Testing the water while the house is on fire:

a critical approach to the African Union conflict management system

submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree LLM (Human Rights and Democratisation in Africa)

by

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Chapter five: Conclusion and recommendations

DECLARATION

I, WILHELMINA CATHARINA WICOMB, declare that this research is my original work and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it has not been previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted to any other university for a degree or diploma. Other works cited or referred to are accordingly acknowledged.

Signed:..

Date:...

This dissertation has been submitted for examination with my approval as University Supervisor.

Signed:..

Date:...

Dr Patrice Vahard

University of Addis Ababa

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I can hardly remember who I was and what little knowledge I had of Africa and its struggles just one year ago. For that, I thank:

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But there are those who made me dream about becoming a human rights champion in the first place.

My brother: I can theorise about humanity; he simply lives it.

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ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
CBO	Community based organisation
CEWS	Continental Early Warning System
CMD	Conflict Management Division
CSSDCA	Conference on Security, Stability, Developmen and Co-operation in Africa
ECOSOCC	Economic, Social and Cultural Council
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West-African States
EU	European Union
EWS	Early Warning System
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IR	International Relations
NEPAD	New Economic Platform for African Development
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OAU	Organisation of African Union
OSCE	Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe
PAP	Pan-African Parliament
PSC	Peace and Security Council
PSD	Peace and Security Department
REC	Regional Economic Communities
SCA	Strategic Conflict Assessment
UN	United Nations

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WMD	Weapon of Mass Destruction

The character and quality of the normative and institutional frameworks that we develop for ourselves [...] are central to whether or not we will develop sustainable peace and harmonious relationships within and between states. – Kevin Clements[1]

1. Introduction

The paradox of the world we live in may be summed up thus: we have greater access to information than ever before while at the same time, the world is getting increasingly uncertain. The more we know, the more we become aware of the limits of what we could ever know. If this is the case, it should mean that our entire approach to decision making must be critically evaluated. Theorists of conflict have for decades attempted to explain what causes conflict and manage it accordingly. Thus far, it seems, their analyses have taken the nature of the information upon which decisions are based, for granted. This may well be a crucial omission.

Scholars in a variety of disciplines have become increasingly suspicious of claims to objective truths and historical fact:[2] some have come to prefer the term 'narrative' to describe the discourses we generate, rather than 'fact'. This is an acknowledgement of the notion that we have very little 'direct access' to the world and what happens; we must invariably rely on the stories people tell of what they experience in order to generate information about the world. These 'stories' will always necessarily be distorted by perception; narratives are created by emphasising certain facts and 'ignoring' others. It is a process of selection.

Conflict management depends on narratives. The information that is gathered, analysed and turned into action depends on various actors selecting from the available raw material what facts are to be kept and what may be discarded. For example, in the chain of information that constitutes the early warning system (EWS) of the African Union (AU), decisions of what information is 'relevant' are made by field officers, by members of the situation room, by desk officers and by department heads, to name a few: every link in the chain deciding what information to discard in order to create a narrative around a conflict situation – a quite extraordinary expression of power. Once the narrative about the situation has been created, it is further moulded by the conflict discourse that informs the specific management system before action is decided upon.

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[1] K Clements 'The causes and prevention of violent conflict' in Dolgopol and Gardam (eds) *The challenges of conflict: international law responds* (2006) 3.

[2] See Ignattieff (2001); Lyotard (1984); Foucault (2002).

This epistemological question is extremely significant in the context of conflict, precisely because, it is argued here, conflict is a *complex* phenomenon. This has implications not only for what and how much one can know about it, but how one should act upon this knowledge. This paper argues that our knowledge of any given conflict will always be incomplete and the actions and decisions based upon it, therefore, uncertain. This means, it is contended, that we should be far more *critical* of the process of deciding upon action in order to manage conflict. In the case of the African Union conflict management system (the African system), this would mean investigating the 'strong link between information, analysis and action',[3] as acknowledged by the Conflict Management Division (CMD) within the Peace and Security Department (PSD) of the African Union Commission (AUC).

After attempting a descriptive investigation into conflict systems, the paper will draw on insights from the philosophical theory of complexity in order to suggest ways in which the system may be improved. It is argued that, if we accept that our knowledge of a conflict situation is not only limited but always distorted, we will have to become far more aware of the *responsibility* that these decisions entail. A different approach to conflict should thus inform both the *interpretation* of information and the *response* to it.

2. Context

Africa faces more conflict than any other continent.[4] More than 8 million people have been displaced and hundreds of thousands killed in the last three decades as a result of both wide-spread inter-state, but mostly intra-state conflict. Many different causes have been identified; ethnic and religious tensions,[5] the desire to acquire power and resources,[6] poverty, under-development and in general the legacy of colonialism are some of the more well-documented ones.[7] In addition, every specific conflict has its own contingencies that can inflame or neutralise the situation.

In the light of this extraordinary problem the AU on 10 July 2002 adopted the Protocol related to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC). The document's objectives, amongst others, are to 'promote peace, security and stability in Africa' and to 'anticipate and prevent conflicts'.[8] The PSC operates as part of a greater conflict management system that was established

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[3] CMD 'Draft roadmap for the operationalization of the Continental Early Warning System' in CMD (ed) *Meeting the challenges of conflict prevention in Africa; towards the operationalization of the Continental Early Warning System* (2008) 3.
[4] See M Juma 'The infrastructure of peace in Africa: assessing the peacebuidling capacity of African institutions' (2002) 1.
[5] See C Dongmo 'Collective Identity and the construction of political markets in Africa' in Dolgopol and Gardam (n 1 above) 67.
[6] T Murithi 'African approaches to building peace and social solidarity' (2006) 6(2) *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 10.
[7] See K Annan 'The causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa' (1998) <http://www.un.org> (accessed 24 September 2008).
[8] Art 3(a) and (b) of the PSC Protocol.

with the AU Constitutive Act and the PSC Protocol. This system will be under investigation in this paper.

3. Hypothesis

I contend that the complexity of conflict implies that the AU's engagement with conflict – both in *understanding* and *managing* it – will benefit from an approach informed by the theory of complexity. To test this hypothesis, the paper will attempt to answer the following questions:

What normative framework currently informs the African system of conflict management?

Is complexity theory compatible with the analysis and management of conflict?

What are the implications for conflict analysis and management?

What would a complexity approach add to the African system?

4. Methodology and limitation of study

The investigation into the institutionalisation of conflict theory within the AU architecture and the methodology of the production of conflict narratives will draw from reports, legal instruments and interviews with those working within the system as well as outside observers. The rest of the research will largely be based on scholarly research.

The study acknowledges the fact that the African system is new and therefore many of the institutions have not been developed sufficiently to reasonably be critiqued. However, the sooner we understand how to institutionalise contemporary insights into conflict, the better. It is further not possible to discuss all the elements of the conflict management architecture within the AU exhaustively and, as will become apparent, such an investigation may well distort our understanding of the system. The *interaction* of elements will thus rather be the focus. The conflict management architecture of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) preceded the Africa system and is as a result already more developed. They will not be the focus of this paper however, partly because so much of the emphasis of existing AU reports is already on co-operation with the RECs.

Finally, as this paper investigates the link between information, analysis and decision making, it will deal with the relevant organs in this regard and not with those mandated to execute decisions, such as the African Standby Force.

5. Literature review

Conflict theory is a well-developed field of study and it would be beyond the limits of the current paper to refer to all aspects. The focus in this review is thus on research projects that have asked similar questions to the ones posed here.

The creation of *narratives* to motivate action has been addressed by Caddell and Yanacopulos.[9] They have argued that, even when dealing with urgent situations such as humanitarian crises, the significance of questioning the relationship between knowledge and action remains.[10] They frame their inquiry as the tension between 'knowledge' and 'acknowledgement', or what is known and what is done, in terms of conflict resolution and humanitarian action. Their study focuses on the denial of those creating the narratives and shows that it does not necessarily need to be deliberate, but always involves a subtle process of 'turning a blind eye'.[11] I will attempt to show how complexity theory's insistence on refraining from the reduction of complex information, resists this problem.

The *complex* processes of knowledge production have been dealt with in the context of conflict. Lieberfeld[12] has attempted to explain the narrative that led to the US decision to invade Iraq. He argues that it was not a single scholarly narrative that made war inevitable, but a complex network of interests. Lehtinen has argued that the response of the European Union (EU) to security, conflict prevention and development in Africa is determined by various 'formal and informal factors' and that a simple analysis of the policies and procedures of the EU would never capture the 'dynamic reality of political relations between the EU as a multi-dimensional institution and developing countries'.[13] Amongst these factors he includes the 'subjective perception of the third country' and 'personalities and human interactions'.[14] Lehtinen thus explores the complexity of the institution itself, separate from the complexities of the conflict, which will also be attempted here.

Rasch and Wolfe[15] have written on the disjunction between knowledge and action following the realisation of the complex construction of knowledge. They suggest that systems thinking should be employed in order to circumvent this disjunction and its logical implication that action can no longer be informed by such subjective and unstable knowledge. Systems theory, they suggest, allows

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[9] M Caddell and H Yanacopulos 'Knowing but not knowing: conflict, development and denial' (2006) 6(4) *Conflict, Security and Development* 557-559.

[10] As above, 558. They refer to a UNDP handbook which advocated for interveners to 'not just do something, stand there'.

[11] As above.

[12] D Lieberfeld 'Theories of conflict and the Iraq war' (2005) 10(2) *International Journal of Peace Studies* 1.

[13] T Lehtinen 'The European Union's approach to security, conflict prevention and development in Africa: the case of Uganda' (2005) 2.

[14] Lehtinen (n 13 above) 3.

[15] W Rasch and C Wolfe *Observing complexity: systems theory and postmodernity* (2000) 8.

us to indeed base action upon knowledge, but with an acceptance of the plurality of the latter. This suggestion is followed and tested in this paper.

Not much has been written by external sources on the current AU architecture for conflict management, since it is brand new. Juma[16] assessed the capacity of African institutions for peace building in 2002 shortly before the current system had come into existence. Gruzd[17] has analysed the effectiveness of one of the AU tools developed to prevent and manage conflict, namely the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). He concluded that, at present, several weaknesses of the system are constraining its practical utility as a conflict prevention tool.

