

## **Resurgence of Traditional Institutions of Governance: Imperative for State-Building in Africa**

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### **Abstract**

*The question of the rights-based institutions of governance capable of facilitating the consolidation of state-building and democratic governance in Africa remains critical as most African countries continue to experience widespread disintegration of their institutions of governance despite the demise of colonialism and autocracy in the continent. While some scholars argue for selective application of some traditional African political models of governance as solution to African deepening crises, others however doubt the relevance of such models in the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands of governance. By examining the traditional African system of state legitimacy and civil obedience, this paper argue that though the viability of institutions cannot be necessarily determined by whether they are imported or indigenous, the present African political and economic crisis is unlikely to be reversed under the existing mostly contradictory duality of institutions. It recommends among others, a dynamic interplay and harmonization of Africa's cultural ideological heritage and the agencies of the modern state.*

**Key words:** Africa, traditional, institutions, governance, state-building

### **INTRODUCTION**

Most countries in Africa are characterized by economic and political disintegration despite the euphoria over the demise of colonization and autocracy in the continent. Several decades after independence, Most African postcolonial states continue to experience widespread ethnic and civil conflicts, poverty, corruption, civil disobedience, frequent electoral and post-electoral strife and fragmentation of various aspects of their institutions of governance. The contemporary African state is not able to guarantee its citizens adequate security while basic necessities of life

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have eluded its people. Despite that the continent is rich in gold, petroleum, uranium, diamonds and other valuable mineral resources; its political economy is in shamble with most countries in the continent among the poorest in the world. The virtual anarchy in many parts of Africa today is an indication of the failure of the post-colonial state in Africa. Most of these countries essentially imitate western political institutions, while the overwhelming rural populations often alienated from the state continue to stick principally to traditional socio-political institutions as a parallel system of governance. This thus create a dualistic form of institutions of governance that are positioned back-to-back, each one behind the other and facing in opposite directions. The fragmentation of the institutions of governance continues to contribute to crisis of state-building, governance, and economic development in Africa. Despite modest progress in some countries, the post-colonial State of Africa has been unable to establish rights-based political and economic systems of governance that would facilitate consolidation of state-building and promote economic development.

Scholars have viewed this as to a large extent, a result of Africans' detachment from the institutional and cultural values of its constituency. The issue of what values and rights-based political and economic institutions and systems of governance that would facilitate the consolidation of state-building, democratic governance and promote economic development in Africa therefore, remains critical. While some scholars of African political thought argue for selective application of traditional African political models and system of governance which was distorted by the colonial administration as the solution to the myriad of crisis ravaging the continent, others however doubt the relevance and applicability of such models in the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands of governance. It is therefore imperative to examine the perspective of the traditional Africa on some of these concepts that are characteristic of political institutions.

### **STATE, GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL OBLIGATION IN TRADITIONAL AFRICA**

One of the fundamental interests of political theory is the origin of the state.<sup>2</sup> Political philosophers are very keen at discovering the fundamental factors that underpinned the creation

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<sup>2</sup> Appadorai A. (1974): *The Substance of Politics (11<sup>th</sup> Ed)*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

of the state and the institutionalization of government in the society.<sup>3</sup> However, like any other phenomenon in the field of political science, various divergent theories had been postulated to explain the subject matter. Thus Carneiro<sup>4</sup> noted that though the State is the most far-reaching political development in human history, its origin is still imperfectly understood. In the context of the African traditional state, religion provides the explanation for the origin of the state and justification for legitimation of the authority of the ruler.<sup>5</sup> The origin of states in traditional Africa is traced to either the benevolence of an all-powerful god or to the expansive abilities of a mythical or super-human ancestor.<sup>6</sup> They are all therefore theocratic. The story of the origins of the Yoruba in the Southwestern part of Nigeria, the Zulu, the Nyoro of the Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom in western Uganda, the Tallensi of northern Ghana among others, are rooted in this mythical supernatural phenomenon. Though Africa is replete with different versions of this mythical origin, Kinship is the connection of the various beliefs and ideas about social-political order in Africa. States are regarded to have originated from one original stock a belief that holds the communities together in political union.<sup>7</sup> The mythical origin rooted in kinship also identifies the limits of the ruler's power as well as the rights of the citizens and provides the standards by which behaviour is judged, crime identified and punishments apportioned.<sup>8</sup>

Scholars on traditional African political systems recognize two main forms of states in Africa, namely the non-centralized or fragmented traditional state and the centralized state.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> Ball, A. R. (1977): *Modern Politics and Government*. London: Macmillan Press.; Beckman T. (2006): *Aristotle's Politics*. California: Harvey Mudd College.

