

Appreciating Traditional Forms of Healing Conflict in Africa and the World

By Linda James Myers and David H. Shinn

Traditional African methods of healing and ways of coping with conflict have much in common, even when it comes to acceptance in the western world. Most westerners approach both concepts with great skepticism. Many western-educated Africans have also retreated from traditional concepts of conflict resolution in favor of solutions offered by formal court systems, binding arbitration, official sanctions, and western-style mediation. Some critics go so far as to suggest that traditional African conflict resolution systems are barbaric and have no place in the modern world. This essay examines the effectiveness of these underappreciated traditional norms within the context of different worldviews and the framework of an optimal psychology. Emphasis will be placed on the ways in which traditional strategies can be better understood and appreciated within this culturally congruent framework, which places the highest importance on values for truth, justice, peace, harmony, order, balance, reciprocity, and sustainability.

The key components of five strategies will be discussed: *Gacaca* in Rwanda; *michu* and *luba basa* in Ethiopia; *mato oput* in Uganda; the Akobo Peace Conference in Sudan; and one of the world's most successful traditional peace conferences following Somaliland's declaration of independence from Somalia in 1991. These examples of successful traditional conflict resolution processes are provided by Professor David H. Shinn, who served for thirty-seven years in the United States Foreign Service and was stationed at embassies in Kenya, Tanzania, Mauritania, Cameroon, and Sudan and as ambassador to Burkina Faso and Ethiopia (Shinn, 2005). The aim of this piece is to illuminate the notable commonalities among people acknowledging African descent on the continent and throughout the diaspora in their pursuit of justice, providing an Afrocentric analysis of cosmopolitanism based on optimal theory.

The normal binary of traditional methods versus those imported from the west for providing more effective strategies to resolve conflict will be expanded to include consideration of the role of a cultural worldview (Myers, 2008). Within this consideration is awareness that trust in traditional strategies, cultural strengths, and effectiveness can be obstructed by the larger colonial and neocolonial historical context of psychological oppression and the reality of control, subjugation, and dehumanization constructed and imposed on those acknowledging African descent. Other factors to be considered include the nature of the violence perpetrated and whether it is personal or impersonal. The ways in which traditional means to mitigate or resolve conflict, analyzed in light of the theory of optimal psychology, will add to the sympathy and empathy of cosmopolitanism, which is the hallmark for universal understanding described by Appiah (2006) as the legacy of Black Studies, the third-level criteria of insight derived from classical African civilization.

Overview of Traditional Interventions and Challenges

It is time to acknowledge that on a modest scale and in certain circumstances traditional forms of healing conflict may work better than western practices. Modern conflicts in the Horn of Africa often challenge the authority on which these relations depend. Only acknowledgement of this situation and a concerted effort by elected and appointed political leaders and international groups interested in reconciliation can bring traditional authorities effectively into the process. However, in order to do so, insight into the way in which designs for living and the

patterns of interpreting how reality shapes experiences, values, and expectations would be helpful. Traditional conflict resolution practices reflect principles of reconciliation based on long-standing relationships and values. They tend to be effective in addressing intra-community and even inter-community conflict, where relationships and shared values are part of the reconciliation process (Trujillio et al., 2008). Traditional mechanisms are rooted in the culture and history of the African people. They emphasize group unity, reconciliation of individuals or groups, and peaceful reintegration into the community. Traditional techniques place the interest of the group above that of the individual. They assume that all parties are interested in and affected by the conflict. The goal is to reconcile the parties to the conflict so that there is a return to social harmony—the goal of cosmopolitanism.

Chiefs, village mediators, tribal elders, community leaders, clan leaders, mobilized women, and local religious figures are well placed to ameliorate certain aspects of larger conflicts. Elders function as a court with broad and flexible powers to interpret evidence, impose judgments, and manage reconciliation. Traditional leaders use their position of moral strength to find an acceptable solution. Councils of elders and chiefs usually seek resolution through consensus. The solution often involves forgiveness and compensation. Women and traditional religious figures play a unique role in the reconciliation process in some societies. Their very place in society puts them in a strong position to encourage dialogue between feuding parties.

