

Research Report

Compatibility of endogenous conflict resolution practices with African democracies

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Abstract – Endogenous Conflict resolution system as a practice within African societies is fast losing relevance and popularity despite the important roles that it has served since time immemorial. This approach to conflict resolution was largely nurtured by cultural and religious systems so much so that whatever conflict it addressed, the outcome would be culturally sustainable to parties involved. With the advent of modernity and contemporary governance systems, the olden practice is gradually being pushed to the periphery and losing relevance. The discussion is guided by the conceptual framework of *perennialism*, *essentialism* and *experientialism*, which all focus on sustainability of the practice according to a particular paradigm. The study was partly extracted from a longitudinal research on endogenous conflict resolution practices and complimented by a review of archival material. The study notes that while endogenous conflict resolution practices were handy, cultural and sustainable, the coming of new and modern approaches has rendered them irrelevant. Some of the endogenous principles are in modern democracies undermined as archaic, despotic and repressive. However, it has been realised that there continues to be systematic mergers of the old and new resolution approaches taking on board present day relevant and acceptable practices.

Key words: Endogenous, conflict resolution, democracy, governance, conflict.

Introduction

Indigenous Zimbabweans developed over time and at the instigation of modernity and alien practices, what are termed endogenous practices. Included in these practices were endogenous conflict resolution practices, which were crafted along respective cultural and religious orientations. However, as modernity ushered democracy, the study now questions the compatibility of the two systems; democracy and endogenous practices. This question emanated from the fact that while democracy values human rights, endogenous conflict resolution practices place value in fundamental traditional rituals. It is therefore such controversies that the study sought to establish how much the two concepts could be fused and find relevance in the contemporary governance system.

The study, in its exploration looked at various aspects including endogenous conflict resolution approaches, modern democracy, the nexus in human rights, values, cooperation, critical thinking, ideology and organic skills' acquisition before proposing a conceptual framework on the compatibility of endogenous conflict resolution practices with modern democracies. The study was partially extracted from a longitudinal research on endogenous conflict resolution practices in Zimbabwe. The study was conducted in Zimbabwe with a view to establishing the basis and development of endogenous conflict resolution systems and understand their impact on the present situations. The other part was derived from an analysis of both archival and documented literature.

Background

Endogenous Conflict resolution system as a practice within the African societies is eclectic as is informed by a variety of factors and forces. Realizing that traditionally these societies had no formal means of education as in committing productive time towards imparting knowledge to the others, there were many influences that impacted on the ways in which conflicts were addressed. Culture; food, dressing, settlement types, farming practices, transport systems, marriage systems and language, dances, traditional brews and

funerals amongst others all contributed towards the mechanisms of resolving conflicts in particular societies (Millar et al. 2006).

With these concepts and beliefs around how people resolved conflicts in their societies, the study sought to understand the compatibility of same with modern democracy where people now look at various issues to measure and determine justice and how people's expectations are met. Unlike during the pre-colonial era when the application of justice and resolution of conflicts was determined by class, age and gender, in contemporary democracies, there is equality and fairness regardless of age and gender (Hountondji 2002). There are also laws which are written down for consistency and future reference thus contradicting with most of the endogenous practices, which do not document for reference purposes.

The study also comes against a background where in traditional societies, recognition of human rights, equitable distribution of social services and personal development were considered luxuries whose provision was not a 'right'. Given the fact that in modern democracy, the provision of the above cited aspects has become a right, the question about whether the two paradigms can work together arises.

In the same argument, there are some quarters that want to preserve some traditions and heritage, with some only selecting what they believe is essential for development while others wanted to experiment on anything new for development. These three movements led to the *perennialists*, *essentialists* and *experientialists* (Cohen 1999). Therefore, the question is, are these three conceptions compatible with modern democracy?