<sup>4</sup> Carneiro, R. L. (1977): A Theory of the Origin of the State. In: *Studies in Social Theory*, No 3. California: Institute of Humane Studies.

<sup>5</sup> Osaghae, E. (1989): The Passage from the Past to the Present in African Political Thought: The Question of Relevance. In: Ayoade John; Adigun Agbaje (eds.): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

<sup>6</sup> Otubanjo, F. (1989): Themes in Traditional Political Thought. In: Ayoade John; Adigun Agbaje (eds.): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

<sup>7</sup> Agbakoba, J. C. A. (2004): The Supreme Being in Traditional Africa Thought: A Logico-Ontological Approach. In: *The Annual of Medieval Studies* Vol. 10., pp. 129-145.; Otubanjo, F. (1989): Themes in Traditional Political Thought. In: Ayoade John; Adigun Agbaje (eds.): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

<sup>8</sup> Ikelegbe, A. O. (1989): Checks on the Abuse of Political Power. In: Ayoade J.; Adigun A. (eds.): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.; Oculi, O. (1989): The Limits of Power: Lessons from Egyptology. In: Ayoade John, & Adigun Agbaje (eds.): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

<sup>9</sup> Mengisteab, K. (2005): African Traditional Institutions of Governance: The case of Eritrea's Village Baito. In: Vaughan Olufemi (ed.): *Tradition and Politics Indigenous Political Structures in Africa*. Eritrea: Africa World Press.; Osaghae, E. (1989): The Passage from the Past to the Present in African Political Thought: The Question of

non-centralized traditional states are fragmented, stateless, acephalous, and lack a sovereign. They are characterized by consensual nature of decision-making in the areas of resource allocation, law making and settlement of disputes. Techniques of social control in this political system revolved around the dynamics of clanship. The normative scheme consisted of elaborate bodies of well-established rules of conduct, usually enforced by heads of fragmented segments, and in more serious or subversive cases, by spontaneous community action. Two major features are noticed in this system - The existence of well-defined norms despite the absence of a hierarchical system headed by a sovereign; and the direct and pronounced participation of people-members of clans, segments and so on in decision making assuring a visible democratic process. Examples are the "Tallensi" of Northern Ghana, Baito of Eritrea, the Sukuma of Tanzania, Oromo of Ethiopia, the Ibos of Nigeria, the Kgotla in Botswana, the Nuer of Southern Sudan, and the Kikuyu of Kenya.

The centralized states had a more structured and sophisticated political system. Examples are Asante and Mole - Dabgani of Ghana, Yorubaland of Nigeria, Zulus of South Africa, Barotse of Zambia and Baganda of Uganda. These states were organized under well-entrenched, highly structured and sophisticated political authorities. They had a political sovereign backed by well-organized law enforcement agencies and habitually obeyed by the citizenry. Infraction of well-articulated legal norms attracted swift sanctions imposed by state officials. But the king, chief or the political sovereign, ruled with his council of elders and advisors in accordance with the law, and although autocracy was not unknown, the rule of law was a cardinal feature of their system of governance. The king was ultimately accountable and liable to deposition upon the violation of norms considered subversive of the entire political system or particularly heinous. In many cases the political structures were complemented by hierarchy of courts presided over by the king, the head chief or the village chief. The concept of law in these states was, in substance, hardly distinguishable from that of a modern state.

In most of these states, there was provision for participation in decision-making by groups of the citizenry either indirectly through the heads of their clans' lineages or families; or more directly through various types of organizations like the Asafo Companies of the Fantes in Ghana.

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Relevance. In: Ayoade John; Adigun Agbaje (eds.): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.; Agbakoba, J C. A. (2004): The Supreme Being in Traditional Africa Thought: A Logico-Ontological Approach. In: *The Annual of Medieval Studies* Vol. 10., pp. 129-145.

