

BETWEEN THE JUST AND THE EXPEDIENT: THE PROBLEM OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN AFRICA¹

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Abstract

This paper is about African conflicts and their tendency to persist despite attempts to resolve them. Such persistence has in the past been attributed to various causes but it is the contention of this paper that African conflicts fester due to poor governance and thereafter persist and recur because the issues that led to the conflict are not adequately addressed in the course of resolving the conflict. To justify this position, the paper attempts a classification and analysis of what it considers to be recurring patterns in the conflict processes of some post-independence African states and also attempts a classification and analysis of efforts at resolving such them. It argues that the expedient is often promoted over equity in the management of African conflicts and that mediators and facilitators routinely disregard the underlying issues of the conflict in their haste to abstract an agreement from the parties. It posits that some of the compromises that are extracted from the parties fail to meet their basic expectations and thus force them into a temporary peace that is abandoned at the earliest opportunity. The paper concludes that lasting peace is only feasible when issues of justice and equity are given priority of place and the parties are accorded sustained assistance as they embark on national reconciliation.

Introduction

Aristotle is reputed to have said that man outside a society is either a beast or a god. This is because, by his estimation, it is only a beast or a god that can subsist without the desire to

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented to the International Research Conference Understanding Conflicts: Cross Cultural Perspectives on August 21, 2008 at Aarhus University, Denmark. I thank the participants for their comments.

interact with its own kind. For Aristotle, therefore, interaction between *homo sapiens* is the most definitive aspect of their humanity and it is only when individuals and groups interact with one another that they express their humanity. Yet it has been observed that conflicts usually and only arise in the course of such interaction. This implies that, just as interaction appears to be essential to being human, so do conflicts appear to be essential to human interaction. In Africa, this observation has been confirmed many times over, as individuals and communities confront contending ideas and interests in the course of their relations. The disputes within communities or rival communities sometimes boil over into violent conflicts that are as costly as they are destructive. This paper is about such violent African conflicts especially those with a tendency to persist despite attempts to resolve them. It is limited to intra-state conflicts of the post independence era, where the contending parties share a common nation-state but engage in conflict behaviour that destabilizes the state. The paper's pivotal interest is in the impact of third party interventions in the management of African conflicts. It argues that such conflicts recur or persist because the complex histories of such conflicts which ought to be an invaluable guide to mediators are not given sufficient consideration during the mediation process. Instead, that third party mediators rush the conflicting parties into agreements that fit the exigencies of the moment. It concludes that sustainable peace may only be achieved if sufficient time and effort is dedicated to such complex histories rather than the apparent conflict phenomena.

Conflicts in Africa

African societies, like those elsewhere have been built by and sustained through conflicts. Conflicts have not only played a leading role in the rise and fall of the great African empires of the past but continue to define the everyday existence of individuals in contemporary nation-states of Africa. Such conflicts have sometimes been violent, resulting in the loss of life and

destruction of property, while others have been of low intensity and without injury to the contending parties. Conflicts, even when they have been violent sometimes have redeeming features inasmuch as they helped to forge great empires, generate wealth, contribute to more equitable distributions of wealth, highlight injustices and help develop complex political systems. On the other hand, some of them merely yield immense physical and psychological suffering and result in colossal destruction of physical and institutional infrastructure without substantial benefits for the warring parties and the civil population. Some have been short-lived and quickly resolved with the contenders going back to and sometimes improving upon their pre-conflict relations, while others have been protracted and recurring as the protagonists and their descendants continue to spar and brawl with one other.

A cursory examination of history reveals four possible periods in the history of African conflict; the pre-colonial, the colonial, the early independence/Cold War and the post-Cold War period, with the conflicts of each period having their unique characteristics. In the pre-colonial period, for instance, violent conflicts were primarily between exogenous groups with clearly defined characteristics of otherness. Such conflicts usually ended in the vanquishing and dispersal of one group, or in the incorporation of the vanquished group into the victorious group. Examples of such conflicts include the expansion wars of the Asante, Luba, Lunda, Oyo, and Zulu kingdoms. Intra-group conflicts of the time usually had to do with chieftainship disputes and involved mainly the ruling families and their allies. Examples of these include the Kongo Civil War of 1665, the Ndwandwe-Zulu War of 1817 and to some extent the first Matebele War of 1893.