The project closest related to the research question posed here is that of De Coning,[18] who has suggested an integrated and coordinated approach to security in Africa motivated by the theory of complexity. He argues for the integration of different departments within the AUC. What De Coning does not do, is provide a rigorous investigation into what the implications of a complex approach could be for the AU system itself, rather than merely for conflict management in general. Whilst I agree with De Coning that the complexity of a conflict system requires us to approach it with equal complexity, I argue that there are further advantages to structuring the African system as a complex system. In addition, the generation of narratives and the epistemological problem that necessarily ensues is not addressed by De Coning. Once it is done here, it becomes clear that De Coning's project is based on a 'restricted' complexity unwilling to acknowledge its own limitations, while this paper advocates for a 'general' complexity.[19]

6. Overview of chapters

This paper consists of five chapters. This first chapter serves as an introduction to the argument. In chapter 2, a brief overview will be given of the most important theories of conflict, reflecting the developing insights into the complexity of conflict systems and their management. It will be shown how the AU constitutive documents relevant to its conflict management system fit into these different theories. In chapter three, the philosophical theory of complexity is introduced with a focus on the work of the leading African pioneer on the subject. I test a conflict system in terms of the characteristics of complex systems in order to assess whether a link could be established. The implications of a complexity approach for the problem of both knowledge and action is subsequently

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[16]   n 4 above, 57-63.
[17]   S Gruzd 'Peace, security and the African Peer Review Mechanism: are the tools up to the task?' (2007) 16(3) *African Security Review* 66.
[18]   C De Coning 'Moving beyond the 4 Ps – an integrated conflict management system for the African Union' (2008) 5.
[19]   'Restricted complexity' acknowledges the complexity of a subject matter, but then attempts to restrict it by means of a model, for example. General complexity argues that the characteristics of a complex system makes modeling and therefore a complete understanding, impossible. The latter approach is followed here. See E Morin 'Restricted complexity, general complexity' in Gershenson, Aerts and Edmoncs (eds) *Worldviews, science and us: philosophy and complexity* (2007).

investigated. In chapter four the focus shifts to conflict management as a system. The conceptual links between the complexity approach and the conflict theories outlined follows with specific emphasis on what I believe complexity theory adds to the discussion. The argument becomes prescriptive here, as I claim that we should embrace the characteristics of complex systems in our managing of complex conflicts. In chapter five, my conclusions are compared to the most recent documents emanating from the AU which indicate the direction internally envisioned for the African system. Finally, a number of recommendations specific to the AU system are made.

Chapter two

Traditional theories of conflict and the African system

1. Introduction

Theories of conflict deal with how and why large-scale conflict happens.[20] Subsequently, they offer suggestions of action that may minimise or at least best manage conflict. This strain of thought has its origins in international relations: as conflict was traditionally limited to inter-state wars, the management of conflict was focused on the sphere within which states came to the decision to wage war. The conflict landscape today is significantly different with far more intra-state conflicts taking place, often spilling over national borders creating regional tension. Conceptually, however, conflict theory remains largely the domain of international relations theorists.

In the first section of this chapter, the most prominent conflict theories will be outlined. In the second section it will be shown how this knowledge has translated into action. This serves as background to the final section, which will attempt to identify the normative framework that underpins the African Union conflict management system. This is important, as the conflict theory which informs ones approach to information does to an extent shape the narrative that is created from the raw information and the subsequent action.[21] This is a consequence of the fact that international relations are dominated by what Skinner has termed 'Grand Theories': theories that combine ontological, epistemological and normative functions - it tells us 'what' the world is, how we can know it and what should be done about it.[22]

2. Theories of conflict

The oldest and perhaps best-known theory of conflict is that of realism.[23] This school generally believes that conflict is always caused by states' involuntary actions in their quest for power and security.[24] This is caused by an international environment where states fear the hostilities of other states as this environment is defined by their self-interest. States are regarded as unitary actors with single self-interested goals of survival. Leaders calculate the cost and benefits of war *rationally*. This explains the relative continuity of foreign policy despite changes in government. Explained

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[20]   G Cashman *What causes war? An introduction to theories of international conflict* (1993) 4.
[21]   R Meyers 'Contemporary development in international relations theory' (2005) 6.
[22]   In Meyers (n 21 above) 13. Says Meyers: "The importance of Grand Theories lies [...] in their role as conceptual-linguistic constructs with the help of which we (re-)constitute, choose and interpret the 'facts' of international 'reality', and *decide* the question which phenomena can aspire to the status of recognized facts of IR on what grounds'.
[23]   J Donnelly *Realism and international relations* (2000) 6.
[24]   Lieberfeld (n 12 above) 1.

differently, traditional realism understands the workings of the international system as based on the underlying distribution of power[25] – power understood in a very narrow sense of the word.

Liberalism, sometimes called idealism, is the traditional counterweight to realism. It acknowledges not only the self-interest of states within the international environment, but also the influence both of states' internal characteristics as well as international law, in deciding to go to war.[26] The possibility of the influence of morality upon states' decisions is acknowledged. Emphasis is often placed on types of government, with the notion that only the spread of democracy could secure a world without conflict as democracies will in theory never fight each other.[27]

In the 1980s structuralism emerged as a third major school. Structuralists also regard states as dominant, but not as rational units, rather as the representatives of a set of economic interests.[28] This mode of analysis is closely related to Marxism that understood economic interests as the driver of international relations, but placed more emphasis on the structures that enabled this to be the case, rather than the individual actors.[29]

Recent schools of thought on conflict have started to criticise the traditional 'state-centric' theories. These schools, ranging from pluralism to globalisation, argue that states are increasingly forced to share the international plane with other actors of importance, notably multinational corporations. Foreign policy becomes a compromise between various organisations' views of national interest and their own interest.[30] According to these theories, the domestic and international spheres have lost their independence from each other. The pluralist focus turns 'away from national control and the balance of power towards the management of the structural situation of complex interdependence. This situation is one in which national actors struggle to control a fluid external environment and where the analytic focus is on management and bargaining within and between national actors'.[31] This increasing acknowledgement of the complexity of conflict is an important motivation for the project at hand.

Diverging from these Grand Theories, Lieberfeld[32] identifies 'elite interests' as an important cause of conflict. He argues that if actions of 'insignificant' domestic constituencies (for example political and economic elites) can affect major military decisions, Grand Theories become problematic. We must accept that leaders may at times put their own interest, such as political survival, above 'national interest'. He analyses the causes of the US invasion into Iraq, showing that it

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[25]   S Guzzini 'The limits of neorealist power analysis'(1993) 47(3) *International Organization* 447.
[26]   Lieberfeld (n 12 above) 2.
[27]   As above.
[28]   Meyers (n 21 above) 22.
[29]   'Marxism in international relations' < www.abdn.uk/pir.notes05/> (accessed 24 September 2008).
[30]   Meyers (n 21 above) 23.
[31]   Steve Smith (1995) cited in Meyers (n 21 above) 23.
[32]   n 12 above, 3.

is possible to read them in terms of any of the traditional conflict theories.[33] His point is that it is almost never possible to trace a single conflict theory as an exhaustive explanation for the cause of a conflict: rather, each school chooses to emphasise that which they believe to be important, ignoring elements pointing to alternative interpretations.

We are thus returned to the notion of narratives being the result of a selection process: this is not the case only when we tell the story of a single conflict, but clearly also when we attempt to explain conflict as a general phenomenon.

3. From theory to action

Based on traditional realist theories, conflict management used to target states exclusively, hoping to end conflict through processes of negotiation. Realists would approach such a negotiation based on their understanding of states' rational approach to conflict and their dedication to self-interest: negotiation would be based on a win-lose understanding, with a fixed amount of resources that must be allotted. In this zero-sum game, each party would have to give in on some part of their initial goal in order to find a result compatible with the goals of both parties.[34]

The failure of this method to guarantee positive peace[35] led to a new emphasis on analytical problem-solving.[36] Soon, this approach was complemented by so-called Track II initiatives, where negotiations were held in more informal settings with representatives from a broader spectrum.

Lederach[37] identified important gaps in these initiatives. While it was encouraging that role-players at different levels were engaged, the approach remained horizontal: equals meeting equals.[38] As a result, the vertical links within parties were overlooked. Secondly, this approach only focused on getting a peace agreement signed, without addressing the structural violence that led to the conflict in the first place.[39] Lederach argued that there was not sufficient awareness of the fact that peace requires a change in structure and culture.[40] Finally, he argues, peace must be organic, developed from within rather than imposed from the outside.[41]

On the basis of these insights and Galtung's notion of positive peace, the TRANSCEND approach was developed. It aims to be a comprehensive approach that 'must be *complex* and

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[33]   As above.
[34]   W Graf, G Kramer and A Nicolescou 'Counselling and training for conflict transformation and peace-building: the TRANSCEND approach' in Webel and Galtung (eds) *Handbook of peace and conflict studies* (2007) 124.
[35]   Galtung's phrase; it refers to peace as the possibility of people to realise their potential, rather than a mere absence of conflict. J Galtung 'Violence, Peace and Peace Research' (1969) 6 *Journal of Peace and Research* 167.
[36]   Graf *et al* (n 34 above) 124.
[37]   As above.
[38]   Graf *et al* (n 34 above) 125.
[39]   As above.
[40]   Graf *et al* (n 34 above) 126.
[41]   As above.

integrative, and continuously revised according to the findings and experiences of practical work' (my emphasis).[42] It is based on the philosophy that human beings should be at the centre of transformation.

The notion that conflict and security are far broader concepts than initially appreciated is today widely accepted. Naidoo[43] argues that there are only two contemporary theories of note in international relations. The 'new security thinking' or neo-realism maintains an emphasis on the primacy of the state while acknowledging that security is a broader concept than previously thought. The post-modern or 'critical security approach' wants to dislodge the state as the primary referent of security and emphasises the interdependency and trans-nationalisation of non-state actors. Post-modernists do not equate state security with human security, and place the latter above the former. As Naidoo[44] explains:

> Both approaches attempt to address the non-military threats to human security. Their fundamental difference lies in the way these analyses point to action. The broadening of security to conceive of more than just military threats raises the contentious question: 'What is it that is to be made secure?'.

Interdependency is also the focus of the systems approach to conflict. Earlier conflict analysts measured conflict on a timeline with the phases 'preventive diplomacy', 'peacemaking', 'peace-keeping' and finally 'peace-building' following each other chronologically.[45] Recently, however, conflict analysts have come to understand that these phases are actually interdependent and interlinked aspects of the same process.[46]

This means that the management of this process must equally be interlinked. As Fischer[47] explains, it 'allows the integration of contributions from many different disciplines into a coherent framework. It looks systematically at threats to peace and surveys potential corrective measures, exploring where a minimum intervention can have a maximum effect'. This is possible because of the specific characteristics of systems. They are self-regulating, which means that they can adapt in order to maintain their own survival.[48] When one understands conflict in this way, it becomes clear that it is not a process that develops predictably in identifiable phases, but rather a 'living organism' that adapts to its environment in order to survive.

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[42] Graf *et al* (n 34 above) 127.

[43] S Naidoo 'A theoretical conceptualization of Human Security' in ISS (ed) *Peace, human security and conflict prevention in Africa* (2001) 8.

[44] n 43 above, 9.

[45] De Coning (n 18 above) 4.

[46] As above.

[47] D Fischer 'Peace as a self-regulating process' in Webel and Galtung (n 34 above) 187.

[48] As above.