Eligibility for installation as king or chief was limited to certain royal families but among many states of Ghana the institution of king-makers was not unlike the Electoral College in some other countries. The Queen mother played a critical role as the custodian of the "royal register" and the person who pronounced on the eligibility of conditions for chiefly office.<sup>10</sup>

The resolution of political power is central to the corporate existence of any group of people, no matter their permissivity or civilization. There has been a considerable debate however, in the literature of political science and dating back to the period of hobbes as to whether the state, as a sovereign, should be accountable to anyone or whether it should be treated as a moral and responsible agent.<sup>11</sup> The consensus now seems to be that while the state must be self-accounting on the basis of the constitution and the laws of the country, the individuals who exercise power on behalf of the state whether appointed or elected, must be accountable for the actions they take on behalf of the state.<sup>12</sup> The traditional African society was however, characterized with the rule of law and leadership accountability to the citizens of the community. As noted by Oculi<sup>13</sup>, political power in the African traditional governance was held in trust for the people by the king or the ruling council. For instance rulers who abused their power and authority in the Yoruba traditional society among others, were exiled and forced to commit suicide. Similarly, the Jukun, the Attah of Igala all though regarded as God but possess no more than constitutional power. It was a sacred and symbol of unity of the people. The ruler was not regarded as a person who could enforce his personal will, but the will of the people. In this same dimension, the traditional African societies had rich traditional economic institutions that deal with allocation of resources. The political economy of the traditional African state was communal and held in trust for the community by the rulers.<sup>14</sup> Land which was the major means of production was recognized as belonging to the society. Through communal land tenure system,

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<sup>10</sup> Oculi, O. (1989): *The Limits of Power: Lessons from Egyptology*. In: Ayoade John, & Adigun Agbaje (eds.): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.; Ikelegbe, A. O. (1989): *Checks on the Abuse of Political Power*. In: Ayoade J.; Adigun A. (eds): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

<sup>11</sup> Osaghae, E. (1989): *The Passage from the Past to the Present in African Political Thought: The Question of Relevance*. In: Ayoade John; Adigun Agbaje (eds.): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

<sup>12</sup> Adamolekun, L. (2002): *Public Administration in Africa. Main Issues and Selected Country Studies*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.

<sup>13</sup> Oculi, O. (1989): *The Limits of Power: Lessons from Egyptology*. In: Ayoade John, & Adigun Agbaje (eds.): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

<sup>14</sup> Shepperson, G. (1964): *Abolitionism and African Political Thought*. Indiana University Press.

every member of the community had a right to the use of land. This communal system of resource allocation is foundation for the traditional political structures and democratic values in Africa (M). It ensured respect for the traditional land rights of local communities and their involvement in decision-making as well as in sharing the benefits of land and other geo-resources allocation. The *diessa* land tenure system which was predominant in Eritrea for instance, ensured distribution of arable lands equally among all households in the village. The system ensured that single widows/widowers, spinsters and orphans are entitled to shares of arable land in the village. Azikiwe<sup>15</sup> identifies the pristine African economic ideology as proto-welfarism. According to him, this proto-welfarism is welfarism in its “purest form” aimed at guaranteeing economic security for every one, animated by the goodwill and humanitarianism of each kindred, through the family as a unit of the clan. Proto-welfarism places the responsibility of finding solutions to the socio-economic problems of the society mainly on the elders, who are known as the trustees of the traditional African societies. They are the custodian of the law, and they made it their point of duty to safeguard, and maintain the welfare of each member of their society. This proto-welfarism as portrayed by Azikiwe has the potential to promote material prosperity for Africa according to the resources of each individual. As noted by Igwe, 1992, being motivated by the philosophy of live and let live, the proto-welfarism encourages the system of mutual aid and care on the basis of familiness. It enjoins everyone to care for the welfare of each individual. This proto-welfarism designates the principle of communalism and was the hallmark of African traditional life before European colonization, and the subsequent disruption of Africans economic and social life.<sup>16</sup>

Social cohesion in African traditional society was dominant over individuality and the order of dominance was natural, that is, society evolved with social harmony rather than tension or crisis between the two.<sup>17</sup> African traditional society was a system of interlocking familial relationships and destinies.<sup>18</sup> This contradicts the contemporary Africa which is characterized by

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<sup>15</sup> Azikiwe, N. (1980): *Ideology for Nigeria: Capitalism, socialism, or welfarism?* Nigeria: Macmillan.

<sup>16</sup> Okafor, F. (1993): Issues in African Philosophy Reexamined. In: *International Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. XXXIII. No1, Issues No129, p 92.; Igwe, A. (1992): *Zik: The Philosopher of our Time*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publisher.

<sup>17</sup> Kigongo, J. K. (1987): *The Concepts of Individuality And Social Cohesion: A Perversion Of Two African Cultural Realities*.