There were two types of conflict during the colonial period and both had to do with the imposition and resistance to colonialism. The first revolved around the pacification and

subjugation of African natives as major European powers sought to extend their spheres of influence and include such conflicts as the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, the Gun War of 1880, the Benin Punitive Expedition of 1897, the Italo-Ethiopian wars, the Anglo-Zanzibar War of 1896, and the Maji Maji Rebellion of 1885. The second, in the later days of colonialism, grew out of attempts by Africans to wrestle self-rule from colonialists and include the independence wars in Angola, Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe. At this time the colonial authority as the common enemy united the otherwise disparate parts of the colonial state under the common task of resisting colonialism, thus defining the colonialist as the out-group and the Africans as the in-group. The absence of the colonialists and the emergence of African nation states in an era of great ideological polarization, helped to define conflicts in newly independent African states. Since conflicts of the era were sustained by the Cold War, otherness which would have been defined in terms of the cleavages of the pre-colonial era was reinforced with ideology. Such conflicts include, among others, the civil wars in Angola 1975, Chad 1979, Congo DRC 1960, Mozambique 1975, Nigeria 1966 and Zanzibar 1964. The end of the Cold War and the attempt by disparate groups to live together in newly independent states resulted in more recent conflicts such as those in Burundi, Chad, Republic of Congo, Congo DRC, Cote d' Ivoire, Djibouti, Gambia, Kenya (Shifita), Lesotho, Liberia, Mali (Tuareg) and Niger (Tuareg), Nigeria (Niger delta), Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda. These recent conflicts could be said to be more about socio-political and economic accommodation than anything else.

Although the conflicts described above have their own unique characteristics and each is worthy of independent study, this paper is only concerned with conflicts of the post independence era. Also, although the Cold War played an important role in post-independence African conflicts, one could argue that the issues in the conflicts were mostly local and that the

superpowers struggle for world domination was merely incidental to them. Thus although the cold war provided sustenance and introduced an ideological zeal that fired up the adversaries, the opportunity structure for such conflicts were created through local issues. It is only the marginality of the Cold War ideologies in the conflicts that would explain the dexterity with which African conflict groups switch from one cold war patron to another. In the Angolan civil war for instance, Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), received patronage from China in the early days of its existence and later switched to the United States and South Africa despite the ideological differences of these patrons. Also, the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) which in its early days was the ideological home of Savimbi, was initially funded by the People's Republic of China and later by the United States and its proxy, Zaire (DRC). Thus, rather than fight a proxy war one could argue that the parties used the facilities of the Cold War to further their own ends. Again, one could argue that if the conflicts were mere appendages of the Cold War, the conflicts in Angola, Chad and Congo (Zaire/DRC) would not have outlived the Cold War.

Issues in African Conflicts

Violent conflicts arise and escalate in Africa for a variety of reasons. The United Nations Secretary General's report² attribute African conflicts to historical legacies, like the arbitrary partitioning of the continent during colonization and the challenge of forging a genuine national identity from among the disparate and often competing communities; and from the competing identities that resulted from the Cold War. The report also identifies internal factors like the nature of political power in African states, external factors like the competition by foreign governments for precious resources such as oil and the economic motives of arms merchants,

² UN secretary General, "The Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa," *Report of the UN Security Council, April 16, 1998*, accessed February 5, 2008, <https://www.issafrica.org/uploads/CAUSECONFLICT.PDF>.

local crime syndicates and greedy political opportunists. Again the report points to peculiar situations where competition for scarce land and water resources and the degradation of the environment in the process of mineral extraction without commensurate benefits to local communities are sources of conflict.