In reaction to this trend, the UN conflict management system started employing what they called 'Integrated Missions' in the late 90's. Kofi Annan[49] explained it thus:

> An integrated mission is based on a common strategic plan and a shared understanding of the priorities and types of programme interventions that need to be undertaken at various stages of the recovery process.

The new emphasis on an integrated, transformative approach does not mean that negotiation has seized to be an option. In fact, international level negotiation is growing in popularity for resolving conflicts,[50] but now negotiations are structured towards a win-win solution. This may be attributed to the proliferation of international institutions since World War II, but Hampson *et al*[51] believe that an important reason remains states' attachment to sovereignty, which keeps them weary of using judicial means. Realism is therefore far from dead and buried. The liberalists would argue that their understanding is equally still to be found in these recent developments: the preference for negotiation exhibits the link between democracy and peace, as nations choose to end conflict by peaceful means.[52]

It thus seems as though the disjunction between knowledge and action is evident even without the acknowledgement that knowledge is subjective, as (re)action to conflict rarely reflects the simultaneous developments in conflict theory. In the next section, the knowledge-action nexus is traced as found in the AU constitutive documents.

4. The African Union system

The PSC[53] is the centre of the AU's peace and security architecture.[54] It is composed of 15 member states, each of which must have shown a commitment to the principles of the Union, including constitutional governance, rule of law and human rights.[55] The PSC Protocol provides for the establishment of an African Standby Force to enable the PSC to perform their functions. Their decisions are mainly informed by the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), based within the AUC, with advice coming from the Panel of the Wise. The latter is composed of five highly respected African personalities mandated to advise the PSC on all issues pertaining to the promotion of peace on the continent. The Chairperson of the AUC may bring to the attention of the PSC and the Panel of

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[49] Cited in De Coning (n 18 above) 7.
[50] FO Hampson, CA Crocker and P Aall 'Negotiation and international conflict' in Webel and Galtung (n 34 above) 36.
[51] As above.
[52] Hampson *et al* (n 50 above) 37.
[53] The significance of the word 'peace' in the name of the council – in contrast to the UN's 'Security Council' – has been commented on as exhibiting the acknowledgement within the AU that security is a broad concept that incorporates the notion of positive peace. J Galtung 'Peace by peaceful conflict transformation – the TRANSCEND approach' in Webel and Galtung (n 34 above) 14.
[54] De Coning (n 18 above) 12.
[55] PSC Protocol art 5(2)(a).

the Wise matters relevant to peace and security on the continent. He must further use the information gathered by the CEWS to advise the PSC.

Apart from the Peace and Security Department (PSD), other relevant functions are spread across the AUC, including in the Political Affairs Department (elections, refugee affairs, human rights and governance) and in the Office of the Chairperson (the capacity to deploy and support special envoys and special representatives).[56] Within the broader system, relevant organs include the APRM, the General Assembly and the Executive Council.[57] Co-operation is also envisioned between the PSC and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC).[58]

5. The underpinning theories

The African Union was born in 1999 in Sirte during an extraordinary session of the OAU Assembly. A Constitutive Act was to be drawn up to create a Union modelled on the EU.[59] As Kindiki[60] points out, the AU Act showed far greater acknowledgement of human rights than its OAU predecessor. The nexus between human rights and security was explicitly recognised, as it was in the Grand Bay Declaration of 1999 and the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation in Africa Solemn Declaration of 2000.[61]

A significant departure from the OAU principles is found in Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union which gives the AU the 'right to intervene in a member state pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity'. This article does not require the consent of the target state. The article is complementary to the powers of the ACHPR who, in accordance with article 58 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, may alert the General Assembly to the existence of a series of serious or massive violations of human rights revealed by communications brought before them. This mandate is limited however to the target state giving its consent.[62] The significance of these articles is that they depart from the principle of absolute sovereignty, a principle that is associated strongly with the traditional state-centric approaches in international relations.

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[56]   De Coning (n 18 above) 13.
[57]   Juma (ed) *Compendium of key documents relating to peace and security in Africa* (2006) 225.
[58]   PSC Protocol arts 18-20.
[59]   K Kindiki 'The normative and institutional framework of the African Union relating to the protection of human rights and the maintanance of international peace and security: a critical appraisal' (2003) 3 *African Human Rights Law Journal* 97.
[60]   n 59 above, 98.
[61]   Art 9(h).
[62]   Kindiki (n 59 above) 99.

This move away from traditional narrow approaches to conflict to a broader, more integrated approach is evident in all the documents relevant to the AU system. The Preamble to the Protocol relating to the Establishment of the PSC, for example, confirms that the member states are

> aware also of the fact that the development of strong democratic institutions and culture, observance of human rights and the rule of law, as well as the implementation of post-conflict recovery programmes and sustainable development policies, are essential for the promotion of collective security, durable peace and stability, as well as for the prevention of conflicts.

The objectives of the PSC further reflect this rights-based approach to conflict.[63]

There is even evidence of the post-modern perception of security as human rather than state security. The PSC Protocol lists as a principle the 'interdependence between socio-economic development and the security of peoples and States'.[64] The Solemn Declaration on a Common Defence and Security Policy emphasises the need for a 'common understanding of defence and security as terms embracing both civilian and military aspects'.[65] In defining defence it includes both the 'traditional, military and state-centric notion of the use of the armed forces of the state to protect its national sovereignty' as well as 'less traditional, non-military aspects which relate to the protection of the peoples' political, cultural, social and economic values and ways of life',[66] while 'security' is understood to include

> a new emphasis on human security, based not only on political values but on social and economic imperatives as well. This newer, multi-dimensional notion of security thus embraces such issues as human rights.[...] At the national level, the aim would be to safeguard the security of individuals, families, communities and the state/national life, in the economic, political and social dimensions.[67]

The PSC Protocol paradoxically reiterates the allegiance to the realist notions of sovereignty[68] and non-interference.[69] A Pact[70] was adopted in 2005 that aimed to clarify the circumstances under which the AU may authorise intervention, but this Pact has only been ratified by a single state and has therefore not come into force.

An integrationist and even pluralist approach is further reflected in the power of the PSC to promote close co-operation with the RECs in promoting peace and security,[71] as well a 'strong

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[63]   Article 3(a) holds that the PSC is established to 'promote peace, security and stability in Africa, in order to guarantee the protection and preservation of life and property, the well-being of the African people and their environment, as well as the creation of conditions conducive to sustainable development', while 3(f) names 'promote and encourage democratic practices, good governance and the rule of law, protect human rights and the fundamental freedoms, respect for the sanctity of human life and international humanitarian law'.
[64]   Art 4(d).
[65]   Preamble.
[66]   Definitions and Scope.
[67]   As above.
[68]   Art 4(e).
[69]   Art 4(f).
[70]   African Union Non-aggression and Common Defence Pact.
[71]   Arts 7(1)(j) and 16.

partnership' between the Union and the United Nations and other relevant international organisations.[72] The establishment of a Panel of the Wise, consisting of five 'highly respected African personalities from various segments of society' to advise the PSC, indicates an acknowledgement of the fact that peace cannot be established at the level of state representatives only. There is certainly a suggestion of liberalism reflected in the belief that the African respect for elders may encourage conflict resolution.

The CEWS created under Article 12, is supposed to develop an 'early warning module based on clearly defined and accepted political, economic, social, military and humanitarian indicators, which shall be used to analyze developments within the continent and recommend the best course of action'. This reflects an emphasis on the broad nature of security, but also the complexity of conflict and its causes – it is not merely up to the rational self-interested decisions of states. The development of these modules will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

6. Conclusion

From the analysis of conflict theories in the first section, it became apparent that these theories are narratives themselves. In the context of the uncertainty of knowledge that I used as a starting point, one could argue that these 'narratives' are attempts to place certainty upon an uncertain world. That is indeed always the intention of a Grand Theory. We need to acknowledge that conflict and its causes cannot be captured in a single theory – as Lieberfeld's analysis showed – even if this theory acknowledges the complexity of conflict as the systems theorists do.

This insight is further supported by the brief analysis of the African system's conceptual underpinnings. It is clearly informed by many different approaches to conflict. Does this mean that the system is incoherent and that there is a dangerous uncertainty about how to approach conflict? If we accept that conflict theories are simply means to attempt to capture the uncertainty of the world (which necessarily distorts it), then a system that does not prescribe to a single theory may well escape the dangers of distortion. But this could only be an effective system if it can cope with the uncertainty and complexity that it embraces.

The next chapter will introduce the theory of complexity as a critical (rather than a grand) theory. It will be argued that, on the basis of the complexities of conflict and the inability of a single theory to capture it exhaustively, approaching conflict as a complex system may allow us to manage the complexity without distorting it.

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[72]   Arts 7(1)(k) and 17. Kindiki (n 59 above 100) believes that this relationship between the AU and the UN remains unclear.

1. Introduction

At the outset, it was explained that this paper investigates the *narratives* that underpin and inform the AU conflict management system. When opposing narrative to fact, one invariably invokes the discourses of modernism and postmodernism and their implications for epistemology. Bauman has described typical modernist thinking as embracing 'certainty, orderliness, homogeneneity'.[73] If a modernist approach requires certainty, then it would have to rely on positive fact as its basis. Arguing that conflict analysis relies on narrative rather than fact, is thus arguing for an acceptance that we are faced with a certain *un*certainty. What is more, it is upon this uncertain basis that we have to decide on action – life-changing action. It is little wonder that conflict analysts resort to Grand Theories to eliminate this uncertainty.

This chapter will outline the relevant aspects of complex systems and what has been argued in terms of the possibility of acquiring knowledge of a complex system. I will rely heavily on the work of the leading African pioneer in the field of complexity theory, Paul Cilliers. He has not explored the links between complexity and conflict therefore I pause to do so in this chapter by using the characteristics of complex systems that he has identified.

2. Complex systems

As we saw in chapter two, the notion of conflict as a system has been introduced into conflict analysis by the systems theorists. A system has been defined as 'a set of objects together with relationships between the objects and between their attributes'.[74] Systems theory therefore investigates phenomena as a unity of *organised* elements. The purpose of systems theory has further been described as a means of 'dealing with complexity'.[75] It is thus hardly surprising that the theory of complexity eventually developed from systems theory. The very significant difference between the two theories is the unique and crucial characteristics of some systems that may be called 'complex', which have only been acknowledged by the latter school and which I contend could significantly add to the conflict discourse.

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[73]   Z Bauman *Intimations of postmodernity* (1992) xiii.
[74]   AD Hall and RE Fagan 'Definition of System' in *System Thinking Vol 1* (2003) 63.
[75]   L von Bertalanffy 'General systems theory' (n 74 above) 38.