<sup>18</sup> Otubanjo, F. (1989): Themes in Traditional Political Thought. In: Ayoade John; Adigun Agbaje (eds.): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

deliberate coercive tendency against individuality in the attempt to build a cohesive harmonious society and realize nation unity.<sup>19</sup> Despite its inherent oppression, this has been the foundation of nation building.<sup>20</sup> Drawing credence from Nyerere, Bande<sup>21</sup> noted that the traditional African society is an integrated whole within which all social institutions are concerned with the welfare of the group as a single entity with politics, religion, and the economy overlapping one another. This society is humane, socialists, and democratic. It is characterized by equality, mutual respect, sharing, and an acceptance of obligation to work. It was a harmonious and classless yet pluralistic society being characterized by an undisputable vast of diversity of systems of social organisation.

Political obligation in African traditional states derived from the acceptance of a common descent, custom and a common perception by the people that they will be more able to realize their common aspirations for peace and security, which are essential for their physical and spiritual welfare and progress, both as individuals and as a community.<sup>22</sup> Just as political power was legitimized by customs and common good of the society, the obligation to obey also follows the same belief.<sup>23</sup> Myths provided the framework for the relationship between the ruler and the ruled in the African traditional society. The communities' acceptance of the myth of descent and the superintending role of the supernatural world believed to give the infallible truths involves a disposition to obey words and instructions emanating from this platform. Thus communities' authorities are believed to say the truth and heeded to for the promotion of good behaviour among the people.<sup>24</sup> The Diama in Bornu, Yoruba, Jukun and Onitsha all in Nigeria, the ancient Egypt among others for example conceived their rulers as god.<sup>25</sup> The traditional Africa believes in the organic nature of the society. There is a belief in common descent, value and interest for all

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<sup>19</sup> Kaphagawani, D. N. (1988): On African Communalism: A Philosophic Perspective. In: *Paper presented at The First International Regional Conference in Philosophy*. 23-27 May, Mombasa/Kenya.

<sup>20</sup> Bidney, D. (1963): *The Concept of Freedom in Anthropology*. The Hague: Mouton.

<sup>21</sup> Bande, T. (1989): Nyerere's Conception of the Link between Tradition and Modernity. In: Ayoade J.; Adigun A. (eds): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

<sup>22</sup> Otubanjo, F. (1989): Themes in Traditional Political Thought. In: Ayoade John; Adigun Agbaje (eds.): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

<sup>23</sup> Osaghae, E. (1989): The Passage from the Past to the Present in African Political Thought: The Question of Relevance. In: Ayoade John; Adigun Agbaje (eds.): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

<sup>24</sup> Klosko, G. (2005): *Political Obligations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.; Ikelegbe, A. O. (1989): Checks on the Abuse of Political Power. In: Ayoade J.; Adigun A. (eds): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

<sup>25</sup> Oculi, O. (1989): The Limits of Power: Lessons from Egyptology. In: Ayoade John, & Adigun Agbaje (eds.): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

member of the society to protect and enhance.<sup>26</sup> Civil disobedience means invoking the wrath of the gods or ancestors whose existence provides an essential ingredient of social order.<sup>27</sup> According to Otubanjo<sup>28</sup>, the theory of political obligation which is applicable here is somewhat an amalgam of prudential theory and Hobbes's social contract. By Prudential theory man obeys the state because of fear of the punishment for disobedience while in social contract theory, the acceptance of political authority by the people is the fountain of men's obedience of rules.<sup>29</sup> There is evidence in traditional Africa of the omnipresent sanctions of religion and the fear of them in men's relationship to each other and their rulers, but there is also the existence of a potent feeling of shared antecedents and values which is the springboard of a willingness to obey.<sup>30</sup>

#### ORIGIN OF CRISIS OF STATE-BUILDING IN AFRICA

The political map of Africa was redrawn in Berlin in 1885 following European colonization. African territory was carved out according to the colonialists' areas of influence without regards to the pre-existing boundaries. This brought together in most instances erstwhile antagonistic communities and dissimilar cultures while ethnic areas were arbitrarily split between two or more countries under different European powers. European political structures and processes were introduced and imposed. The imposition of colonialism involves a conscious or unconscious process of imitation or adaptation by many Africans to European lifestyles and values. Colonialism in this context entails both territorial annexation and internal colonialism involving political, economic and psycho cultural exploitation.<sup>31</sup> To Fanon therefore, colonialism is never a modernizing factor but destructive to African values and was a brake on the process of social

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<sup>26</sup> Mengisteab, K. (2005): African Traditional Institutions of Governance: The case of Eritrea's Village Baito. In: Vaughan Olufemi (ed.): *Tradition and Politics Indigenous Political Structures in Africa*. Eritrea: Africa World Press.