African leaders and the international community are struggling with such issues as bringing justice to the victims of genocide in Rwanda, implementing the peace agreement between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army and the government of Sudan, ending attacks against the Ugandan government and society by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and helping Somalia to reestablish a national government. As they confront these challenges, they need to consider a more significant role for traditional African conflict resolution, which continues to be a useful supplement to western ways of solving today's conflicts on the continent. Male domination is an important feature in most societies in the Horn of Africa. Slowly, however, women are being empowered in both the development of their respective countries and at the traditional level. In Ethiopia in the late 1990s, it was not unusual to encounter women who served as elders. The 2003 Ngok of Abyei People's Conference in Sudan committed to the full emancipation of women in decision making. Women's groups were responsible for many of the initiatives resulting from an innovative committee established to deal with conflicts along the Kenya-Somalia border. Women are now a majority in the Rwandan parliament. As a general rule, women are more dedicated to peace than men, but exceptions do occur on occasion.

Significant conflict in the Horn of Africa continues at a time when traditional authorities are losing power to elected and appointed officials and others who wield authority through the barrel of a gun. This is occurring, for example, in northern Uganda. Traditional institutions known as *maglis* among the Beja people in eastern Sudan emphasize truce making and compliance mechanisms. Although they continue to curtail violent conflict, they are losing some of their status. Traditional mediation mechanisms, called *agaweed*, in Darfur have been undermined by fundamental social change in western Sudan. Central government authorities have relegated these institutions to minor roles or even bypassed them entirely. Similar erosion of traditional institutions has occurred in southern Sudan. Local and traditional leaders normally cannot end conflict themselves, but they can make an important contribution towards a wider peace.

Locally-based, traditional solutions simply cannot end a problem the magnitude of Darfur, ensure successful implementation of the peace agreement between northerners and southerners in Sudan, put an end to the LRA, or guarantee Somali acceptance of a new national government. But all of these disputes have many facets, some of which do lend themselves to traditional reconciliation. Though it is important to continue trying to solve these problems at the international or national level using international, regional, and state institutions, it is equally important to identify those components that can be dealt with more successfully at the local level. It is also critical that these efforts receive continuing support and adequate funding. In the long run, they may well cost less than the typical conference or peace talks held at a four-star hotel in a regional capital. They would also engage more people at the grassroots level and reach a greater consensus on a solution.

The bias against these mechanisms in the so-called modern/postmodern world can be seen as the outcome of the cultural and intellectual imperialism imposed as a condition of colonial and neocolonial rule in Africa. Among the sons and daughters of Africans enslaved and brought to the Americas, a similar outcome has been observed as the consequence of having endured centuries of cultural and psychological oppression, which is still maintained. A post-colonial period can never be reached until the nature of this hegemonic cultural worldview is fully examined and competing, alternative cultural mindsets are investigated for their strengths, particularly those representing the best of the African tradition of wisdom and deep thought. Myers (1982, 1993) has undertaken such an examination from a psychological vantage point.

The theory of optimal psychology posits that cultural worldview informs the designs for living and patterns of interpreting reality for a people, becoming the powerful medium, conceptual lens, or system by which consciousness is structured to create reality (Myers, 1988, 1993). Optimal designs for living and patterns of interpreting reality for a just, sacred, and sustainable world are holistic and integrative rather than fragmented and discontinuous. They place the highest value on peace, justice, truth, reciprocity, righteousness, harmony, order, and balance rather than acquisition of material wealth. By acknowledging and embracing the unity of all humankind, nature, community, and past and future generations, the connection to the Source of Life is assumed, as is intrinsic worth.