The problem of dealing with complexity came to a head in cybernetics when the race for creating artificial intelligence started in earnest in the sixties.[76] In order to be able to create a computer with intelligence similar to the human brain, scientists attempted to model the brain as a system of rules which could be replicated to create artificial intelligence. This turned out to be impossible, however, because the brain does not function according to linear rules. The interactions between neurons in the brain are non-linear; the functioning is complex. More important, however, these *interactions* are what constitute the 'meaning' generated by the brain, not the neurons or elements in isolation. To this day, artificial intelligence remains science fiction, but scientists did become wiser: they know now that some systems are simply too complex and dynamic to contain within a rule-based model.[77]

There were more lessons to be learned from studying the brain as a system, however. As Cilliers[78] explains,

> the brain has to develop an understanding of its environment, and be able to operate effectively in that environment. Since it is implausible that the brain contains, *ab initio*, a programme that can cope with all eventualities, we can safely assume that the brain has to have the ability to *learn*. The necessary changes in structure that enable the brain to *remember* what has been learnt must therefore come about spontaneously.

In terms of systems theory, this ability of the brain is called 'self-organisation' and is a characteristic of all complex systems. Self-organisation is that ability of the system to change its internal structure in order to adapt to and cope with its environment as a means of survival.[79]

The following characteristics of self-organising systems[80] are important to our discussion here:

- The structure of the system is not the result of an external designer, but of the interaction between elements in the system and between the system and its environment – upon which the system adapts *spontaneously*.
- Self-organisation is not merely the result of linear processes, but also involves non-linear interaction that *cannot be modelled or predicted* – that is why the brain has defied attempts at linear, rule-based modelling.
- Self-organisation is dependent on the system having a memory. It could be said that the system must be able to create 'narratives' from the information received from the environment in order to adapt. This means the system stores some information and 'forgets'

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[76] P Cilliers *Complexity and postmodernity: understanding complex systems* (1998) 13-14.
[77] E Grebe 'Networks of influence: a theoretical review and proposed approach to AIDS treatment activism' (2008) 12.
[78] n 76 above, 90.
[79] Fischer (n 47 above) 187.
[80] Cilliers (n 76 above) 91-92.

others – not because of a 'rational decision', but based on the principle of use it or lose it. The more the same information is received and used by the system, the smaller the chance of it being lost in the creation of narratives.

An understanding of the capacity of complex systems to self-organise is not sufficient to identifying complex systems in general, however. To this end, Cilliers[81] further developed a list of characteristics which assists us in identifying complex systems:

1. They have a large number of elements.

2. These elements must interact dynamically resulting in the system *changing* over time. Merely having a large number of elements, does not make a system complex.

3. Interaction is not limited: all elements are influenced by and can influence all other elements.

4. The interactions are non-linear.

5. Interaction happens over a short range (that is, information is received from a closely related element), but any interaction may have wide-ranging influence.

6. Interaction occurs in a loop – either positive or negative – which means that the activity of an element may directly or indirectly affect the element itself.

7. Complex systems are open to interaction with the environment.

8. Complex systems must always have a flow of information running through them; they cannot be at a state of equilibrium.

9. Complex systems have a history which informs it.

10. Elements of the system are not aware of the behaviour of the system as a whole – the latter is a function of the changing nature of the system's structure.[82]

The most significant characteristic of a complex system, I believe, remains the fact that the meaning of the system is not to be traced in the elements of the system, but in the interaction of the elements with each other and with the outside: if the system was to become static, if elements seized to interact, the system would simply seize to exist as a complex system, and become a 'simple' system that could be analysed exhaustively.

3. Conflict as a complex system

It was shown that the insight that conflict systems are 'complex' is not new. De Coning[83] explains that each conflict system has its own unique history that moulds it. The dynamics of its peace processes and the interaction between all relevant internal and external actors are similarly unique to that

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[81]   n 76 above, 3-4.
[82]   These characteristics do not offer a definition of complex systems, but a 'general, low-level, qualitative description'. Cilliers, P 'What can we learn from a theory of complexity?' (2000) 2(1) *Emergence* 23.
[83]   n 18 above, 16.

system. In addition, he highlights the multi-facetted nature of society within which the conflict system operates: 'every individual in that society must make thousands of micro-decisions about their own security, shelter, health, well being, employment, education and future prospects'[84] – each of these having a greater or lesser impact on the system's functioning. Funk[85] argues that the new conflict constellations are

> Multi-facetted, fluid, and complex, and cannot be fully encapsulated either by the concepts of traditional international relations theory or by the newer language of 'clashing civilizations'[...] Reductionist and over-simplified analyses of cultural and religious factors have the dubious distinction of reinforcing the very phenomena they purport to describe, encouraging competitive cultural and religious geopolitics.

Commentators of conflict in Africa contend that its complex nature is even heightened on this continent. Johan Cilliers[86] explains that this is partly due to the fact that many African states do not have a monopoly on the use of force within their own territories. With a lack of proper administration, legitimate and illegitimate activities become hard to distinguish; country borders become insignificant and international actors readily become elements of the conflict. 'Insecurity and instability in much of Africa has become a single, complex and interrelated problem that is an intrinsic part of the debate about the nature and capability of the African state'.[87]

I am testing the relevance of a different and very specific understanding of complexity here, but one that certainly seems fitting in a discussion of a phenomenon that is so readily called 'complex'. If a conflict system agrees with the specific understanding of 'complexity' as described by complexity theorists, however, it would mean not only that conflict is caused by a number of different factors, but more significantly, that these factors *interact* in a dynamic system from which conflict may or may not emerge as a result.[88]

Let us consider the example of the conflict system in Sudan, and apply the characteristics identified by Cilliers in order to ascertain whether this system may indeed be understood as a complex system.

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84   De Coning (n 18 above) 17.
85   N Funk 'Islamic-Western identity conflict: a framework for strategic engagement' (2007) 12(1) *International Journal of Peace Studies* 23.
86   J Cilliers 'Human security in Africa: a conceptual framework for review' (2004).
87   As above.
88   In complexity terms, that which is spontaneously created as a result of the dynamic interaction within the system is called an 'emergent property'. Grebe (n 77 above) 12.

1. The conflict in Sudan involves a large number of elements: these include, but is not limited to rebels, civilians, soldiers, government officials, international organisations and external powers of interest.[89]

2. Dynamic interaction is always occurring between these different elements; both direct and indirect conflict as well as negotiations, bargaining and contingent interaction. This interaction is dynamic in the sense that different elements interact at different times in different circumstances *and are changed by the interaction*. This is evident from the fact that the Sudanese conflict system is not static, but has changed substantially over time: even though the conflict is today popularly and simplistically perceived as one between Arabs and non-Arabs, commentators have pointed out that it was only during the late 80's that fighters began to identify themselves in these terms. [90] By that time, a recognisable conflict system had already emerged. [91]

3. The actions of government officials or international organisations or certain rebel groups often have wide-reaching influence on all elements. At the same time, localised interaction in a remote village may seem limited, but this has had wide-ranging influence on the conflict system – mostly exaggerating the tension. Moreover, interaction within the conflict system is not fixed, because many elements in the system are continuously moving around causing them to interact with many different elements.[92] Interaction is thus not limited.

4. If interactions in a system are non-linear, it means that small events can have a major effect on the system, and vice versa. In the case of Sudan, the conflict was not started by a major declaration of war. The droughts in the mid-80s in the Sabel region caused many Arab pastoralists to migrate south – leading to their cattle trampling the fields of non-Arab farmers living in central and southern Sudan.[93] The disputes that ensued were generally settled through negotiations. This all changed when the previous and current Sudanese governments started their (perceived) campaign of 'Arabising' Sudan. This seemingly small factor, the existence of which is even in dispute, eventually led to the brutal conflict that has lasted decades. Another example of 'insignificant' government action that has been identified as a major cause of war was their tampering with the tradition of *Dar* or tribal homelands in the Darfur area.[94] Government actions represent small changes *within* the

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[89]   R Moni 'The UN report on Darfur: what role for the AU?' in *Human rights, peace and justice in Africa: a reader* (2006) 193.

[90]   P Woodward 'Sudan: war without end' in Furley (ed) *Conflict in Africa* (1995) 92: 'The most simple characterisation of the conflict in Sudan depicts it as the Arab and Muslim majority in the North fighting against the African and often Christian majority in the South. But such a simple depiction distorts the lengthy and complex relations that reflect not only developments within Sudan, but in the wider world as well'.

[91]   J Du Plooy 'A brief overview of the causes and conduct of conflict in Sudan' (2005) 6.

[92]   As above.

[93]   Du Plooy (n 91 above) 5.

[94]   Du Plooy (n 91 above) 5.

system, but the system also reacts to its environment. The environmental degradation[95] in Sudan is an example of external conditions that arguably influenced the structure of the system by forcing it to adapt to survive.[96]

5. Interaction and the transfer of information occur mostly over a short range. The interaction between farmers and pastoralists, between the Janjaweed and the civilians they attack,[97] are far more dynamic, prevalent and significant than the interaction between, for example, the government and the people. It could even be argued that localised conflicts are what sustain the system as a whole.

6. The fact that interactions in the system can feed back on elements is illustrated by, for example, internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sudan. It was the alleged actions, in part, of the government funding the Janjaweed[98] that led to the displacement of thousands of people.[99] The huge instability IDPs have caused has fed back to influence the government significantly, forcing them to deal with international scrutiny of the situation.

7. Complex systems are open systems that interact with the environment to such an extent that it is difficult at times to clearly identify the boundary between the system and the external.[100] Above, civilians were included in the definition of the Sudanese conflict as a system. Of course, not all Sudanese civilians are part of the system, but the nature of the conflict has made it difficult to determine exactly who is inside the system and who is outside. To what extent should the life of a civilian be affected by the conflict in order for him to be identified as an element? The level of a civilian's involvement may also differ significantly over a period of time. Secondly, the conflict system never operates in isolation. The environment, whether weather changes, the changes in neighbouring countries or even global geo-political changes always impact to a greater or lesser extent on the conflict. The growing international involvement in the Sudanese conflict illustrates how quickly it can become difficult to separate the system from this external environment.

8. Complex systems can never be at equilibrium: the power structures and ethnic tensions, amongst others, have kept the system in Sudan from ever reaching equilibrium. Instead, there is a constant shifting of power, emphasis and even of the physical location of the

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95   Du Plooy (n 91 above) 6.

96   See CN Kyrou 'Peace ecology: an emerging paradigm in peace studies' (2007) *International Journal of Peace Studies* 73.

97   See 'The national implications of peace and development in three of Sudan's overlooked regions' <www.africaaction.org> (accessed 18 August 2008).

98   Moni (n 89 above) 193.

99   Africa Action (n 97 above).

100   It is becoming more difficult to define conflicts in Africa within state frameworks. Foreign sponsorships of rebel groups and the proliferation of refugees cause borders to blur. See J Maxted and A Zegeye 'Human stability and conflcit in the Horn of Africa' in ISS (n 43 above) 59.

conflict. If the system had reached equilibrium, the conflict system would have seized to exist.

9. It seems self-evident that the Sudanese conflict system has a very significant history which continuously informs its meaning.