Contemporary literature on conflicts in Africa tends to support the Secretary General's report. For instance, Cyril Obi sees African conflicts as "...embedded in the interplay of historical factors, socio-economic crisis, legacies of authoritarianism and the politics of exclusion, international forces, and local struggles."³ Nancy Annan elaborates on the above when she says that "...bad governance and corruption, human rights violations, poverty, ethnic marginalization and small arms and light weapons proliferation (among others), continue to serve as triggers and drivers of violent conflicts."⁴ Picking up on the bad governance narrative, Stremlau observes "...most wars result from bad governance. Weak authoritarian African governments lack the institutional capacity to manage factional struggles; they exclude majority and minority groups from power and suffer from poverty and gross income inequalities."⁵ The above tends to support the idea that "conflict must be defined in terms of the wants or needs of the parties involved"⁶ and for the African, such needs include, social identity, political inclusion, economic advancement and good governance. The common belief is that African states can eschew conflicts or otherwise contain existing conflicts if sufficient effort is made towards satisfying these needs.

Ethnicity and African Conflicts

³ Cyril Obi, "Conflict and Peace in West Africa," (Uppsala, Sweden: The Nordic Africa Institute 2012), accessed October 2015, <http://www.nai.uu.se/publications/news/archives/051obi>.

⁴ Nancy Annan, "Violent Conflicts and Civil Strife in West Africa: Causes, Challenges and Prospects," *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 3, no. 1 (2014): 5.

⁵ John Stremlau, "Ending Africa's Wars," *Foreign Affairs* 79, no. 4 (2000): 118.

⁶ Michael Nicholson, *Conflict Analysis* (London: English University Press, 1970), 2.

Ethnic solidarity and the desire by primordial groups for recognition and palliation have always been associated with African conflicts. Tshitereke, for instance, observes, “few countries are heterogeneous and identity becomes a causal factor in war as allegiance of men and women to their nation and intimacy to the state are the hallmarks of their spirit of patriotism.”⁷ The importance of ethnicity in African conflicts is further illustrated by the ethnic cleavages that characterize most African conflicts. The conflicting parties in the Angolan civil war, for instance, each drew their support from the main ethnic groups that formed the Angolan state. The MPLA for instance drew its support from the Kimbundu group while the FNLA and UNITA drew their support from the Bakongo and Ovimbundu groups respectively. The Rwanda and Burundi conflicts follow the ethnic Tutsi, Hutu divide while the Kenya (Shifta) conflict pitched ethnic Somalis against the rest of the population. Again ethnicity played a major role in the splintering of the DRC into four different states at independence and the ensuing crisis that lasted between 1960 and 1965. Further more, ethnicity and ethnic loyalties have been identified as factoring prominently in other crisis as in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, and Cote D’ Ivoire. The above notwithstanding, it is important to note that ethnic identity alone has never been the source of any rebellion and that no rebel army in Africa has ever been mustered or sustained merely by ethnicity. Thus while ethnicity contributes to the hardening of positions and cement loyalties, it is more appropriate to say that “... collective identities coalesce around specific grievances such as political repression, economic marginalization and exclusion, and so on, that become inter-subjectively held.”⁸ This is not to say that primordial identities do not play a role in conflict processes, rather it is saying that their role is secondary rather than pivotal.

⁷ Clarence Tshitereke, “On the Origins of War in Africa,” *African Security Review* 12, no. 2 (2003): 85.

⁸ James Busumtwi-Sam, “Sustainable Peace and Development in Africa,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 37, no. 3 (2002): 98.

If differing identities alone were sufficient for conflict, then the whole continent would have been engulfed in conflict. This is because, apart from the numerous primordial identities, which Africans jealously guard, new identities that are equally important are created from time to time. The growth in urbanization and the contact between traditional societies and foreign cultures have resulted in the emergence of new identities, which are sometimes more powerful than primordial identities. Such new identities include those that have been created because of education, political ideology, political association, occupation, religion, and other aspects of cultural interaction. These new identities are identifiable within, but sometimes cut across the primordial identities of various African groups. For instance, in the post independence crisis of what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo, non-primordial identities, associated with alumnae associations of mission schools, as well as the *cercles*⁹ in urban centres, contributed variously to the origin and escalation of the conflict. It could in fact be argued that without the non-primordial identities, the disputes that led to the conflict would not have arisen. Again, during the Angolan conflict, the ability of the MPLA to attract the support of the multiracial intelligencia of Luanda allowed it some credibility as a national organisation while the other groups were merely seen as regional movements.