On the other hand, when a cultural worldview's conceptual system is primed with assumptions that limit reality to what the five senses perceive, forces external to an individual can easily be manipulated to define human identity and worth. For example, external characteristics, such as physical appearance, income, position, and education become the basis for measuring human worth. Such externalization not only fosters a sense of insecurity, fearfulness, and alienation, not to mention unbridled materialism, individualism, and competition, but it predisposes individuals to anxiety, depression, addictions, and violence. It also results in the systematic privileging of certain individuals and groups over others by virtue of race, gender, and class (Myers, 1993, 2003, 2006, 2009). This suboptimal mindset emerges as the prevailing western cultural worldview, particularly notable in encounters with people of color, providing fertile ground for fomenting unprecedented levels of aggression, legitimizing the enslavement of African people as chattel, and the colonization of native lands. People of African descent have also embraced a suboptimal worldview, as noted among Africans who have collaborated with Europeans in the enslavement of other Africans. However, it has not been so pervasive as to characterize the deep structure of African cultural traditions. A cultural worldview with greater moral reach, spiritual enlightenment, and emphasis on peace, justice, and sustainability is needed. Movement toward a more just, sacred, sustainable world is dependent on

the adoption of a more holistic and integrative cultural worldview compared to the one favored by former colonizers.

When considering traditional African methods for reconciling disputes and conflict in Africa, it is important to keep in mind how they are constrained by a history of colonization and to understand that the current global context is complex and interwoven. The notion of modernization is steeped in the cultural and intellectual imperialism of westernization and colonization and built on the forced labor of enslaved Africans. It should come as no surprise that western-educated African elites are generally reluctant to adopt traditional techniques, having assimilated the western cultural worldview that these practices are quaint or lack so-called empirical qualities. Their adopted worldviews prevent appreciation of traditional strengths. Perhaps even more important, modern elites must yield some of their political power over the issue to those far less educated. They are not willing to do this lightly. Given the nature of the western cultural worldview into which they have been socialized, this group would be deemed inferior.

On another level, westernization has imported and escalated impersonal conflict; the more impersonal the conflict, the harder it is to employ traditional forms of reconciliation. Villages burned by unknown assailants, persons killed by bombing from airplanes, and even death inflicted at the range of an automatic weapon are examples of impersonal conflict. The victim may never see the attacker. Traditional leaders on both sides of the problem find it more difficult to reach an understanding in bringing this kind of mayhem to an end, assessing blame, and determining appropriate compensation. Further, the larger the scale of the conflict, the less opportunity there is for traditional efforts alone to succeed in ending the problem. Despite these obstacles, examination of the key components of traditional practices and their place within optimal psychology's model of cosmopolitanism is warranted. Five examples of traditional methods will be discussed and then followed by a section that situates the key components within a framework of optimal theory.

The *Gacaca* Process in Rwanda

The aftermath of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda offers an interesting comparison of modern and traditional techniques for achieving some element of justice for the 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu killed during this wave of violence. Three processes have been created to deal with the many thousands of Rwandans believed to have committed acts of genocide. In 1996 the United Nations established the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania, to prosecute those who planned, organized, instigated, and supervised the genocide. The formal court system in Rwanda began indicting some 120,000 jailed suspects who were believed to have committed attacks against persons, were accomplices in such attacks, and/or committed property crimes. Many of the accused had no formal charges leveled against them and languished for years in dangerously overcrowded prisons. By 2002, the regular judicial system had tried less than 7,000 suspects, and the Rwandan government concluded it could only handle such large numbers of prisoners by reviving the traditional court system known as *gacaca*, named for the type of grass common to this part of Africa. Rwandan villagers traditionally gathered on patches of this grass to resolve conflicts between families, with household heads acting as judges (Shinn, 2005).

Like most traditional African justice systems, *gacaca* operates on collective principles; the individual has no rights or duties other than within his or her group. Reconciliation,

understood in Rwandan society to mean “to mend ourselves,” is central to *gacaca*. The idea is to hold the offender accountable and require him or her to make amends for the wrongs he or she has committed. *Gacaca* also created a forum for debate of the crimes; it does not rely just on punishing the accused (Rusagara, 2010).

The government set a goal of trying more than 100,000 persons under the *gacaca* system. It created more than 12,000 *gacaca* courts and divided hearings into a pre-trial investigation phase and the actual trial. This process aims to bring conflicts into the open, involve the entire community in resolving it, provide compensation, and reintroduce offenders to the community. Rwandans elected approximately 225,000 *inyangamugayo*, or persons of integrity, to act as judges of the *gacaca* courts (Rusagara, 2010).