The concepts of *perennialism*, *essentialism* and *experientialism* (Cohen 1999), all focus on sustainability of the practice according to a particular paradigm. *Perennialists* want what they believe to be the most important in the survival of society heritage and that which was of relevance throughout the year to be nurtured while *essentialists* only value what they regard essential in their traditional society to be carried forward and passed on to younger generations for use. *Experientialists* are known to be conservative and traditional in nature. There is also another group of people in the same societies who believe that life was about experiences and practice 'the doubting Thomases'. These want

what they had previously practiced and confirmed to be real and applicable to be maintained as their heritage. This to some extent explains why most traditional African societies have sustained their practices for thousands of years without transforming them either for the better or to suit the changing times. These traditional societies have not really engaged in any meaningful researches beyond what they needed in their immediate future.

Objectives

The discussion seeks to establish the compatibility of endogenous conflict resolution practices that are in use in Africa with the current democracies. The study follows a realisation of the fact that while democracy values human rights, endogenous conflict resolution practices place value in fundamental traditional rituals. The two; human rights and traditional rituals often contradict creating conflicts in some societies.

Theoretical explanation

The discussion is guided by a conceptual framework of *perennialism*, *essentialism* and *experientialism* (Cohen 1999), which all focus on sustainability of the practice according to a particular paradigm. All these concepts generally focus on the continued use of endogenous systems in local governance. The study to some extent is also guided by the Afrocentric theory which calls for the inclusion of cultural values in the areas of leadership and management (Teffo 2006).

Fundamentally, two leading conflicting interpretations are apparent in the existing literature. The neo-traditionalist argument contends that endogenous conflict resolution is compatible with modern democracy because it has certain democratic components. The neo-liberal argument by some scholars argues against the involvement of endogenous conflict resolution practices in modern democracy because to them by its very nature, endogenous principles compromise the democratic principles of conflict resolution (Rugege 2002; Ntsebeza 2005).

This hypothesis may be expressed as follows:

$$E = f(Cr, M, Mg),$$

Where E stands for endogenous conflict resolution systems in democracies, Cr represents cultural and religious practices, M represents modernity, Mg represents systematic mergers of the old and new resolution approaches.

Analysis

Endogenous conflict resolution approaches

Endogenous conflict resolution systems (ECLS) existed in Africa in various forms and practice. ECLS were culturally acceptable and community embedded so much so that the degree of ownership was very high. The variation in form and practice was largely determined by various factors chief amongst them being level of civilisation, religious beliefs, settlement types and forms of economic practice amongst others (Dodo 2015). Basically, endogenous systems are defined by inherence in local practices, flexibility to be fused with new practices and creativity and ownership, being instinctive to a society, having organically developed within a society, and adopted by years of practice (Murithi 2008).

Endogenous conflict resolution practices are broad and varied. They include amongst others; elders who helped transmit values, marriage that brought different people together, compensation that also appeased the victims and silence which was employed to either ignore or avert potential conflicts. Song and dance were used to console and entertain, appeasement of the dead was critical in bridging relations between the dead and the living and fighting also helped establish hierarchy in order of strength and power. Others are *chisawira* (jocular friendship), *jakwara* (collective work), *bira* (spiritual dance ceremony), death which helped eliminate one of the parties to a conflict, *ngano* (story-telling) and *mudzimu* (spirits) (Dodo 2015). Some cultures in other African countries also have the following conflict resolution systems; *kgotla* (court) in the Tswana in Botswana,

guurti (court) in Djibouti, *michu* (friendship) in Ethiopia, *wonde* (dance) in Sierra Leone, *mato oput* (drinking a bitter herb) in Uganda and *gacaca* (court) in Rwanda (Lanek 1999). Others include; *judiyya* in Sudan, *dia* in Somalia, *moots* in Liberia, *jir* in Nigeria, *curandeiros* in Mozambique and *ndendeuli* in Tanzania amongst others (Dodo 2015). The differences in these systems signify the differences in cultures and how people view and live their lives. They also show each culture's level of development and how the surrounding elements and systems are valued and taken into consideration especially when making decisions. However, the cited conflict resolution methods are not national but rather apply to specific ethnic and cultural groups.