If differing primordial identities alone were pivotal to African conflicts, then it would be difficult to explain the conflicts in Lesotho, which despite its homogeneous population has witnessed quite a number of violent conflicts since its independence in 1966. Also, ethnicity does not explain the conflict in Somalia; especially the one between Mohamed Farah Aideed's Abgal group and Ali Mahdi Mohamed's Habargidir group. This is because apart from sharing the same Somali ethnicity, both belong to the same Hawiye clan and Hiraab sub clan. The same could be

⁹ Associations of educated, middleclass and westernized urban intellectuals popular in each of the major urban centers of DR Congo that lead the struggle for independence.

said about the conflicts between the Darod clans, viz. Absame Harti and Mareehaan. Indeed Elmi and Barise have observed that,

Mere differences in clan identities themselves did not cause the conflict. Clan identity is not static, but changes depending on the situation. One can claim to be ‘Somali’ if doing so serves one’s interests or wish to emphasize the link between two clans at national level. That same person may claim to be ‘Irir’, ‘Hawiye’, ‘Hirab’, ‘Habargidir’, ‘Sa’ad’ or ‘Reer Hilowle’. These terms involve an example of descending levels of one’s clan identity. The same is true of other clans regardless of whether they are in the north or the south. Clan identity is flexible.¹⁰

This view is supported by Tshitereke who in discussing the conflict in the DRC observes that “ethnic conflict is demonstrating how shifts in ethnic identity depend on the socio-economic and political context of the moment rather than on some objective criteria of identity.” Again, ethnicity does not explain the rise of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone as it did not coalesce around any specific ethnicity. According to Paul Richards, “the RUF stood out against ethnic particularism, and imposed the national lingua franca (Krio) in its training programs. All of the country’s main ethnic groups were represented in the movement by the end of the war, though Mende-speakers from the east predominated.”¹¹ The dominance of Mende speakers should not be seen as a sign of ethnicity since, as he further claims, the militia mobilized as a national counter-insurgency force against the RUF was also dominated by Mende speakers.

Resources and Conflicts

The role of resources in African conflicts has been variously articulated but it was the notoriety of resources in the Sierra Leonean conflict, and the advent of the concept of ‘conflict diamonds’ that established its pre-eminence as a source of violent conflicts. In many cases where

¹⁰ Afyare Abdi Elmi and Abdullahi Barise, “The Somali Conflict: Root Causes, Obstacles, and Peace-Building Strategies,” *African Security Review* 15, no. 1 (2006): 37.

¹¹ Paul Richards, “A Systematic Approach to Cultural Explanations of War: Tracing Causal Processes in Two West African Insurgencies,” *World Development* 39, no. 2 (2011): 215.

economic marginalization is cited as reason for violent conflicts, the dispute is usually over the distribution of proceeds from natural resources. This is especially so where such resources are derived from a section of the country but the area is not as developed as other areas. In the case of pre-independence South Sudan, for example, "...economic marginalization was a key grievance that had mobilized and politicized collective identity formation in the south."¹² The idea here is that a unified southern identity would not have emerged from the fragmented primordial identities of the pre-1956 south if there was no perception that resources from the south were being used to develop the north while the south was left without development. It was this belief that galvanized identity formation in the south and the desire by southerners to control these resources. White has also argued that there was no unified Sahrawi identity in Western Sahara prior to the discovery of oil and phosphate in the territory. A unified Sahrawi identity only emerged and the tension between them and settlers developed after they had abandoned nomadism to look for jobs and education in the mining towns.¹³ This notwithstanding, it would appear that the Sahrawi had better claim to the territory than Morocco whose interest in the territory was also fuelled by these resources.

Economic marginalization was also cited as reason for the Tuareg rebellion in Mali/Niger and is alluded to in many other low intensity conflicts in Africa. But, although economic marginalisation is usually a convenient rationalization for conflicts, it is usually difficult to determine how much of the conflict is directly linked to such marginalisation. The economic marginalization of the post 1956 South Sudan, for instance, happened within the context of the amalgamation of northern and northern Sudan following the British sponsored Juba conference of 1947. It is therefore not clear, how much of the resentment that lead to the conflict was due to

¹² Busumtwi-Sam, "Sustainable Peace and Development in Africa," 102.