Under the *gacaca* system prisoners are taken to their hometowns or villages, where local residents are invited to assemble, often in an open field, and give evidence against the accused. Local elected judges, few of whom have any formal legal education, receive six days of training in law, conflict resolution, and judicial ethics. These judges render the final verdict after hearing evidence from people in the local community. Suspects who plead guilty receive reduced sentences.

Stripped to its essential elements, the *gacaca* process may appear simple, but is far from ideal. Villagers and judges are closely linked to the genocide, which tests the limits of fairness. Some villagers are reluctant to offer evidence for fear of retribution. On occasion, local businessmen held secret meetings prior to a *gacaca* hearing aimed at intimidating potential witnesses. There have even been a few cases in which witnesses were killed. As years pass, it becomes more difficult to recall true events accurately. Despite the system’s limitations, however, there exists an element of justice that is difficult to achieve in a timely manner in the formal court system (Shinn, 2005).

The system looked at the cases of some 400,000 suspected perpetrators. As of the end of 2009, more than 94,000 convicted suspects have worked in some form of a community service program. Nearly every Rwandan adult has participated in *gacaca* as a witness, defendant, or audience member at a hearing. The vast majority of those convicted of genocide crimes have either had their sentences commuted to community service or, if they were imprisoned, have been reintegrated into their communities (Clark, 2010). Some 1,500 cases have yet to be resolved, and the *gacaca* process was slated to end in June 2010. Two members of parliament resigned after information emerged that they played a role in the genocide, and parliament demanded that its speaker appear before a *gacaca* court to give testimony on what he knew.

Phil Clark at Oxford concludes that *gacaca* has two major successes and two long-term challenges. It is remarkably successful at expediting the justice process and providing accountability in a timely manner for those accused of a crime. *Gacaca* is important for uncovering truth in the form of legal facts regarding genocide and allows therapeutic truth by allowing individuals to tell and hear personal narratives of the genocide. On the other hand, many survivors conclude that the punishment, especially community service, is too lenient. *Gacaca* also generates truth-related problems. Listening to repeated, highly emotive testimonies results in increased trauma and psychological problems. Clark argues that it is essential to bear in mind both *gacaca*’s successes and shortcomings (Clark, 2010).

Rwanda’s pre-1994 judicial system was comprised of 758 judges and 70 prosecutors, many of whom perished in the genocide. Others had participated in the genocide and fled the country for fear of prosecution. By November 1994, there were only 244 judges, 12 prosecutors, and 137 support staff left in Rwanda. This system was clearly inadequate for the job. Between

1996 and 2006, the Rwandan courts prosecuted only about 10,000 criminal suspects (Rusagara, 2010).

As of May 2008, the U.N.'s International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) arrested a total of 75 people and had completed 35 cases. These included a former prime minister, 11 former cabinet ministers, 13 senior military officers, 16 high-ranking government administrators, 5 religious leaders, and a number of other government officials and businessmen. The ICTR has had some important successes, but it moves slowly, has proven to be excessively expensive, and fails to function effectively within Rwandan custom (Rusagara, 2010).

Mechanisms in Western Ethiopia

The Gumuz people predominate in the Metekkel area of western Ethiopia next to the Sudan border. In this isolated part of Ethiopia, neighboring Amhara and Oromo peoples have moved into Metekkel over the years, resulting in disputes over land and resources. As a consequence, a mechanism known as *michu*, or friendship, developed to resolve ethnic conflicts and to create an environment of tolerance and mutual coexistence. The conflicting parties invoke *michu* when serious problems arise. It establishes the free movement of people and is used by all the inhabitants of the region. Ethnic groups living in Metekkel prefer to entrust their differences to the *michu* mechanism than to a government court. To this day *michu* plays an important role in preventing conflicts in the region. It is not a substitute for established legal systems but stands as a creative complement to them (Tsega, 2002).