<sup>27</sup> Ekong, E. (1989): Issues in the Analysis of African Traditional Political Institutions. In: Ayoade J.; Adigun A. (eds): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

<sup>28</sup> Otubanjo, F. (1989): Themes in Traditional Political Thought. In: Ayoade John; Adigun Agbaje (eds.): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

<sup>29</sup> McPherson, T. (1967): *Political Obligation*. London: Routledge.; Kigongo, J. K. (1987): *The Concepts of Individuality And Social Cohesion: A Perversion Of Two African Cultural Realities.*; Jessop, B. (2007): *State Power: A Strategic-Relational Approach*. Cambridge: Polity.

<sup>30</sup> Bande, T. (1989): Nyerere's Conception of the Link between Tradition and Modernity. In: Ayoade J.; Adigun A. (eds): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.

<sup>31</sup> Fanon, F. (1967): *Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Pequine Books.

change in pre-colonial Africa.<sup>32</sup> Since the imposition of European colonial rule on Africa, coercion provokes reaction in form of resistance, both physical and psychic, thus causing a crisis between social cohesion and individuality. This marks the beginning of the crisis in state building in Africa.<sup>33</sup>

Another critical aspect of the crisis of state-building is the nature of the post-colonial state of Africa. Many observers view the despotic and self-serving nature of the African State to be a major hindrance to Africa's political and economic transformation.<sup>34</sup> The nationalist leaders of the decolonizing Africa instead of reclaiming and revitalizing the relevant aspect of their traditional institutions and building upon them, often simply adopted western institutions which was largely ineffective in advancing the interests of the society. Following its degradation by the colonialist, the nationalist leaders viewed African traditional institutions of governance as archaic and not suitable for modern governance while the overwhelming rural populations continue to stick principally to traditional socio-political institutions. The resultant effect was a dualistic form of political institutions in Africa. Thus the African State, in most cases, inherited the extractive (rentier) production relations and repressive security apparatus of the colonial state.<sup>35</sup> Its economic policies largely represented the interest of external forces – the imperial powers and also remained largely outside the control of its citizenry, advancing private interests at the expense of public interests.<sup>36</sup> As a result, the general population often perceives the state to be an apparatus of exploitation and oppression, while the elite see it as a source of power for control and self-enrichment. A State that is perceived in this manner will definitely lack internal

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<sup>32</sup> Jinadu, A. (1980): *FANON: In search of the African Revolution*. Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers.; Fanon, F. (1967): *Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Pequine Books.

<sup>33</sup> Ekong, E. (1989): Issues in the Analysis of African Traditional Political Institutions. In: Ayoade J.; Adigun A. (eds): *African Political Thought and Institutions*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization.; Jinadu, A. (1980): *FANON: In search of the African Revolution*. Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers.

<sup>34</sup> Mengisteab, K. (2005): African Traditional Institutions of Governance: The case of Eritrea's Village Baito. In: Vaughan Olufemi (ed.): *Tradition and Politics Indigenous Political Structures in Africa*. Eritrea: Africa World Press.; Ayittey, G. B. N. (1993): *Africa Betrayed*. London: Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.; Samatar, A. I.; Ahmed I. S. (2002): *The African State: Reconsiderations*. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman.

<sup>35</sup> Kieh, G. K.; Abgase, P. O. (2008): Reconstructing the State in Africa. In: Keih, G. K.; Abgase, P. O. (ed): *The State in Africa. Issues & Perspectives*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited.; Acemoglu, D.; Johnson, S.; Robinson, J. A. (2001): The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation. In: *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5., pp. 1369-1401.

<sup>36</sup> Mengisteab, K. (2005): African Traditional Institutions of Governance: The case of Eritrea's Village Baito. In: Vaughan Olufemi (ed.): *Tradition and Politics Indigenous Political Structures in Africa*. Eritrea: Africa World Press.; Kieh, G. K.; Abgase, P. O. (2008): Reconstructing the State in Africa. In: Keih, G. K.; Abgase, P. O. (ed): *The State in Africa. Issues & Perspectives*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited.

legitimacy that is necessary for political obligation and stability. A state of this nature whose economy is closely tied to the interests of external forces can hardly provide accountable leadership or be an agent for the empowerment of citizens.