¹³ Natasha White, "Conflict Stalemate in Morocco and Western Sahara: Natural Resources, Legitimacy and Political Recognition," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 3 (2015): 343.

economic marginalization and how much of it resulted from the emergent political structure that favoured the Arab north. In the Western Saharan conflict, it is also not clear that the Sahrawi would have accepted to join the Moroccan state if they had been given complete control over the territory's resources or the territory had been better developed by the Moroccans. Again, in the Tuareg rebellion, it is often difficult to separate the role played by the territorial and paternalistic ambitions of Libya from the economic marginalisation alluded to by the separatists. Keenan has also alleged that the rebellion was due to the deliberate use by the United States of El Para, an agent of the Algerian military intelligence services Direction des Renseignements et de la Sécurité (DRS), to create a phantom terror group in the region a bid to label the northern parts of Mali and Niger as a 'Terrorist Zone', and justify its "imperialist counter-terrorism strategies and militarisation of the rest of the continent." Keenan argues that "the fabrication of the El Para incident and the US's subsequent labelling of their region as a 'Terror Zone' have not only done immense damage to the local tourism industry and associated livelihoods, but angered the Tuareg populations of southern Algeria, northern Mali and northern Niger who resent their region being labelled as a 'Terror Zone'."¹⁴ It is this anger and loss of livelihoods that continue to fuel the Tuareg rebellion. In view of the above, one could hazard a guess that without the other ancillary factors that actively fuelled discontent some of the violent conflicts that are attributed to economic marginalization would not have thrived.

A different approach to discussing the role of resources refers to the desire by individuals to appropriate the resources of the generality for themselves and it is on this behaviour that the greed and grievance theory of civil conflicts¹⁵ is based. In discussing the Lesotho situation for

¹⁴ Jeremy Keenan, "Uranium Goes Critical in Niger: Tuareg Rebellions Threaten Sahelian Conflagration," *Review of African Political Economy* 35, no. 117 (2008): 453.

¹⁵ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "On the Incidence of Civil War in Africa," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (2002): 13-28.

instance, Sejanamane observes, “Increasingly the question of accession to power began to be seen as a struggle for control of the resources, to the exclusion of all other issues.”¹⁶ This is to say that, it is the desire by the elites to gain access to and exclude others from the limited resources of African countries that result in conflict. In arguing against this generalization, Hutchful and Aning observe,

Privileging the struggle over resources in explaining conflicts serves a number of useful functions. First, it allows conflict theories to be aligned with an existing rational choice –driven paradigm of human and economic behaviour favoured by the World Bank and many neo-liberal western economists. Second, it provides that some “rationality” – in a very western idiom – can be discerned beneath the otherwise baffling violence witnessed in many of these wars. Third, this approach furnishes a tangible basis for international action such as initiatives against “conflict diamonds” that admittedly would not be possible if conflicts were simply ascribed to some “primordial African culture.”¹⁷

They argue that “It is necessary to avoid exaggerating the role of resources in conflicts and the excessive generalization of the nature of “resource conflicts.”¹⁸ This is not to say that control of resources do not play a role in conflicts. On the contrary they hold that “...greed for profits and/or power certainly is a strong motive for war, and no one can argue with the fact that warring factions need resources to finance their war effort.” But it should also be kept in mind that “...greed and predation, after all, require an opportunity structure”¹⁹ and where that structure is not available, conflicts would not arise.

The Struggle for Power

African conflicts have also been attributed to the struggle for power by the political elite and one reason for this view is that most African conflicts begin either as civil contest for

¹⁶ Mafa Sejanamane, “Peace and Security in Southern Africa: The Lesotho Crisis and Regional Intervention,” in *Peace and Security in Southern Africa*, ed. Mandaza (Harare: Sapes Books, 1996), 63.