Neighboring Oromo developed a similar concept known as *luba basa*, literally, "to set free." As the Oromo migrated into territory occupied by other ethnic groups, they created *luba basa* as a traditional system to reduce conflict. The Oromo considered the non-Oromo groups castes and treated them as inferiors, sometimes harshly, until they assimilated through the *luba basa* institution. *Luba basa* "set them free" so that they could become equals to the Oromo. *Luba basa* rituals vary from place to place. One common practice involves mixing the blood of conflicting parties and breaking a bone, a symbolic gesture signifying that old conflicts are broken and new friendships formed. They then pledge an oath not to fight each other. In some cases, *luba basa* even resulted in ethnic integration (Tsega, 2004).

Confronting the Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda

The conflict involving the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda lends itself to traditional methods of reconciliation. Joseph Kony began a rebellion in 1987 that is steeped in apocalyptic spiritualism. He uses fear, violence, and the abduction of children to maintain control within the LRA and sustain the conflict. He draws support from some real grievances experienced by the Acholi people, a legacy of violent politics in Uganda, and deep-rooted divisions between northern and southern Uganda. With the exception of Kony's opposition to the Ugandan government, the political agenda of the LRA is unclear. Since its inception, the LRA has kidnapped between 20,000 and 25,000 children to serve as soldiers, some of whom are now LRA commanders, killed thousands of civilians, and displaced more than 1.4 million people. An estimated 90 percent of current LRA commanders are former abductees and, therefore, both victims and perpetrators of violence. Kony uses spiritual and Biblical revelations to manipulate people and claims that he has been sent by God to save the Acholi people. The

best efforts of the Ugandan defense forces have been unable to capture him or put an end to his rebellion (Shinn, 2005).

The Ugandan government, cultural and religious leaders, and the Northern Uganda Peace Initiative organized a Reconciliation Stakeholders Conference last December in northern Uganda as part of an ongoing effort to end the conflict. Conference participants included elders and religious and traditional leaders from the Acholi sub-region. The stakeholders acknowledged the importance of the traditional Acholi reconciliation ceremony of *mato oput*, literally, “drinking a bitter herb,” as one way to help end conflict. After taking a drink made from the *oput* tree, the guilty party repents, asks for forgiveness, pays a fine, and is reconciled with the victim’s family. The ceremony usually takes place in an isolated area or at the bank of a river to chase away hatred and revenge. Acholi society does not believe in capital punishment. If an Acholi kills another Acholi, the usual solution to achieving reconciliation is to pay compensation determined by a local court under the supervision of a chief. Once compensation has been paid, the parties to the dispute are never to raise the issue again. Traditional authorities believe that this form of cleansing can be used to reassimilate abducted children, some of whom are now LRA commanders. Uganda’s Amnesty Law, passed in 2000, provides a solid legal basis for this approach (Reconciliation Stakeholders Conference Report, 2004).

Traditional Conflict Resolution Methods in Southern Sudan

The war between the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) and the central government in Khartoum dates back to 1983. After more than two years of formal negotiations, the two sides signed a comprehensive peace agreement on January 9, 2005. The difficult part—implementing an agreement—is well underway. This complicated agreement faces numerous challenges, especially in southern Sudan and the north-south border area that would benefit from traditional reconciliation efforts. Long-standing conflicts over grazing lands, water sources, and cattle rustling have been exacerbated by the easy availability of small arms, militarization of civilian populations, displacement of local people, and the breakdown of traditional methods of conflict resolution. During a mass rally in southern Sudan, now-deceased SPLA leader John Garang acknowledged the importance of traditional conflict resolution methods when he called for all stolen cattle to be returned to their owners and lives lost compensated according to customary law (Shinn, 2005).

There have been numerous examples of locally-based efforts to end conflict in southern Sudan. The Akobo Peace Conference in 1994, for example, lasted for more than a month and involved some 2,000 delegates and observers in an effort to end intra-tribal fighting between the Jikany and Luo members of the Nuer tribe. Presided over by a chief, it relied on ad hoc committees, traditional courts, an open discussion forum, a technical committee for making recommendations, and a secretariat. Disputes over pastures, land, and water had led to violence between these groups. Nuer women served as effective witnesses and acted as informal truth commissions during the deliberations. They shouted down any man whose testimony contained false statements. The shame of their response caused a number of the men to revise their testimony so as not to be branded as liars. Ten Luo and twelve Jikany chiefs eventually signed an agreement on sharing water, grazing lands, and fishing areas. In a ritual conducted to demonstrate divine support, they sealed the agreement with the sacrifice of two bulls (Kiplagat, 1998).