While these approaches to conflict resolution have worked effectively for years, they have their peculiar challenges. It has been observed that endogenous practices are gradually losing acceptance by the consumers who at the end of the day, are expected to use them. In some cases, these systems are inefficient and produce unsustainable solutions. With the fast integrating wave of modernity, some of the endogenous practices are clashing with the contemporary expectations of democracy and human rights (Dodo et al. 2014).

Endogenous approaches and modern democracy

Concepts of endogenous governance and contemporary democracy are pillars facing completely different directions but facing each other. Therefore, as they move forward, they are definitely going to meet and fuse. However, it is this movement which is problematic. The discussion seeks to understand the nexus between endogenous practices of conflict resolution and the demands of democracy.

Endogenous approaches to governance and its relation to democracy is in itself a controversial issue. All traditional societies have developed ways to deal with governance matters especially conflict resolution. What often comes to the fore are the clashes that manifest when endogenous practices are executed and simultaneously cross the paths of democracy with regards to human rights (Millar et al. 2008). Because of the differences in time and civilisation, the two often clash. However, because endogenous systems are a creation of systems indigenous and adapted, it is flexible enough to accommodate

anything new that comes albeit with some challenges. Endogenous systems simply seek to empower and take control based on local knowledge and strategies with a view to creating relevance, diversity, ownership and identity (Hountondji 2002). According to Murithi, (2008), endogenous systems are historical processes of endless creation and crafting of additional ways, organically developed from a society. It permits the integration of indigenous approaches with the contemporary and official ways having been internalized by years of practice. However, there are instances when endogenous systems like cultural practices of female genital mutilation, circumcision and inheritance clash with human rights demands within the democracy cluster.

African traditional leaders depended on divination and mysticism. However, there was a component of public participation and consensus in public policy and law-making. The decision-making process in traditional governance was not only broad-based and participatory; the entire governance processes except the selection of the leaders which is hereditary, were transparent and endogenous in nature. Minority opinion was entertained and encouraged provided it conformed to traditional customs of communication (Yankah 1997). Similarly, despite the fact that traditional leaders had the last word, rebuffing a consensus-based decision was taken as an infraction of the oath (Gyimah-Boadi 2001). However, while modern democracy promotes freedoms, it seems to be in some systems, being scuttled by the fusion of both, which sometimes fails to flow.

Traditional leadership paid a lot of respect to age as the basis of wisdom and maturity. Unfortunately, modern democracy looks at it differently. Age and leadership traditionally involved more tasks. Aged leadership was expected to live up to high standards of behaviour expected of the aged; behaviour responsible enough to be worthy of emulation by the subjects (Gyekye 1997). The importance of endogenous systems even in modern democracies is seen by the signing of the Right to Culture, Article 22 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 2007). Endogenous practices the world over, enveloped in culture, belief and values are significant in providing ethical and practical basis for decision making in everyday lives.

Classical modernisation theorists believed that the values of modern governance systems would one day turn out to be more important than traditional leaders. The same classical modernists barely imagined the continued significance of a system entrenched in a pre-capitalist background. It believed that a well-educated citizenry and widely travelled, exposed and urbane elite would not allow an old-fashioned system managed by people whose key qualification for leadership was circumstances of birth (Gyimah-Boadi 2001). It is this belief amongst others that continue to create a hurdle towards the integration of the two systems for an efficient, effective and widely acceptable governance approach.

However, what is noticeable in most African governance systems is the presence of traditional practices. In some parliaments like in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Swaziland, Lesotho, Namibia, Zambia and others, the traditional part of their lives is represented at the highest policy-making level (Keulder 1998; Dodo 2013). Besides, the constitutions also provide for the existence and sustenance of the traditional institution. The chieftaincy in the leadership system is however in various circles, accused of undermining human rights through the recognition of patriarchy, beliefs in polygamous marriages and other social rituals which tremble on the aspirations and interests of other people in society.

Modern democracy

This is one area that has been researched and written about most and yet remains difficult to both understand and practice. Such scholars; John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Robert Dahl, Joseph Schumpeter, John Dewey, Max Weber and Jurgen Habermas and several others have in vain researched on this concept. While not attempting to define democracy, it is clear that from any perspective, it involves several aspects including; popularity, consent, time, rights, people and freedoms (Dodo and Mateura 2011). However, there are instances when some or all of the above features fail to exist. It is in those circumstances that such type of governance is referred to as one party rule, authoritarian, personal rule, despotic or neo-patrimonial rule (Osabu-Kle 2000).

