of non-intervention in national affairs. On this basis, having formally adopted the principle of non-indifference in Sirte, Libya, in 1999, two years before the idea of Responsibility to Protect was proposed by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, Africa is the first region to provide the legal framework for setting aside the principle of non-intervention in specific circumstances, before the international community adopted the principle of Responsibility to Protect. Therefore, the AU Constitutive Act, the Protocol establishing

the PSC and other decisions of the AU on peace provide a conducive legal-political environment for comprehensive AU peace missions. This brings the AU's concept of peacebuilding closer to the ideals of the Responsibility to Protect – towards which the world has been working.

It forms part of a Comprehensive African Peace Architecture

The establishment of a continental peace and security architecture with the PSC at the centre is an outcome of lessons learned in the latter years of the OAU when the Central Organ on security was established with positive effect in all major OAU peace interventions. The African Standby Force and its regional brigades in all five regions of the AU are meant to enable the AU to respond timeously to incidents of violence defined in Article 3 of the Protocol establishing the PSC. This provides the necessary institutional framework for the support of the peacebuilding interventions.

It promotes AU-UN cooperation for peacebuilding

Clearly, the cooperation between the UN and the AU in peacebuilding in Africa is positive for building and strengthening African capacity for peacebuilding as well as for boosting the UN interface with regional organisations in keeping with the principle of subsidiarity. The AU approach is to lay the ground for such cooperation through comprehensive peace missions of its own, focused on anticipating conflict hotspots, confidence building and peacekeeping. This is essential for African ownership of hybrid missions as well as for building African capacity for peacebuilding. The challenge is to develop a shared conceptual framework for the AU and UN.

In spite of AU unconcern, its peacebuilding is supported by effective peace initiatives from below

The AU policies and protocols pay lip service to enabling citizen involvement in the implementation of AU programmes. The Post-Conflict Development and Reconstruction policy does the same. As a result, efforts from below function mainly because citizens pursue them rather than because governments enable them. African civil society interventions for

peace are many and various. The most notable include the women-driven efforts that helped transform the situation from conflict to a peace process in Liberia when organisations like the Women in Peace building Program (WIPNET), the Mano River Women of Peace Network (MARWOPNET) and Women Peace and Security Network Africa (WIPSEN-A) created a peace movement that politicians and rebel groups could not ignore. These formations remained vigilant enough to support social efforts to reintegrate demobilised fighters, build community centres for normalising community relations, provide counselling for the affected, engage in post-war community rebuilding, and convene dialogues to keep peace alive (UNIFEM 2007; Ecoma 2009; WIPSEN-Africa 2009). Such peacebuilding initiatives from below have enjoyed the support of intra-African and extra-African civil society networks as well as structures of the UN like the UN-INSTRAW and UNWOMEN (Hendricks and Chivasa 2008). They have become crucial for pursuing the full implementation of UN Resolution 1325. This is all part of efforts at attaining peace from below, involving organs of civil society where women's formations play a prominent role – efforts which have increased in number, scale and impact. This is in spite of a political, security, and legal environment that discourages the involvement of formations from below in AU-driven peacebuilding projects (Maphosa et al. 2014).

Which factors impair the uniqueness of African peacebuilding?

Over-reliance on external funding for peacebuilding

The reliance on former colonial powers and other external forces for financial and technical resources seriously undermine the AU's peacebuilding. 'Borrowed waters do not quench one's thirst' is an African proverb that supports the pan-African ideal of self-reliance. Thus, dependence on external financing of peacebuilding defeats the very purpose of the AU approach. We have shown that the AU approach is founded on African renaissance and on the ideals of decolonising the world; but these ideals

cannot be achieved while allowing Western powers space to influence what Africa thinks and does to this end. The failure of the AU to finance its programmes generally and the inability of many of its member states to finance their regular budgets is a major threat to the second decolonisation of Africa and its aim to finish the incomplete process of liberating the continent. This resource problem points to a fundamental weakness in the post-colonial African condition, and is a serious contributor to the post-colonial realities of deferred dreams, shattered expectations and illusions of change. Over-reliance on generous European Union funding mainly and other external donors means that AU's peacebuilding is not sustainable and cannot be considered to be fully sovereign and African. Assistance from the UN is better because the UN is an inclusive global organisation, but it still can be a conduit of imperial designs of the few dominant powers in the world, as happened when the UN played a problematic role alongside France in Côte d'Ivoire's coup and violence that brought the current government into power (Zounmenou No date).