¹⁷ Eboe Hutchful and Kwesi Aning, “The Political Economy of Conflict” in *West African Security Challenges: Building Peace in a Troubled Region*, eds. Adekeye Adebajo and Ismail Rashid (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2004), 201.

¹⁸ Hutchful and Aning, “The Political Economy of Conflict,” 206.

¹⁹ Busumtwi-Sam, “Sustainable Peace and Development in Africa,” 99-100.

political power or as a low-level political agitation. The common reason for escalation is the domination of the political structure by a particular clique that consistently frustrates every attempt at peaceful political change. It is such "...monopolization of power and the absence of institutionalised mechanism of peaceful change in political structures and governing institutions that made military coups and/or armed insurrections the main source of change."²⁰ This is especially so where democratic institutions are manipulated by privileged groups in order to exclude others from political participation. In Liberia for instance, the political monopoly of the True Whig Party as well as economic domination by Americo-Liberians was cited as reason for the Samuel Doe coup. The attempt by Doe to replace the True Whig/Americo-Liberian domination with one led by his Krahn kinsmen was equally cited as the reason for the First Liberian Civil War. Also, the civil war in Burundi is often attributed to the power monopoly by the minority Tutsi's at the expense of the majority Hutus. The civil wars in Chad, Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote D' Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Mozambique and Uganda are also associated with the contest for power by the political elite. But it is not clear how much of the contest is for political power alone and how much of it is for the economic benefits that come with wielding such power. Thus, even though self-actualisation and determination plays an important role in the contest for power, one cannot discount the desire for pecuniary benefits in such contests.

The one word that is often seen as summarising the different sources of African conflicts is 'governance.' In using governance an umbrella concept, the understanding usually is that good governance can assuage "...the tugs and pulls of different identities, differential distribution of

²⁰ Busumtwi-Sam, "Sustainable Peace and Development in Africa," 95.

resources and access to power...’’²¹ and thus averts violent conflicts. This is to say that, though African conflicts “...tend to have multiple causes, the most important single cause is poor governance over a sustained period coupled with frustrated aspirations for political change, often occurring in a context of profound state debilitation.”²² Issues of governance arise where the government is found wanting in the delivery of basic services to the governed and democratic political change is thwarted through a manipulation of the political process. In such situations, the socio-political and economic environment offers young people nothing to defend or celebrate, thus making rebel soldiering an attractive venture. A case in point is the tragic end of Mohamed Siad Barr’s government in Somalia, where issues of governance could be said to have played a pivotal role. In championing the concept of a greater Somalia, which brought his government into conflict with Ethiopia and Kenya, Barr gradually diverted focus from issues of governance which defined the achievements of his early years in office. Thus whereas he was able to contain the clan cleavages in the early years and even reduced clan dominance through his attempt at moulding a Somali national identity, his loss of focus erased those gains. Again his violent repression of the Isaaq clan over their complaint of economic and political marginalization rather than quell dissent unleashed a wave of dissensions thus confirming Coser’s contention that “rigid systems which suppress the incidence of conflict exert pressure towards the emergence of radical cleavages and violent forms of conflict.”²³ Issues of governance and the tendency by governments to visit violent reprisals upon political dissent could be said to be at the heart of violent conflicts in Africa.

²¹ S. J. Stedman, “Conflict and Conflict Resolution in Africa: A Conceptual Framework,” in *Conflict Resolution in Africa*, eds. Francis Mading Deng and I. William Zartman (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1991), 367–99.

²² Hutchful and Aning, “The Political Economy of Conflict,” 217.

²³ Lewis A. Coser, *Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 29.