Dealing with Conflict in Somalia

Somalia offers a veritable laboratory for traditional methods of reconciliation. A failed state since 1991, the resurgence of clan politics led to new conflicts that revived traditional mechanisms for resolving them. Nearly all of the numerous Somali peace conferences focused on political faction leaders meeting at expensive hotels in cities outside the country. Most of them ignored tried and true traditional Somali techniques for resolving disputes. Perhaps due to the relative lack of success of the larger and more formal conferences, lineage elders, who lead smaller units within the clan, have returned to prominence. The heads of lineage groups, or *akils*, have reestablished their mediating authority and stepped into a vacuum left by the collapse of the national government. In certain locations such as Mogadishu, *sharia*, or Islamic courts, often maligned in the west, have played a similar role. Somalis have well-established procedures under councils of elders or *guurti* for dealing with contentious issues. Through this process, elders often can arbitrate procedural problems and help formulate a consensus among the clans. Somalis have achieved numerous agreements to end fighting at the local level through these peace conferences. They rarely come to international attention, however, because media focus on the fact that Somalia has yet to reestablish a national government in Mogadishu and has failed to end the conflict (Shinn, 2005).

One of the most successful traditional peace conferences took place in Somaliland, which declared its independence from Somalia in 1991. Somali elders met at Borama for five months in 1993 to address a variety of concerns in Somaliland. The Borama conference created a national security framework, an interim constitutional structure, and a peaceful change of government. Although fighting broke out again late in 1994, another conference based on traditional structures reestablished a shaky peace between two different parts of Somaliland. Borama was successful because a series of local clan meetings preceded the conference, clan elders initiated and conducted the meetings, and the conference took place in the vicinity of the conflict rather than at an expensive hotel hundreds of miles away. It had community support and ownership and received some international financial assistance. It also benefited from common goals and legitimate representation and was not rushed by outside pressures (Farah and Lewis, 1997).

Framework for Appreciating Traditional Strategies

The challenge facing Africana and Black psychologists in producing psychological knowledge is the larger social, now global, context in which a cultural and intellectual imperialism, which has historically denigrated traditional African knowledge and practices, has prevailed for centuries. As Fanon (1952, 2008) so aptly questioned, should one postulate a type of human reality and describe its psychic modalities only through deviation from it, or should one strive unremittingly for a concrete and new understanding of man? The theory of optimal psychology proposes to face that challenge by seeking the best of humanity from its earliest teachings, with designs for living that value peace, truth, reciprocity, righteousness, harmony, order, balance, and patterns of interpreting reality that are holistic and integrative. The placement of people of African descent at the center of human process and activity, treating them as sacred authorities rather than inferior people with a deficient cultural heritage, is complicated by a history of cultural and intellectual imperialism mired in the practices of chattel enslavement and colonization.

From this greed and penchant for building individual material wealth, racism emerges as a tool for wielding oppression. Dr. Camara Jones (2009) and her research team at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have defined racism as a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one appears, which unfairly advantages some individuals and communities and disadvantages others, undermining the strength of society through the waste of human resources. Such a vast, multi-national system was created to support the power and control of a wealthy elite. Jones specifies the social interpretation of appearance or race and identifies three levels of racism: institutional racism, personally mediated racism, and internalized racism. Optimal theory expands that definition to suggest that racism often extends beyond appearances along the lines of other human diversity markers (e.g., race, gender, class).