The obsession with saving the inherited neo-colonial State

It is clear that like the states that constitute it as an intergovernmental organisation, the AU is still trapped in state-centric approaches to peace, focusing more on rebuilding the state, that was never authentic in the first place, than on transforming society as a whole. It has been about establishing the semblance of a functioning nation-state in the form of governmental institutions for providing services and security rather than re-orienting citizenry or boosting indigenous civil society structures that form part of social capital for peace and development. Such rebuilding should ideally be linked to institution building, leadership development, citizenship enhancement, economic rejuvenation. At a practical level, the conflict-resolution and peacekeeping components must be seen as the start to the post-conflict reconstruction and development process. Post-conflict does not mean that interventions start after conflict has ended, but that the focus of intervention is measured by what happens after agreements are implemented fully.

Conclusion

The AU approach to peacebuilding has evolved over the past fifty years from the terrible experiences of the early OAU years to improved interventions in the later years of the OAU. The AU inherited the lessons learned and improvements begun under the OAU, but benefitted also from UN-driven ideas of holistic and comprehensive pursuit of peace and development. This has produced the following features that now characterise the particular nature of the AU approach to peacebuilding:

- It is based on a holistic concept of peace that embraces all the elements of the UN Agenda for Peace (conflict prevention/anticipation, conflict resolution/peacemaking, conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction).
- It comprises a comprehensive peace architecture that ranges from early warning capacity to post-conflict rebuilding for peace, but this remains underdeveloped mainly due to resource constraints and lack of political will on the part of African governments.
- It uses a peacebuilding framework anchored on balance between continental leadership and regional responsibility for peace; but not all RECs are ready to give effect to this both in terms of capability and in respect of political will to act.
- It benefits from the growing participation of non-state actors in supporting state-driven peace processes; though this is far from enthusiastic on the part of governments and still suffers the weaknesses to do with donor-driven civil society initiatives, neo-colonial suspicions, imposing models from Euro-American history, and a bias towards technical interventions.
- Unique African historical experiences underscore the importance of fundamentally transforming the neo-colonised post-colonial state and its relations with the former colonial empires for permanent peace to take root.

Factors that undermine the uniqueness of African peacebuilding include:

- Limited horizontal coordination and interface both among RECs and among individual countries in building sustainable peace;
- Over-reliance on external resources for peace building, thus limiting African ownership of initiatives;
- Failure to transform the inherited colonial state and economy as a necessary condition for building the fundamentals of decolonial peace.

The record shows that the AU interventions have been relatively successful in de-escalating conflict and restoring the authority of the state, but they have not been successful in transforming the conditions that lead to an elusive colonial type of peace in Africa. Until the very idea of the modern nation-state on African soil (which is colonial in its DNA) is resolved, Africa will remain a mortuary where beautiful concepts and models of peacebuilding die, failing to bringing about lasting peace. The colonial state and modern society as inherited are founded on the paradigm of war, a logic of violence that does not die at independence. It is this underlying colonial/neo-colonial structure of violence that must be overcome for a truly authentic peace paradigm to emerge. In the meantime, the AU peacebuilding efforts need to encourage the interface between efforts from below and those from above, between state-driven and community-driven interventions, and between Eurocentric and Afrocentric peacebuilding models. The latter will ensure that there is greater harnessing of indigenous social capital and historical experiences as well as the customisation of peacebuilding to specific regional and local African realities. Research is urgently needed to explore this in some detail.

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