Modern democracy in practice calls for popular participation. It creates an environment where every willing citizen is able to contest for any leadership position without any fear of reprisals (Brown 2001). In an ideal democracy, leadership does not belong to officeholders but theoretically belongs to the people who can get it back in an organized and peaceful way. From a democratic view, public authority flows from public endorsement and that the law mirrors public interests and expectations. Modern democracy contends that leaders are responsible for their behaviours and activities and answerable to citizens and that existing politics can be contested (Boix 2003; Ntsebeza 2005). However, no matter how ideal this maybe, they are interpreted and practiced differently.

The nexus

The applicability of endogenous conflict resolution practices in modern democracies is without its challenges given the differences in the times and people's expectations (Jelin and Hershberg 1996). Democracy is a system that has recently undergone serious transformation, roping in almost universally reasonably accepted and used approaches. It is recognised that though democracy has become a buzz concept in contemporary conflict resolution practices, it also takes with it some endogenous applications to make it more appealing, acceptable and usable.

Endogenous conflict resolution knowledge is commonly understood as a practice of societal creation carried out by a community that interrelates on the basis of a communal world view (Mathez-Stiefel et al. 2007). Over the past decades indigenous communities have experienced an upsurge of political organisations within and across the board. These organisations have confirmed, incorporated, and organised around their indigenous identity demanding amongst other issues, the right to territorial independence, respect for customary law and the freedom to practice endogenous conflict resolution practices for their development (Jelin and Hershberg 1996). However, in their demands, there has been a serious need to recognise peoples' rights. It has therefore been the attempt

to fuse traditional practices with the recognition of people's rights that this study seeks to explore the feasibility.

To clearly explore the compatibility of such a mammoth task, it is necessary to seek to relate human rights, critical thinking, organic skills acquisition, ideology, values and cooperation as they are understood and applied by the communities under study. There is a critical relationship in all the cited concepts in as far as endogenous conflict resolution in modern democracies is concerned (Haverkort et al. 2003).

Human rights

The application of some traditional practices in modern systems of governance has often clashed with principles and values by various ethnic communities. This is against the background that human rights are not viewed and measured using the same lenses the world over. What is viewed as noble in one community maybe considered outcast in another. This is mainly influenced by socio-cultural and religious backgrounds (Jelin and Hershberg 1996). Typical cases include practices of circumcision and female genital mutilation which are practiced by the Tshangani people in Zimbabwe and the former practice also followed by the Lemba people in Zimbabwe while the practices are no longer acceptable for health reasons (Dodo 2015).

Critical thinking

Critical thinking is an old concept in Zimbabwe if not in most traditional African societies. It is a skill by a person to formally or informally apply logic in life experiences with a view to developing a 'critical consciousness'. It is a skill to diagnose invalid forms of arguments. It is about identifying defective arguments, contentions deficient of evidence, hurried generalizations, truth claims created by unreliable authority, and abstruse concepts amongst others. This skill has always been in most traditional African societies though at a very low magnitude. According to Laitin (1986) the application of some of the traditional practices in modern democracies lacks serious thinking especially

with regards to necessity, relevance and sensitivity of some aspects to the prevailing circumstances.

In critical thinking, there has to be critical consumers to take the arguments. However, because there were less critical consumers in most traditional societies, critical thinking was not developed into a formal institution. Therefore, attempts to take it on-board may result in serious but necessary clashes.

Critical thinking requires education; formal or informal. The education system that was in most traditional societies in Africa and in Zimbabwe in particular was to some extent inferior and limited in scope. It lacked depth and rigour (Williams Commission, 1989). Modern democracy requires this skill unfortunately. It is a saddening fact that most of the traditional African societies failed to see the world through critical lenses hence their failure to realize that their type of clothing was improper and that data storage and retention was poor and unsustainable amongst others. Lack of effective critical thinking has been embraced as part of most traditional African cultures. Ultimately this has seen most Africans living docile lives thus allowing political leaders to do as they please when it comes to leadership, constitutionalism and other democratic practices.