Conflict Intervention

Although African conflicts originate from a variety of sources, the intervention strategies in most of the conflicts appear to be the same. Many of such conflicts usually begin as low-level disputes which could have been settled without violence but the general tendency has been for governments to either ignore the dispute, thus leaving it to fester or regard it as a challenge to its authority that needs to be decisively squashed. This was the case when demonstration by supporter of Sierra Leone People's Party against election manipulation by All People's Congress was violently suppressed, resulting in the Ndogboyosoi massacre in 1982. It is widely believed that it was the children and relatives of the victims of that massacre who later became core combatants in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and that their viciousness stemmed from a desire for revenge. Also, in discussing the Niger Delta conflict, Obi supports the view concerning poor interventions strategies;

the roots of violent conflict in the Niger Delta as in other oil-rich contexts in Africa is **only partly** linked to the manner in which oil is produced and extracted (alienating the people from their lands and livelihoods and capital intensive operations of the oil industry) the production of oil and the highly skewed distribution of its benefits and pernicious liabilities... but can also be explained by the high-handed response of the state to peaceful protests and the complicity of international oil companies and transnational elites benefiting from oil extraction and access to oil revenues.²⁴

Parallels that speak to such poor intervention strategies could be drawn in the case of Somalia, Rwanda, South Sudan and the Tuareg rebellion in Mali and Niger. Such repression, rather than eliminate the conflict sometimes hardens the resolve of the conflicting party and fuel the process

²⁴ Cyril Obi, "Oil and Conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta region: Between the Barrel and the Trigger," *The Extractive Industries and Society* 1, no. 2 (2014): 150.

of escalation. In disputes that do not fit this pattern, such as wars in Angola, the DRC, Mozambique and Chad, the protagonists, who are more or less evenly matched, usually approach the conflict with the goal of securing a decisive military victory. Thus the initial strategy of the major players in most African conflicts has been to accelerate the level of violence rather than explore the avenues for peace.

The tendency by governments to “...address the direct behavioural dimensions of violence with a focus on achieving military security” not only demonstrates “...a limited understanding of the conditions of sustained peace”²⁵ but also forewarns its conflicting partner. Thus an important lesson in the rulebook of political dissent in Africa is for rebels to acquire sufficient military acumen to effectively rebuff attempts by government to resolve the dispute militarily, knowing that it is only when the militarist approach fails, that other forms of intervention will be considered. Arguing for the use of other options in the quest for peace is not to suggest that every challenge to the authority of the state should be rewarded with a negotiated settlement. To do so would be to invite an avalanche of challenges which will make the government cease to function. Rather, it involves saying that appropriate channels should be created for handling grievances so as to forestall an attempt by the people to challenge the authority of the state. It is the absence of such channels or the deliberate decision by governments to ignore them that lead to conflict escalation and the need for external intervention.

International response to African crisis ranges from a disinterested acknowledgement of the dispute to a full scale rush quell the crisis and return the country to normality, with various degrees of passivity and activity in between. A passive response is usually a signal that either members of the international community are supporting a faction in the crisis and are hopeful of

²⁵ Busumtwi-Sam, “Sustainable Peace and Development in Africa,” 101.

a decisive victory or that there territory does not possess the type of resources that are vital to the interest of the international community. In such cases, the issuance of a carefully crafted communiqué that expresses concern and urge the parties to negotiate, followed by a well orchestrated condemnation of human rights abuses, threats of sanctions and offers of mediation are standard procedure. Conflicts such as those in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote D' Ivoire, Uganda, Somalia and Lesotho attracted a more robust response and this involved the deployment of belligerent international troops to stabilize the situation and enforce peace. The stated objective of such intervention is usually to reduce the level of violence and mediate its human and material cost.

From the above it is clear that the common method of conflict intervention in Africa is the arms/crisis/violence management approach. This method, which is used both internally by governments and by external mediators "...does not in itself try to resolve the dispute behind the conflict behaviour, let alone the conflict structures that gave rise to the disputes. Instead, the intention is merely to control violence and try to contribute to the stabilization of the situation."²⁶

Commenting on the failure of external conflict mediation in Cote D' Ivoire, Bar observes;

The Ivorian conflict also exposes significant shortcomings in the way internationally driven peace processes treat the underlying causes of African conflicts. While the issue of citizenship was evident in the discourses surrounding the conflict and peace process, the internationally mediated agreements did not pay sufficient attention to it. ...The details of the internationally mediated peace agreements weighed heavily on power sharing, ceasefire, and election modalities at the expense of creating a mechanism to resolve the citizenship issue.²⁷

This underplaying of the disputes that led to the conflict in the process of mediation was the preferred method in the attempts to resolve the conflicts in Angola, Burundi, Chad, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal,

²⁶ Juha Auvinen and Timo Kivimäki, "Conflict Transformation in South Africa," *Politikon* 28, no. 1 (2001): 65.