10. In a complex system, each element only responds to the information it receives, no element knows the system as a whole. This does not mean that no element knows more than others, or has insider knowledge of interactions of which it is not necessarily a part. It does mean, however, that no element in the system can know it all: if so, there would be no surprises. Clearly, no-one involved in the Sudanese conflict understands the complexities of every single other element and its interactions and therefore can claim to know the system as a whole.

On the basis of this description, I would contend that conflict systems of a certain level of complexity represent complex systems.[101] Based on the insights into complex systems outlined above, it would have the following implications:

• Conflict management could never rely on a plan with a definite outcome: there is no way to predict how a complex system will adapt to change as this happens spontaneously and on the basis of non-linear interaction.[102] All actions taken must therefore continuously be re-evaluated critically and cannot be cast in stone.[103] This is even more significant when the effect of feedback loops are considered: the example cited by Funk[104] of efforts to describe identities in order to promote understanding that have instead inflamed cultural antagonism, is a case in point.

• A conflict system is not controlled from the outside by a single force, rather it adapts spontaneously when confronted with changes in its environment. Therefore, one cannot attempt to steer a conflict in a certain direction by focusing on a single actor who is perceived to be the most powerful (such as the government).

• A small change in an element that may seem insignificant could have a major effect. Therefore every engagement with the conflict, however small, may be that which affects its resolution.

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[101]   This is consistent with the arguments of those observing the conflict. Africa Action (n 97 above), for example, has argued that 'viewing any aspect of the conflict in Sudan in isolation will lead to misguided policymaking'.

[102]   The Political Instability Task Force, for example, develop statistical models that are used to identify countries at a high risk of political instability. See D Lambach and D Gamberger 'Temporal analysis of political instability through descriptive subgroup discovery' (2008) 25(1) *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 19.

[103]   There is empirical proof for this claim. Ali and Matthews have shown that there is no way to predict whether a specific factor – such as international assistance or the means by which a civil war is ended, will have a positive or a negative impact on the peace-building process, since examples of both can always – and inexplicably – be found. TMA Ali and RO Matthews 'The long and difficult road to peace' in Ali and Matthews (eds) *Durable peace: challenges for peacebuilding in Africa* (2004) 393.

[104]   n 85 above, 23.

- Conflict systems will always self-organise in order to adapt and survive: to end conflict one must thus disable the system's ability to self-organise.

- Conflict systems have memory that informs them. This memory is not the sum total of everything that the system has encountered, but of that which was 'selected' to form part of the memory narrative. Acknowledging the memory of the system is thus indispensable in describing the system.

In the next section, the implications of complexity for our *knowledge* of the conflict system are investigated.

4. The crisis of knowledge

Cilliers[105] argues that acknowledging the *complexity* of the world places us in a crisis of knowledge. He quotes Novotny[106] as follows: 'Contemporary society is characterized – irreversibly – by pluralism and diversity [...] It can no longer be understood [...] in terms of the norms and practices of scientific rationality'. This means that the world has become too complex for us to describe it by *analysing* it, by reducing it into smaller fragments in order to understand the separate parts, hoping that this would give us access to knowledge of the world as such. This is analogous to the insight that conflict does not happen in distinguishable phases that follow each other chronologically. Moreover, the world is too complex for us to understand it *exhaustively*.

What happens when we employ scientific rationality upon the world to analyse it, is that we disregard the fact that the world is not a static system, but a dynamic one.[107] The interactions between elements change them, thereby continuously changing the structure of the system. This has two implications. An element only gains meaning within the dynamics of the system: there is thus little use in extracting a single element, such as a rebel group involved in the conflict, and analysing its motives or actions, because their identity separate from the system will be a distortion. Secondly, as the system is always changing, a description of it must always be provisional; a mere snapshot.

But this argument has another dimension. Complex systems are open systems[108] with the ability to receive information from the environment and adapt accordingly in order to survive. In other words, it is not even sufficient to know the dynamics of the system in isolation; one must also understand the environment and how the system reacts upon it. It is simply impossible for a traditional analyst to be able to trace and understand all these aspects in order to understand the system completely.

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[105]   P Cilliers 'A crisis of knowledge: complexity, understanding and the problem of responsible action' (2008) 2.
[106]   Cited in Cilliers (n 105 above) 2.
[107]   This is why systems theory is described as an antidote to reductionsist science. G Midgley 'Systems thinking: an introduction and overview' (n 74 above) xxii.
[108]   Von Bertalanffy (n 75 above).

This does not mean that we cannot know anything about the system, or even that we cannot describe it. The dynamics of the system makes it 'visible', which ensures that we can identify it, but never exhaustively. We can speak about the system, conscious however that the system will always exceed what we can say and know about it.

How then should such a system be approached? How could we possibly make decisions on the basis of such incomplete and unpredictable knowledge?

5. Complexity and action

When one is confronted by the thought that everything cannot possibly be known, Cilliers[109] argues, one must approach the world with a certain *modesty*. There should be an acknowledgement that we don't know everything; in fact we don't know nearly enough. *We don't know what the right action to take is*. This modesty is vital, because our lack of knowledge and subsequent action often leads to disastrous outcomes. If we are not willing to remain critical of what we think the correct action might be, we will persist in our damaging actions.[110]

This gives us the unique opportunity, French philosopher Jacques Derrida would argue, to make a *decision*.[111] When all facts are known, when there is only one course of action that should logically be taken on the face of these facts, then we do not decide upon action, we simply follow a *calculation*. It is only when there is the unknown, when it is not possible to calculate with precision what action would be best, that we have the opportunity to *decide*. This is crucial, because a calculation places responsibility in the hands of science: if the action fails, it is because the science failed. But a decision to take action in the face of uncertainty places the responsibility upon the one who decides. Arguably, when a person is faced with responsibility, she will take far greater care in coming to the 'right' decision than when the responsibility rests on a calculation. Taking far greater care, Cilliers[112] argues, means that every decision should be informed by careful and critical reflection. 'Walking through a minefield carefully does not mean that you will not step on one, but you will attend to every detail around you and you will have a better chance than one who just stomps through. Moreover, you will be extremely sensitive to, as well as critical of, any advice others with a different perspective may give'.

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109 n 105 above, 9.
110 It has been shown repeatedly that the structural adjustment programmes demanded by the World Bank and IMF have been disastrous to most African economies. The lack of 'modesty' of these Bretton Woods institutions have compelled them to persist in these programmes which has arguably only exagerrated Africa's problems. 'Structural adjustment a major cause of poverty' <www.globalissues.org/article/3/> (accessed 29 September 2008).
111 See N Royle *Deconstruction: a user's guide* (2000) 4.
112 Cilliers (n 105 above) 10.

The US invasion of Iraq is a fitting example of a lack of responsibility on the side of decision-makers: Lieberfeld[113] has shown that the decision to go to war was based on many factors – not merely the calculation based on intelligence indicating weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Yet, it was the WMD theory that officially motivated the invasion – precisely because it afforded the US government the opportunity to shift the responsibility for invasion away from a *decision* on their side to a *calculation* based on intelligence, science. The 'fact' of the existence of WMDs was portrayed as making an invasion inevitable. No-one was required to take responsibility for a decision. Once criticism of the invasion became impossible to ignore, 'intelligence' was the fall guy again.

There has been wide consensus that completely insufficient care was taken when deciding to invade Iraq.[114] This carelessness could be afforded, because responsibility was never upon the shoulders of the decision-makers. There was no acknowledgement early on that the invasion is a course of action *decided* upon amongst a number of alternatives and in the face of many uncertainties, with the acceptance of the consequences that such a decision should entail. Ironically, the acknowledgement of the complexity of the war and the many unknowns[115] came at a much later stage when an excuse was needed for the many failures in Iraq. Had the responsibility for the decision to go to war been squarely on the shoulders of the decision-makers, it is only conceivable that they would have taken greater care in coming to a defendable, ethical decision.

No doubt this seems politically naive: few governments will be willing to tell its citizens that it is unsure what to do. That is why it is important that security is understood as human rather than state security and conflict management as integrated rather than state-centred. Spreading the responsibility across the system, I will argue in the next chapter, should have the effect that the decision becomes less and less political.

6. Conclusion

This point of responsibility is belaboured not as an apology for a neo-liberalist approach that would see states act ethically as opposed to in their own interest as a final solution to the problem of conflict. Rather, it is important as the African system facilitates many decisions within its conflict management architecture: political decisions to send in a force, to start negotiations or to call for sanctions, but ideally also countless small, everyday decisions on human security. Could an acknowledgement of the inevitable shortcomings of the information gathered through the EWS lead to greater responsibility – and hence accountability – upon the shoulders of these decision-makers?

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[113]   n 12 above, 1.
[114]   As above.
[115]   In March 2003, Donald Rumsfeld notoriously said 'There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know' cited in S Zizek 'Philosophy, the 'unknown knowns', and the public use of reason' (2006) *Springer Science and Business Media* 137.

If that is the case, we would have to avoid an approach that centres itself upon the rationality and intentions of the decision-maker, as that would lead us back to the realist trap. To avoid that and at the same time maintain individual responsibility, I suggest that the conflict management system should mirror its complex subject; the African system itself should operate as a complex system. In order to test this hypothesis, the next chapter aims to deepen our understanding of what complexity theory would mean for a conflict management system by comparing and opposing it to the traditional approaches outlined in the previous chapter.

Chapter four

A complex approach to conflict

1. Introduction

This chapter will attempt a prescriptive argument supporting the assertion that the African system should embrace the characteristics of a complex system in order to better cope with the complexities it is attempting to 'manage'. It will provide a comparative study. While the chapter starts with a brief engagement between complexity and the traditional theories, the focus will rather be on the subsequent comparison with Galtung and De Coning's more progressive approaches. They acknowledge the complexity of conflict to a certain extent, and it is thus with such a comparison that we are able to trace more precisely what a complexity approach will add to these approaches. Finally, the system is tested against anticipated criticism.

It should be borne in mind that complexity theory did not emanate from international relations and therefore its approach will always be less prescriptive and more critical. This is why I choose to illustrate the characteristics of complexity by means of its critique of more conventional theories.

2. What complexity theory adds

2.1 Traditional theories

The most useful way to describe the relationship between complexity theory and other theories of conflict is by means of the general observation that complexity would acknowledge the various factors causing conflict that these theories do, without emphasising one above the other. These factors may interact in such a way that a conflict system emerges from them, but it is a distortion of the system to understand it merely in terms of either a single theory or in terms of various factors in isolation, rather than in interaction. Complexity theory would insist on avoiding such a distortion, because it is our understanding of the system which should inform our actions in response to it. A distorted understanding is generally not accompanied by the necessary modesty that incomplete knowledge should entail, which means that the actions undertaken are regarded as final and non-negotiable, rather than flexible, provisional and continuously critically assessed.