Organic Skills' Acquisition

There are various ways through which ancient Africans transmitted down knowledge and wisdom for future use. One of the most common means was what the study calls 'organic acquisition' of essential knowledge. This is the type of learning that developed gradually and rather naturally, as a result of various interactions and exchanges (Horowitz 1985; Millar et al. 2006). Unfortunately, it lacks a clear agenda required in contemporary democracy where learners' rights and knowledge content are measurable and defined.

In the olden African societies, knowledge was transmitted through oral means in ways that did not guarantee record and consistency in application. The processes that were followed in some cases created social conflicts and discord so much so that as civilisation and modernity moved in, they could not embrace all and sundry; there was serious sieving of practices.

Ideology

There are numerous foundations for people's philosophies; the effect of parents and friends, the media, traditional village practices, government, religious practices, schools, books, observations, and own thought processes (Rugege 2002; Haverkort 2003; Mathez-Stiefel et al. 2007). Not all these sources are similarly decent, nor is any of them moral all the time. Some of the people create most of their beliefs without ever intentionally attending to the fact that they have assimilated a belief. This is the challenge with most endogenous conflict resolution approaches. They lack an agenda to please the majority of the people's needs socially, politically and economically (Haverkort 2003; Mathez-Stiefel et al. 2007). Such uncritical ideologies can be risky, for they subjugate people to the manipulation and abuse of other persons and establishments.

Values

Values are culture specific and therefore, what modern democracy defines as values does not serve the purpose that traditional community values do serve. In modern democracy's eyes, values include formal education, respect for people's rights, honesty, transparency and equality amongst others while in the eyes of the traditional communities; values are characterised as collectivism, humanity, and religious, inequality and hardworking amongst others (Millar 2006). Therefore, it is such differences in perception and definitions that conflicts emanate leading to various other challenges related to the compatibility of endogenous conflict resolution practices in modern democracy.

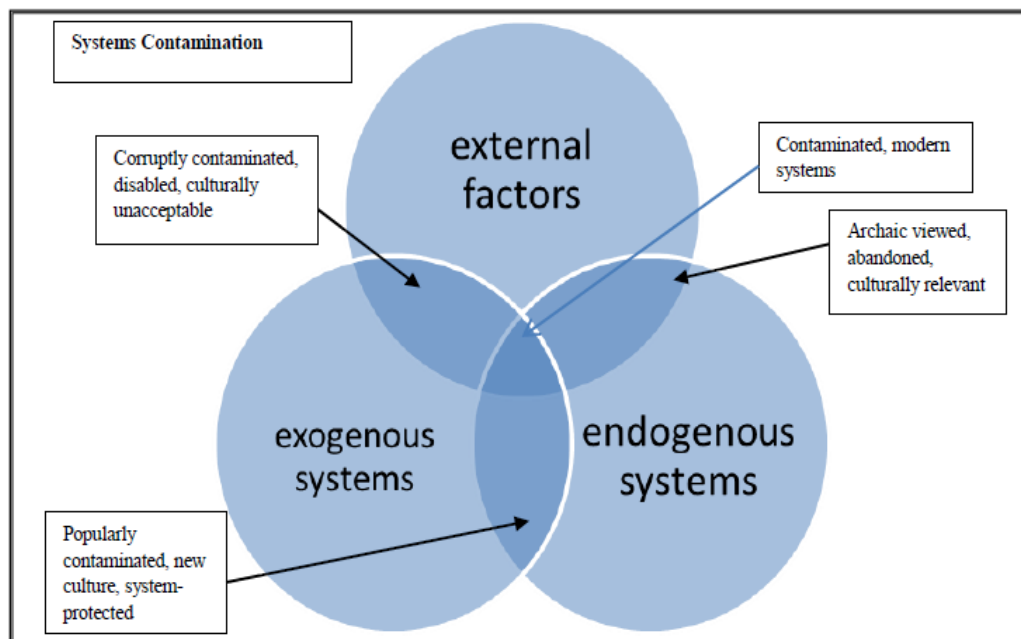
Cooperation

In most traditional societies, cooperation has been the corner stone of most successful programmes and government systems (Montagu 1965). It requires that various efforts and synergies be brought together towards a single objective. One of the philosophies of cooperation in traditional societies especially with regards to conflict