#### **STEP IN THE RECONSTITUTION OF THE AFRICAN STATE**

The construction of democratic governance architectures rooted in African traditional system of governance constitutes a critical step in the reconstitution of the contemporary African state. As it has been shown in this paper, many of Africa's traditional institutions of governance have valuable characteristics that can inform the development of culturally relevant institutions of democratic governance in contemporary Africa. African traditional political values should therefore be incorporated into the modern values of governance. Decentralization and devolution of power, consensual system of decision-making, resolution of conflicts by narrowing differences through negotiations instead of adversarial procedures and establishing power-sharing arrangements of governance, are key to mitigating political, religious and ethnic conflicts, avoiding the winners take all modern electoral and litigation system and bringing the State under broader popular control, rooted in African political and cultural values. Reconstitution of the State and integration of traditional institutions are thus complementary processes that must go hand in hand.

The state and political system have been viewed as parts of a broader collection of social relations of the society and therefore cannot adequately function outside its being part of this ensemble.<sup>37</sup> There must be renewed efforts of African leaders to democratize the state by bringing it under the control of and linkage with the society. This is essential for state building in Africa. Democratization of the State, along with incorporation of traditional institutions of governance can contribute to effective governmental administration in Africa.

African traditional political values and customary laws do not only converge with modern democratic values but also have the potential to complement the mechanisms of modern

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<sup>37</sup> Effland, R. (1998): *The Cultural Evolution of Civilizations*. Mesa Community College.; Turner, B. S. (2000): *The Blackwell companion to social theory (2nd ed.)*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.; Mengisteab, K. (2005): African Traditional Institutions of Governance: The case of Eritrea's Village Baito. In: Vaughan Olufemi (ed.): *Tradition and Politics Indigenous Political Structures in Africa*. Eritrea: Africa World Press.

democracy by filling the gaps in the applicability of modern democratic mechanisms. The institution of traditional rulership is an enduring part of African heritage that plays a critical role as the custodian of these cultural values and customs hence their roles are indispensable. They are closely linked with the grassroots and understand the problems of the people. They can mobilize the rural populace for political participation, bring marginalized groups of society into the political process and constitute forums where local interests are debated and articulated. Traditional authorities can therefore be a veritable instrument in our search for grassroots political participation, peace, order, security and stability in our societies.

The traditional institutions can also serve as effective mechanism for complementing the efforts of the modern state in mitigating resource-based conflicts. The communal land tenure system a traditional mechanism for resource allocation is foundation for the traditional political structures and democratic values in Africa. It ensured respect for the traditional land rights of local communities and their involvement in decision-making as well as in sharing the benefits of land and other geo-resources allocation. The communal tenure system creates access to land for all members of the community. The *diessa* land tenure system which was predominant in Eritrea for instance, ensured distribution of arable lands equally among all households in the village. The system ensured that single widows/widowers, spinsters and orphans are entitled to shares of arable land in the village. While communal land tenure system may not necessarily alleviate poverty or ensure social equality, it creates a relative equality of access in the rural areas. The governments' practice of issuing land by concession to individuals, commercial farmers and mining corporations with little regard for the land rights and interests of local communities will continue to create land shortages, adverse ecological changes and hence impoverish the economy of local communities. This practice has been the source of violence, resource-based conflicts among communities and between the state and communities in several countries like Nigeria, Sudan, Liberia, and Sierra Leone among others. The communal land tenure system promotes egalitarian and democratic community.

## CONCLUSION

The deepening crisis ravaging the continent of Africa's is unlikely to be reversed under the existing import or duality of institutions. Viable state institutions cannot be sustained if simply imposed from above or from outside. They require the dynamic interplay of antecedent structures and the agencies of the modern state. The formal institutions of the State, i.e., rules regulating the structure of polity, property rights, and contracting, cannot be effective if they disregard or contradict the customary rules of the traditional institutions, which govern the lives and livelihood of large segments of the population. For instance, the State is unlikely to succeed in state-building and in mobilizing the cooperation of large segments of its citizens for socio-economic development without connecting itself to and harmonizing its political apparatus with the institutions, cultural values and interests of all its constituencies, including rural populations. Though the viability of institutions cannot be necessarily determined by whether they are imported or indigenous it is submitted in this paper however, that identification of a theory grounded in Africa's cultural heritage is an indispensable factor to the construction of viable political systems in Africa. There must be link between culture, ideology, and modernization!

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