This modesty should not be confused with *in*action. To say that we can never calculate the outcome of a situation finally is not to say we should stop making calculations.[116] What complexity theorists do argue is that we can never count on this process to end or to reach perfection; therefore, we cannot attempt to cast descriptions in stone by formulating models to provide us with final answers. We should be modest about how much trust we may have in our calculations, and yet, they are still the best we can do. This means that we should never shift the responsibility of our decisions upon a model: the responsibility must remain 'human'.

2.2 Complexity's closest allies

In chapter 2, Galtung's TRANSCEND approach to conflict transformation was briefly introduced. Galtung[117] bases his model relating conflict, violence and peace on a number of key insights. Firstly, he focuses on peace as a relation between the parties, rather than merely on security. As a result, peace depends on the transformation of the relation of conflict between the parties, a process which must itself happen peacefully. Thirdly, conflict transformation requires transcendence, 'going beyond the goals of the parties, creating a new reality [...] so that parties can live and develop together'.[118] Fourthly, the TRANSCEND approach starts working on one party at a time. Finally, this approach is a holistic and dynamic one.[119] Galtung likens his approach to a medical model: it requires a diagnosis of the 'type' of disease, a prognosis into its natural history and process given the conditions and causes, and finally the therapy that would intervene in this natural process in order to prevent unacceptable conditions.[120] What is required is insight into the past and the future, as well as a *description* of the situation and a *prescription* for therapy.[121]

Galtung is clearly aware of the complexities of conflict. The problem that remains with his approach is that he returns to a rational scientific analysis made explicit with his analogy with the medical sciences. What he is attempting to do, is acknowledge the complexity of conflict and then eliminate it to retain an amount of *certainty*. His analogy implies that we can place the responsibility of conflict analysis upon science to find patterns and then base therapy upon it 'objectively' – rather than modestly. One could argue that, while Galtung does agitate for an integrationist approach to *managing* conflict, he does not envision the same complex approach to the *understanding* of the system. Science takes care of the 'diagnosis' and 'prognosis', while a flexible, human approach is reserved only for the 'therapy'.

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[116]   Cilliers (n 76 above) 31.
[117]   n 53 above, 14.
[118]   As above.
[119]   As above.
[120]   As above.
[121]   Galtung (n 53 above) 15.

De Coning's integrationist approach falls in the same trap as it relies on a *model* based on what he identifies as common processes and dimensions to conflict. He argues for an approach to conflict management with the collaboration of 'a wide range of internal and external actors, including governments, civil society, the private sector and international agencies, in a coherent and coordinated effort'.[122]

> [A]n integrated conflict management system is understood as a complex system consisting of parallel, concurrent and interlinked short-, medium-and long-term activities that intend to prevent disputes from escalating, or avoid a relapse into violent conflict, by addressing the immediate triggers, the consequences and the root causes of a conflict system, as part of a larger process aimed at facilitating a peace process.[123]

I believe there is a very significant consequence of this integrated effort that both De Coning and systems theorists fail to address: if the response to a conflict is not based on the decisions of a single organ – such as the PSC – but relies on many 'concurrent and interlinked' organs all making conflict-related decision of their own, then the *responsibility* of decision making will not be that of the PSC (or a political organ) alone, but will be spread across the system. This eliminates the dangerous political motivation of decisions. It could lead to an uncoordinated effort, but not if the system operates as a complex system, as the dynamic interaction between elements will keep their actions in sync.

The criticism of these approaches is therefore not a complete abandonment of their suggestions. Galtung's emphasis on perpetual re-evaluation acknowledges that the system is dynamic and that our approach should thus be flexible. Another significant insight is his emphasis on creativity. The TRANSCEND approach admits that many dynamics of conflict are irrational and therefore the trainers dealing with such dynamics must make room for 'creativity' and 'spontaneity' in order to deal with the irrational.[124] Programmatic action is not tailored to deal with the irrational. This is echoed by Cilliers in terms of complexity theory, but with a much broader impact. Complexity requires creativity not merely when an 'irrational' element is identified within the system, but in dealing with the system as a whole. A complex system, we have seen, always reacts spontaneously and unpredictably. Says Cilliers,[125]

> [a] central role for the imagination is indispensable when we deal with complex things. Since we cannot calculate what will or should happen, we have to make a creative leap in order to imagine what things could be like.

De Coning offers the important insight that the interdependence of elements in a complex system means that our approach to the conflict must be equally interdependent: we cannot afford a

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[122]   De Coning (n 18 above) 16.
[123]   As above.
[124]   Graf *et al* (n 34 above) 126.
[125]   n 105 above, 16.

fragmented approach. In other words, we should be wary of separating people dealing with different aspects of conflict into different organs.[126] Every engagement with a situation of conflict, however small, should be understood as part of the larger system and successfully integrated into it. This has significant implications for the African system, which I explore now from the vantage point of complexity.

3. A complex African system and its critics

An insistence on the conflict management system reflecting the complexity of its subject matter by operating as a complex system has two important implications: there must be many elements operating at different levels in a system of conflict management, and these must all be dynamically interlinked. No one element will thus be charged with full responsibility or be able to operate in isolation, because elements in a complex system amount to nothing in isolation.[127]

> In the context of postmodern society, Lyotard[128] has written as follows:
>
> A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before [...] one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee or referent.

This description may be regarded as analogous to a complex system. It emphasises the fact that a complex system is not merely a sum of all its elements; rather it was explained that the meaning of the system is created through the interactions between the elements and therefore *amounts to more*. When elements work in a fragmentary way, addressing separate goals in isolation, the system will only accomplish the sum of these efforts. Working as a complex system allows excess meaning which supersedes individual efforts, to emerge spontaneously as a systems effect. Our efforts up to now to manage conflict have clearly been insufficient: this excess meaning may well be indispensable.

I would add the following significant implications of a complex management system:

- Every element, regardless of how 'small' or insignificant, influences the complex system, not merely those in 'powerful' positions.
- The problem of the power of single entities to dominate the creation of conflict narratives is alleviated within a complex system. Every element is merely part of the fabric of relations which constitutes the narrative.

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[126]   De Coning (n 18 above)16.
[127]   In terms of an organisation this does not mean that no-one carries any responsibility, but rather that the responsibility is distributed throughout the system. Cilliers (n 76 above) 28.
[128]   Cited in Cilliers (n 76 above) 115.

- If the power is distributed across the system, then this should to an extent neutralise the power of single entities to dictate the system. In a complex system, elements only become meaningful in their interaction with others thereby necessarily undermining absolute positions of power: every element is in some way dependent on another.

- The response to the conflict is complex, so many elements (organs) will be responding, while working interdependently. The inability or unwillingness of a single organ to react appropriately to the conflict will thus not have the effect of paralysing the entire effort.

Incorporating ever more actors into the architecture may also have its drawbacks, however. In the case of the Sudanese conflict, Moni[129] argues that, even if the AU had the political will and the institutional capacity to intervene, it would have been extremely difficult given the number of stakeholders that would have to lend their support. He mentions IGAD – chaired at the time by the Ethiopian President Museveni involved in a conflict of his own; the ACHPR – with the Vice-Chairperson at that stage an official of the Sudan Ministry of Justice; and the PSC – with Sudan in 2005 a member and with a very powerful Permanent Representative (former head of the Sudanese intelligence service). Sudan is furthermore a member of the Bureau of the Assembly of the AU.[130] Had the power to decide on intervention been the sole responsibility of the PSC, it seems positive action may – theoretically at least – have been easier.

Moni's scepticism contradicts contemporary discourse. One of the many theorists now arguing for a network approach to conflict management is Monica Juma.[131] In her 2002 report on the infrastructure of peace in Africa, she motivates the network approach by arguing that

> [s]uch networks have the weight of numbers, provide a resource pool for members, enhance the capacity of weaker/smaller actors, improve the quality of training, encourage complementary action and, in volatile political situations, provide protection for members who are in danger of government harassment.

She therefore encourages greater networking between intergovernmental actors, community-based organisations and civic actors and intergovernmental actors.

The question is, given Moni's analysis of how the various actors involved in the network of decision making actually constrains the effort, how can we encourage a network approach that involves more actors while at the same time guarding against them simply paralysing the system by adding ever more interests into the mix? If increasing the complexity of the management system means more actors have to agree on action, can we accept this option uncritically?

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[129]   n 89 above.
[130]   Compare Lethinen's description of the EU system cited above.
[131]   n 4 above, 62.

I would argue that there are important differences between the systems Moni and Juma describe. Moni focuses exclusively on political actors and therefore on organs within the AU. Juma's suggested network approach aims to open up the AU system to a broader networking that includes actors outside of the political sphere. Moni's analysis is descriptive, while Juma's is prescriptive. In Moni's case, increasing the complexity of the network grinds it to a halt by becoming ever more state-centric; in Juma's case it promotes peace building by countering the state-centric approach.

The shift from a closed network approach to conflict management – one that is limited to political actors – to an open network which includes actors from across society, is, I believe, a first step to improving the conflict management capabilities of the African system. It is only a first step, and even this should be taken with great caution if it is not to feedback negatively on the system. It is quite conceivable that broadening the network to include civil society only broadens the power of the political actors to neutralise even those who may have been able to oppose the system from the outside. It is with these difficulties that I resort again to complexity theory.

4. Complexity answers

The way to guard against only broadening the power of political actors within the African system while still increasing the complexity of the network, I would argue, is by ensuring that it is a *dynamic* system. As explained, a complex system is dynamic in the sense that its elements are always interacting. The system is thus always changing because the elements continue to be transformed by their interaction. This is why the system is able to adapt spontaneously to its environment – the reason why it is important for the system to be open to engagement with the environment.

For an element to be able to control the system, it must be able to isolate itself so as not to be transformed by the system's structural dynamics. The central organising principle of a system cannot be in a state of flux – that neutralises its ability to control. Within a static system, political influence may become all-powerful as it is allowed to operate in isolation. In fact, I would contend that a static system is more dangerous than no system at all, as the influence of power is facilitated to reach even further than if no system had been in place, as Moni's description illustrates. In a complex system, however, no element is ever isolated from the influence of others.

We cannot 'create' a complex system because it emerges spontaneously, but we can increase the dynamics between elements – that, I would argue, is our most important task in transforming the African system.

Juma's suggestion that the system should be opened up to include civil society is extremely important. While Moni's system may include many elements, it remains a closed system with an absolute border: the border between those within the official structures and those beyond it. On the

basis of the earlier characterisation of complex systems (p 20-21), this would mean that the system Moni describes is not a complex system, and that is its danger. Opening the system up to civil society, to the environment, opens it up to critical engagement which could only provide the system with the productive tension that stimulates dynamics. An engaging civil society as part of the system may continuously question official wisdom which stimulates energy to move through the system; may hold others accountable to what was said or promised earlier, thereby stimulating important feedback loops; and may engage with the conflict at a close range, thereby being a vital link between the system and its environment.[132] Such a system would not readily become static – and while it is dynamic, paralysing power could be resisted.