resolution was the principle of heterogeneity. This meant calling every community stakeholder and stockholder to participate in all initiatives around resolving conflicts using traditional practices (Roger and Johnson 2002). However, in the modern day democracy, such collective approaches are facing condemnation. There has been various coalition governments meant to end conflicts by accommodating losers in elections. Ideal democracy does not encourage coalitions as it discourages the spirit of competition.

Conceptual framework of compatibility of endogenous conflict resolution practices in modern democracies

The study argues that endogenous conflict resolution systems have worked since time immemorial. It however seeks to establish the degree of its workability in a modern democracy recognising all the features like human rights, freedoms, and acceptance while retaining basic and relevant cultural elements.



Systems Contamination
(Source: Author)

The conceptual framework contends that compatibility of endogenous conflict resolution practices with modern democracies is dependent on the relationship shared by the three variables; external factors (language, time, environment), endogenous systems (local culture, indigenous beliefs, pride) and exogenous systems (foreign culture, language). It is observed that the interaction between external and exogenous systems often leads to corruptly contaminated, disabled and culturally unacceptable practices and results while that between exogenous and endogenous results in popularly contaminated, new culture and system-protected outcomes and practices. The former outcome is a result of the fact that both external and exogenous systems are not known by locals, are culturally unacceptable and difficult to assimilate. Interaction between endogenous and exogenous practices often leads to the neutralization and dissolution of the former owing to the massive influence of globalisation, modernity and religious effects. However, because it is protected by some system-built shocks, it endures all the pressures leading to the creation of a new culture. The relationship between endogenous and external systems also leads to archaic viewed, abandoned, culturally relevant systems. Meanwhile, contact between endogenous and external systems often creates confusion as the latter is little known and acceptable while endogenous though effective, may be viewed as inferior and backward. However there is creation of an archaic but culturally relevant conflict resolution practice.

The interaction of the three variables often creates contaminated modern systems which though acceptable, maybe ineffective. However, owing to lack of better options, most democracies have opted for an approach that integrates the three; external, endogenous and exogenous systems. What has been experienced over time is that a hybrid form of conflict resolution system has developed and subsequently embraced largely for its use of the three different practices. However, it has also been noted that it has faced resistance from various stakeholders at different points because of the ‘inappropriateness’ and ‘*alienness*’ of some of the fused practices. This, to some extent, explains why most of the conflict resolution initiatives have failed over the years.

Conclusion

The study, having looked at various aspects surrounding modern democracy and endogenous conflict resolution, has identified a variety of contradicting conclusions. First and foremost, neo-traditionalists argue that endogenous conflict resolution practices are compatible with modern democracy. These adopt an *essentialist* approach which values what they regard essential in their traditional society to be carried forward and passed on to younger generations.

The study concludes that traditional systems are significant in providing ethical and practical basis for decision making in conflict resolution within democratic situations. Therefore, they need to be fused into democratic systems. It also observes that democracy takes with it some endogenous applications and concepts to make it more appealing, acceptable and usable. Some of the concepts include; human rights, critical thinking, organic skills acquisition, ideology, values and cooperation.

The study makes a conclusion that the compatibility of endogenous conflict resolution practices with modern democracies is dependent on the relationship shared by the three variables; external factors, endogenous systems and exogenous systems. It is also noted that the interaction of the three variables often creates contaminated, modern systems which though acceptable, may be ineffective. It is concluded that while endogenous approaches to conflict resolution have worked effectively for years, they have their peculiar challenges; inefficiency and production of unsustainable solutions and clashes with contemporary expectations of democracy and human rights.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest

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