Racism wields differing levels of rigor and harshness in structuring opportunity and assigning value based on social interpretation, and the definition is applicable throughout the African diaspora and the African continent. The experience of non-immigrant Africans in the Americas and throughout the diaspora as they have confronted the historical realities of chattel enslavement, and those Africans on the continent as they have experienced colonization, makes necessary the precondition of interrogating, gaining insight into, and transforming the prevailing western cultural worldview better to meet the needs of a humanity on the brink of destruction. By adopting the fragmenting, suboptimal designs for living and patterns of interpreting reality, unsustainable lifestyles, pollution, natural resource depletion, and conflict are created. A trail of greed, oppression, and exploitation can be readily identified as beginning with the enslavement of millions of Africans and the colonization of their lands by western nations, followed by conflicts in more contemporary times. Antidotes to resolving and preventing conflicts can be enhanced by identifying the strengths of a competing, more optimal cultural worldview that adds insight as a key to cosmopolitanism.

Characteristics from each of the five examples discussed illuminate a belief system constructed from assumptions and values different from those seen in western attempts at justice. The designs for living reflect the importance of the collective and have been observed as a generalized ethos documented in early research on cultural ideology and helping systems in traditional African cultures across the continent (James, 1974). By viewing deviance as symptomatic and reflective of collective dysfunction, not solely the individual acting out, the intent is to manage deviance through the reintegration of the guilty party and imbue the perpetrator with a sense of obligation and responsibility into the group.

In the face of conflict we are instructed by people living in Metekkel to accept *michu*, or friendship, encouraging tolerance and mutual coexistence. From the Oromo we are taught *luba basa*, or to set free, allowing those we have relegated to a lower caste to be our equal. From the Acholi we are instructed to engage in the *mato oput* process of drinking a bitter herb, through which the guilty party is required to repent, ask for forgiveness, pay a fine, and then allowed to be reconciled with the victim's family. The Akobo instruct us on the invaluable role of women in peace processes, acting as informal truth commissions by serving as effective witnesses and speaking out against false testimony. We also are instructed to engage in rituals to remind us of a spiritual component as we seek divine support to seal the agreement with some form of sacrifice, which in modern/postmodern times could equally take many forms of ceding something prized for the greater good of the community. From the traditional peace conferences in Somaliland, we learn the imperative of self-determination achieved through a series of meetings supported and owned by a community and initiated and conducted by respected elders in the vicinity of the

conflict. The key to self-determination is not succumbing to outside pressures without the benefit of common goals and legitimate representation.

Each of these strategies reflects an optimal cultural worldview at work: acknowledging the value of friendship; encouraging tolerance and mutual coexistence; setting (hostilities) free; allowing those relegated to a lower caste to be treated as equals; requiring the guilty party to repent, ask for forgiveness, and pay amends or reparations in order to be reconciled with the victim's family; accepting the invaluable role of women in peace processes; engaging in rituals as a reminder of a spiritual component; and promoting self-determination, backed by common goals and legitimate representation. All human conflict could benefit from such wise traditions as they contribute to improved, harmonious social conditions and relations and increased cosmopolitanism (Appiah, 2006).

The theory of optimal psychology suggests that in terms of fostering harmonious human relations, while sympathy is good, empathy is better. However, the recognition of the intrinsic value of life and the divinity of each and all and the capacity to engage logic beyond duality provide the sustainability needed for a just and sacred world. The efficacy of such instructions is based on the psychological analysis of cultural worldviews and their outcomes. They are informed by lessons from the teachings of sacred ancient texts and knowledge across cultural groups and the experiences and lessons learned by nonimmigrant African Americans, whose cultural identification is more in line with the values and beliefs of Native Americans, who have continued to respect, honor, and revere their ancestors and their teachings and cultural worldview (Myers, 2003).

Although it is important to continue to try to solve conflict using international, regional, and state institutions, it is equally important to identify those pieces of the conflict that can be dealt with more successfully using traditional techniques. It is also critical that these efforts receive support and adequate funding. In the long run, they may cost less than typical peace processes held at four-star hotels or international criminal tribunals established in regional capitals. They also engage more people at the grassroots level and improve the chances of a consensual solution. As in the case of African traditional medicine, there are some traditional conflict reconciliation concepts that merit acceptance and encouragement. There is room for both modern and traditional ways to mitigate or resolve conflict. In some cases, the traditional systems are more effective than those imported from the west if for no other reason than the people are willing to put greater trust in them, given their own history and cultural worldview.

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