Above, I suggested that responsibility must be spread across the system, but its coordination maintained by dynamic interaction. I would thus argue that power and responsibility must be understood as two sides of the coin of decision making. Both should be distributed across the system – with the dynamic functioning of the complex system at the same time constraining power and encouraging responsibility.

5. Conclusion

The intuition of many conflict analysts that modern conflict has become a very 'complex' phenomenon which requires a 'flexible' and 'integrated' approach was here critically unpacked to show that when we call conflict complex, we must be willing to deal with the significant implications this has for our knowledge of and approach to the conflict. Integration and flexibility may remain efforts to clamp down on the conflict in a predictable and calculated manner if these implications are ignored. Integration should mean dynamic interaction and flexibility should embrace philosophical modesty if it is to translate into successful conflict management systems. In the final chapter, these insights are used to make specific recommendations for the improvement of the African system.

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[132] This importance of civil society in gathering information is acknowledged by the CMD. See CMD 'Civil society participation in conflict prevention in Africa: An agenda for action' in CMD (n 3 above).

Conclusion and recommendations

1. Introduction

A wise man once said that if the house is on fire, one doesn't test the water.[133] I started this paper arguing that the urgency of conflict-related decisions does not allow these decisions to be based on anything less than critically appreciated underpinning theories. We must allow ourselves the time to test the water.

Chapter two initiated this inquiry by investigating the underpinning theories of the African system. At the same time, it was argued that existing theories of conflict have become too limited to deal with the complexity of conflict systems as we encounter them on the African continent today. In fact, I conclude that we would do better to give up on the search for a Grand Theory altogether, and start cautiously taking action on the basis of the limited knowledge that we have. This acknowledgement relieves us from the dilemma of the narrative construction of conflict description: when we accept that our knowledge will always be limited, then the subjectivity of these descriptions seize to be a crisis.

With this insight in mind, chapters three and four tested the compatibility of the theory of complexity with both the analysis and management of conflict. I concluded that a complexity approach will enable us to deal with conflict without limiting and thus misrepresenting it. It demands the acknowledgement, however, that managing conflict has no recipe; it is a never-ending process. From an assessment of the complex nature of conflict systems (chapter three) and the advantages – and necessity – of dealing with this complexity in an equally complex manner (chapter four), I conclude that we cannot afford to continue understanding and managing conflict as anything less than a dynamic, open and organic complex system. This, I argued, demands a lot more from decision-makers – notably the willingness to accept responsibility – but at the same time, their power is distributed across the complex management system and thereby the weight of responsibility is also relieved.

In conclusion, this chapter will apply these insights. I will 'test' my conclusions against seminal documents emanating recently from the AU (notably the *Draft Roadmap for the Operationalization of the Continental Early Warning System*),[134] which provide a tentative indication of how the conflict management system is currently envisioned within the PSD. However, these

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[133] I am indebted to Dr Patrice Vahard for reminding me of this saying.
[134] CMD (n 3 above).

documents treat the CEWS in 'isolation' from the rest of the system, placing all responsibility for action somewhat uncritically in the hands of the so-called 'end-users' (the PSC and the AUC Chair). I have argued that isolation of parts of the system cannot be afforded, because the system's efficacy lies in the interaction of its elements. Therefore, my recommendations will continue to address the system in its entirety,[135] for important strategic reasons.

2. The system's functioning

2.1 Sourcing information

The conceptual starting point of the African system is located within the CEWS, part of the PSD of the AUC. In the 'situation room', information is gathered round the clock on potential, actual and post-conflict situations in Africa.[136] Their primary source is 12 field officers located across the continent. In addition, they depend on the conflict management units of the RECs as well as open sources, which consist largely of media reports. For the latter purposes, new software is currently being developed that would be linked to 40 000 websites worldwide and that could automatically filter situations for importance by establishing the frequency of reports from certain countries.[137] These developments are likely based on the *Roadmap*, which recommended that data gathering must become automated and that a system of grading sources would increase efficiency. No analysis is done within the situation room; the information is distributed 'neutrally' to the PSD.[138]

As was argued from the outset, information is created by processes of selection. This implies that the information from the field officers and the RECs – not to mention the media – already consists of those facts chosen to be represented by the various sources. This is not a claim of conspiracy, but merely the reality of the creation of information. This challenge is particularly pertinent with regards to the media, and would become even more so when the new software becomes operational. Media reports are to a large extent driven by what would, so to speak, 'sell'. To test the likelihood of conflict on the frequency of media coverage is therefore arguably dangerous.

Moreover, a mere 12 field officers to cover the entire continent is not sufficient. These officers are not posted in places which receive less media coverage, so they do not fill the gap which the fickleness of the media may create. Here I am in agreement with the *Roadmap* that encourages sourcing from far broader sources, including academia, NGOs, international organisations and internal AU reports. I would add a focus on gathering information from all departments within the

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[135]   The AUC has addressed other elements of the system such as the African Standby Force in separate documents, but such fragmentation is undesirable.
[136]   Meretework Shawul, interviewed 21 August 2008, Addis Ababa.
[137]   As above.
[138]   As above.

AUC, as well as from the ACHPR,[139] the African Court, the PAP, ECOSOCC,[140] NGOs and civil society based organisations and the APRM. The establishment of an African Peace Academy and an AUC on International Law as suggested by the AU Non-Aggression Pact[141] should further be pursued in earnest.

Interaction with the RECs is to be welcomed.[142] Nevertheless, these are political organisations and there can be little doubt that their reports on domestic conflict would have to receive a political rubber stamp of some sort. They are only expected to report on situations that are beyond their ability or which would affect the continent as a whole[143] – which further gives them the opportunity to select information very strategically. As all the AU constitutive documents relating to the conflict architecture rely heavily on interaction with the RECs, this should be borne in mind.

The following recommendations are added:

- A variety of sources would mean that the CEWS could deal with less politically sensitive warnings of conflict, while civil society could tackle the political issues and report directly to, for example, the PSC.[144] This would eliminate much of the problems of the AUC as political organ having to inquire into sensitive issues of its members.[145]

- Sources within the PSD and beyond it should interact dynamically. Information should be flowing backwards and forwards, as information is the energy which triggers the dynamism of the system. On a purely empirical level, it is clear how this interaction will benefit the system, as an exchange of information could only enhance its capacity to predict conflict.[146] But on a theoretical level, this dynamic exchange will serve to counter the potential dangers that have been pointed out with respect to the creation of narratives. The more sources exchanging information, the smaller the effect of a single actor's selection of information. This is particularly pertinent with the involvement of the media as a source of information.

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[139]   The ACHPR and the AUC are meant to 'seek close co-operation...in all matter relevant to its objectives and mandate' (see art 19 of the PSC Protocol). The ACHPR should bring any relevant information to the attention of the PSC. This is echoed in article 45(c) of the African Charter.

[140]   The Pan-African Parliament must 'facilitate the effective implementation of the policies and objectives of the AU' and in 'promote peace, security and stability'. See the Protocol establishing PAP, arts 3(1) and 3(5). ECOSOCC's mandate includes supporting 'policies and programmes that will promote peace, security and stability in Africa, and foster development and integration of the continent' (Statutes of ECOSOCC, art 2(4)).

[141]   n 70 above.

[142]   Shawul (n 136 above) conceded that not many RECs are truly operational as yet with regards to conflict management.

[143]   Shawul (n 136 above).

[144]   This is provided for in rules 15 and 16 of the Rules of Procedure of the PSC.

[145]   Souare has suggested such an approach for the ECOWAS EWS. I Souare 'Conflict prevention and early warning mechanisms in West Africa: a critical assessment of progress' (2007) 16(3) *African Security Review* 106.

[146]   Musaka (interviewed 25 August 2008, Addis Ababa) argues that information on issues such as gender-based violence should be used as early-warning signs for conflict. The UN has realised the benefit of this aproach: the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities have been coopted to report to the international EWS. See J Packer 'The role and work of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities as an instrument of confict prevention' (2002) 10.

- At the same time, a dynamic flow of information stimulates the 'memory' of the system: the more information is relayed through the system, the stronger the institutional memory of the system becomes. For argument's sake, if the prevalence of ethnic tension in a particular country is raised by more than one organ (for example, the APRM, a field officer and the political affairs department) it becomes a strong indicator of potential conflict. The chance of this factor being overlooked is greatly diminished with the responsibility of narrative creation spread across the system.

- We saw that the memory of a complex system is created on the principle of use it or lose it. This is a more objective means of creating a narrative than relying on subjects to do so, but it is not objective in the sense that it is based on a rule-based model that eliminates the 'human' element, as is the case with the automated data gathering suggested by the *Roadmap*.

- The *Roadmap* encourages the flow of information, but almost exclusively by means of distributing reports. Such interaction is not dynamic therefore emphasis should rather be placed on direct interaction, for example meetings, both formal and informal, and brainstorming sessions.

2.2 The analysis of information

From the situation room, information is relayed on a daily basis to the desk officers. These officers should have mechanisms in place by 2010 with which early warning signs[147] will be identified. The *Proposal for an Indicators Module* released recently by the CMD,[148] concedes that the most pertinent questions as to what causes conflict and how it can be solved, have not been answered. It also indicates that 'the most sophisticated EWSs operate with very different and often contradictory sets of indicators' purely because no-one has been able to prove that a specific set of indicators is more successful than the next.[149] On the basis of the present argument, this is not surprising. My conclusion was that we should therefore be modest about what these indicators could provide us. The CMD *Proposal*, in contrast, suggests that we settle on a model regardless of the lack of evidence. This, I propose, is because of the erroneous belief that, even though there may be various factors that influence conflict, these factors may still be assessed in isolation rather than in interaction.

The suggested approach will follow 4 steps:

i. Information is matched against a framework of early warning indicators based on conceptual documents of the (O)AU.

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[147]   Nadir Elalim, interviewed 20 August 2008, Addis Ababa.
[148]   In CMD (n 3 above).
[149]   CMD (n 149 above) 5.

ii.   Once there is a sufficient match between information and indicators, a Strategic Conflict Assessment (SCA) of the situation is done to build more specific indicators.

iii. Indicator-building information is transformed into indicator-serving information, for example defining thresholds.

iv.   Once these thresholds have been passed, outcomes must be produced, 'usually by way of reporting' to alarm end-users of the conflict.

A model that depends on 'thresholds' necessarily runs the risk of understanding conflict as chronological, materialising along a continuum of identifiable phases. A conflict as a complex system could never be understood in such a way. What is more, I have argued that a model can never be based on objective fact, but will have to rely on narrative – a realisation that may well defeat the very purpose of using this model.

Significantly, however, the *Proposal* ends by emphasising that these modules are 'mere tools' and that it is rather the analytical capacity of the staff that will lead to recommendations that could prevent, manage and mitigate conflict.[150] This suggests a certain modesty about what these indicators could achieve, which is precisely the 'responsible' approach advocated for here: a model may be used, but should not carry the responsibility within the system. Less encouraging is the *Roadmap's* assertion that the indicators module should 'ensure a degree of objectivity in the selection of cases to be brought on the political agenda and in front of the PSC'.[151] It thus regrettably suggests that the subjectivity of knowledge production should be neutralised by ceding power to an 'objective', scientific standard.

Finally, the encouraging insights exhibited by the Roadmap remain qualified: the effectiveness of the CEWS will lie in its ability to interact dynamically with the entire system rather than function in isolation.

2.3 Operationalisation of the system

With regards to the functioning of the AU architecture as a system, the following recommendations are made:

- At the moment, there is no relationship between the situation room and the desk officers.[152] This fragmentation of the system is unnecessary: members of the situation room should have knowledge of what methodology and approach informs the rest of the system as this knowledge would feed back on their own work. At the same time, there should be feedback

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[150]   CMD (n 149 above) 13.
[151]   CMD (n 143 above) 6.
[152]   The director of the Situation Room (n 136 above) has no knowledge of the means of analysis used by the rest of the department. She agrees that this should change.

from the department to the situation room and their sources to ensure that the dynamism of the system works both on a horizontal and a vertical level.[153]

- When information is finally relayed to the PSC, the dynamic process of interaction should not reach a dead end. At the moment, some of their meetings are open to delegates from other AUC departments, but one such delegate[154] observed that this never materialises into interaction.

- Closed PSC meetings are often a discussion of a communiqué written by the AUC. The PSC then decides on approving or amending it.[155] This means that the AUC has a strong foothold within this organ which could keep the dynamics of the system alive. They should be conscious of and careful with this responsibility. This is an ideal opportunity for the AUC to facilitate the distribution of responsibility so that it is not centralised within the PSC.

- A member of the PSD notes that the coordination within the AUC is still lacking, because there is not a sense of the fact that 'the Commission will be judged as a unit and not each department on its own'.[156] As a result, the departments are still competing rather than cooperating. This understanding of the organ being evaluated as a unit should be disseminated across the system to enhance co-operation.

- At the same time, an emphasis on coordination does not mean everyone must agree in an organisation.[157] On the contrary, some form of competition is needed in order for the system to create new structures and patterns so as to self-organise. In order for different organs to be in healthy competition, they need to be confident of their own position within the system. At the moment, some organs lack this confidence and as a result, interaction is minimised for fear of being undermined.[158] All organs and departments should have a clear mandate and vision of their position within the AU system.

- There remains a lack of trained personnel at all levels of the African system.[159] The CMD recommends that the CEWS should rely on a model with 'a limited number of flexible easy-to-monitor indicators and easy-to-control thresholds' in order to overcome this problem.[160] The financial and institutional constraints should rather be alleviated within a complex

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[153]   Reychler has commented on the challenge of peace building's 'slow learning process': 'There is a need to build structures that support a better exchange of knowledge between the decision-makers, the practitioners in the field, and the research community'. L Reychler 'Challenges of peace research' (2006) 11(1) *International Journal of Peace Studies* 1.
[154]   He asked to remain anonymous. Interviewed 20 August 2008, Addis Ababa.
[155]   As above.
[156]   Charles Mwaura, interviewed 21 August 2008, Addis Ababa.
[157]   Cilliers (n 76 above) 24.
[158]   The ACHPR is a case in point. There is a concerted effort from this organ to maintain their independence from the AUC – who is responsible for the budget of the ACHPR – which could well be stifling interaction. E-mail from S Monageng (Chairperson: ACHPR) on 20 August 2008.
[159]   Musaka (n 146 above) argues that if there were sufficient experts working in that department, the 2007 Kenyan crisis could have been averted. In their APRM review of 2004, the Kenyan delegation mentioned ethnic tension as a challenge to the country – a warning sign that should have been picked up by proper analysis from the PSD.
[160]   n 143 above, 5.

system: a system that works as a coordinated network shares responsibility and capacity. This would only be possible if the system does not follow one indicators module religiously, but allows for the interaction of different analyses to inform the system.

2.4 Conflict response

In a paper presented at the AU Meeting of Governmental Experts on Early Warning and Conflict Prevention in 2006,[161] the notion of societal systems as 'self-organising' was explored. It was argued that conflict warning occurs 'in interactive sequence between societal actors' and that local access and knowledge to the situation would as a result be crucial in effective conflict response. 'The optimal situation would be defined by continual engagement and communication, cooperative monitoring and regulation of the terms of interaction, and [...] characterized by integration, coordination, regulation and reiteration'.[162] Unfortunately, this argument is made not with regards to the African system, but to encourage member states to increase their access to local areas.

This insight into the self-organising capabilities of societal systems is crucial. I would agree that access to the localised interactions within the system is important, because as was shown, the interaction in a complex system happens mostly at a short range. It would thus indeed be advisable for governments and civil society, amongst others, to increase their access to local communities. At the same time, these functionaries should not be isolated from the African system as a whole, but should be engaging directly or indirectly with all other organs – no matter what their status – otherwise the systems effect will be lost.

3. General challenges of the system

Finally, because the *Roadmap* continues to see the CEWS in isolation from the rest of the system, its recommendations do not sufficiently take account of the fact that the CEWS is operating within a political body and within the context of the African continent. As a result, the challenges this implies are not addressed. One could arguably formulate an excellent CEWS in isolation, but it would mean nothing in the face of political unwillingness. An approach to any part of the system must therefore understand it as an element of a larger complex system.

3.1 Lack of political will/interest

Critics regularly comment on the AU's lack of 'political will' to intervene in conflict situations. Moni argues that these leaders are simply not willing to create a precedent that may come back to haunt

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[161]   CMD 'Development of indicators for early warning systems: some conceptual and methodological issues' in CMD (n 3 above).
[162]   CMD (n 161 above) 3.

their own situations in future. Powell calls it the problem of 'proximity' that 'undermines the impartiality between neighbours'.[163] Upon a question to what extent security issues are driven by political motives within the AU – as it is within the UN Security Council (UNSC) – Musaka[164] answered that the stakes are not nearly as high within the AU as within the UNSC. In the case of the AU, however, we are dealing with a 'club of friends', he says, no-one willing to speak out against the other. At the launch of the PSC it was said that this organ could not produce 'expected results' if not 'backed by a real political will on the part of other AU member states'.[165]

This phenomenon could perhaps better be understood as political 'interest', including the authority, motivations, resources and capabilities of states, rather than merely an elusive reference to 'will'.[166] If we understand it thus, it means that the overwhelming importance of the realist approach that remains within the AU system becomes evident. My recommendations have addressed the issues of lack of resources and capabilities above in the context of the AU system and it is equally pertinent here. Finally, with regard to the motivation and authority of states, I believe complexity could again assist in alleviating the effects of these obstacles.

- It has been illustrated that if the African system operates as a complex system it would be far more difficult for political wrangling to paralyse the system. Even if leaders do nothing – something that would be vastly more difficult if the African system already includes a vibrant civil society component – the effect would be less paralysing if the system was functioning interdependently. The reaction to the crisis by organs outside the political structure would continue to operate, meaning that conflict management would continue even though political engagement was slow.

- If the system was to operate effectively, the importance of the political decision may also minimise. For example, had the early warning signs of ethnic tension in Kenya been picked up, many different organs would have started responding to the tension long before it developed into a conflict. This would have been even more likely if civil society had been involved: both in relaying information and in responding to it at close range. If this was the case, the situation may never have developed into a political crisis.

- The problem of the lack of authority of a state takes on a different dimension in a complex system because, as was shown, every element of the system influences the system's output, no matter how small or insignificant. This means that states with little political clout will have

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[163]   K Powell 'The African Union's emerging peace and security regime: opportunities and challenges for delivering on the responsibility to protect' (2005) 119.

[164]   Musaka (n 146 above).

[165]   AUC 'Report on the establishment of a continental peace and security architecture and the status of peace processes in Africa' (2004) iii.

[166]   This was suggested to me by Dr Patrice Vahard.

a say, while the powerful states should be unable to dictate events entirely as responsibility is distributed across the system.

3.2 Lack of an authentic African approach

Many have argued that Africa cannot afford to ignore its own tools of conflict management in approaching conflict on the continent.[167] The remarkable indigenous peace process led by the tribe elders in Somaliland[168] is a case in point. The institution of the Panel of the Wise is a cautious acknowledgement of the significance of indigenous methods, but if it is to be caught within the rigid mechanics of a static African system, rather than in an open system which allows for dynamic interaction and dialogue, this organ will amount to little more than yet another good idea on paper. I suggest that a complexity approach gives us a unique opportunity to incorporate indigenous knowledge where other theories have failed.

- If the African system operates with a complexity approach, it will acknowledge the shortcomings of 'scientific methodologies', which means that there will be more room in this system for different forms of knowledge. Indigenous methods of conflict resolution are often criticised as it is invariably specific to a cultural context and its effects localised. This will be accommodated within a complex system: no single narrative ever dictates the system. The significance of localised interaction was further emphasised in 2.4 above: the use of indigenous knowledge is ideally suited for such localised interaction without it having to become a universal method informing the entire system.

- It was argued that a complex approach requires creativity in the face of the 'irrational': this should be a further encouragement for those within the system to engage and experiment with indigenous methods.

- It has also been argued that because conflict is complex it cannot be changed by an external source, but will self-organise in response to changes in the environment. This means that a conflict system must finally 'manage itself'. Peace must emerge from the system itself, not be imposed from the outside.[169] If we approach conflict this way, Africa may have the opportunity to create its own, authentic peace.

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[167]   See A Mazrui 'Towards containing conflict in Africa' in *Human rights, peace and justice in Africa: a reader* (2006) 262.
[168]   ID Jhazbhay *Somaliland: post-war nation-building and international relations, 1991-2006* Unpublished thesis, University of Witwatersrand (2007).
[169]   This echoes Lederach's comments on p9.

4   Conclusion

The peace and security architecture of the AU is not meant to exist in isolation, but rather to be an integral part of the overall vision of the AU, which is to 'build an integrated Africa, a prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena'.[170] Operating as a complex system, the conflict architecture will spontaneously help develop the integration of Africa by stimulating interaction between people of the continent on all levels. The realisation of this interaction as dynamic may well be the trigger that the AU needs to become a dynamic force as an organisation. A peaceful Africa could only be a more prosperous one, while a more prosperous continent will probably be a more peaceful one.

Conflict represents the result of the intersection of all Africa's biggest obstacles: a lack of development, good governance and human rights. But as conflict is a site of urgency, a situation within which these well-known problems take on a magnitude of terror that forces us to act, there may be no better place to start the initiative for a new, dynamic and strong Africa.

Word Count: 17996

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[170]   AUC *Strategic plan of the African Union Commission: vision and mission of the African Union* (2004).

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