²⁷ Abu Bakarr Bah, "Democracy and Civil War: Citizenship and Peacemaking in Côte D'ivoire," *African Affairs* 109, no. 47 (2010): 599.

Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Uganda. Once the objective of curbing conflict behaviour has been realized, either through the vanquishing of the opposing party or through a cease fire, further interest in the conflict sometimes wanes. This approach loses sight of the fact that conflict behaviour is merely a symptom of an underlying dispute and that mediating conflict behaviour is not the same as mediating the dispute.

A fundamental flaw but recurrent strategy in African conflict interventions has been the promotion of individuals over issues in mediating conflicts. A common thread evident from such interventions involves identifying the major players in the conflict and working through them to achieve a cessation of hostilities. In doing so, it is usually taken for granted that each conflict revolves around its major players and that once these major players have been pacified, the conflict behaviour will cease. This strategy falls under what is generally referred to as 'territorial approaches' of conflict regulation and "rely on the assumption that conflicts can be managed by dividing power between central and regional elites."²⁸ It is this thinking that perpetuates the myth of an all-powerful warlord and the tendency to promote the personal interest of such warlords over and above the issues that they represent. At one time or the other, enigmatic individuals such as Jonas Savimbi, Holden Roberto, Samuel Doe, Charles Taylor, Fordey Sankoh, Alhaji Koromah, Hissène Habré, Goukonee Ouedee, Wadel Abdelkader Kamougué, Laurent Désiré Kabila, Emeka Ojukwu, Mele Zenawi, Isaias Afwerki, Yoweri Museveni, among others, have fit this profile.

Despite popular conceptions, one could argue that warlords may not actually be as powerful as they are made to appear and may at times be captives of their more militant subordinates and interests. For instance, in discussing the Liberian civil war, Ellis opines that

²⁸ Christof Hartmann, "Territorial Power Sharing and the Regulation of Conflict in Africa," *Civil Wars*, 15 (2013): 123.

“...every faction had a history of splits and many actually arose out of these splits, making leaders nervous of powerful military commanders.”²⁹ He argues that leaders had to be creative in dealing with their commanders, with leaders like Charles Taylor playing off commanders against each other in order to survive. In Sierra Leone, Foday Sankor’s coveted position as vice president of Sierra Leone and the inclusion of several members of his RUF in the government under the Lome Peace Accord followed the popular practice of promoting individuals over issues and was designed to curb conflict behaviour by his RUF. The foot soldiers of his rebellion felt betrayed when the agreement did not touch on their popular disaffections and resumed conflict behaviour in protest. In stark contrast to the 1999 Lome Peace Accord that secured his release after his 1997 arrest and imprisonment in Nigeria, the remaining elements of the RUF did not make his release a condition for peace following his war crimes arrest and imprisonment in May 2000. This is despite the fact that he had personally appointed Issa Sesay, to replace him as leader of the RUF during his imprisonment.³⁰ But even where the consequences of elevating individuals over and above issues are not so dramatic, peace agreements merely return conflicts to their latent state rather than promote lasting peace.

Another fundamentally flawed, but recurring belief associated with the promotion of individuals over issues in African conflicts is the view that vanquishing the enemy or otherwise compromising the leadership will ensure peace. It is this belief that informs the relentless hounding of rebel leaders on the one hand, and the generous allocation of positions and influence to leaders of rebel movements in the ensuing government of national unity. Although this may have the short-term impact of curbing conflict behaviour within the specific rebellion, it does not

²⁹ Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War* (London: Hurst and Co. 2001), 141.

³⁰ Solomon E. Berewa, *A new Perspective on Governance, Leadership, Conflict and Nation Building in Sierra Leone* (Blomington, IN: Authorhouse 2011), 132.

guarantee lasting peace on the issues surrounding the specific dispute. For instance, despite the vanquishing of secessionist Biafra in the Nigerian Civil War, secessionist voices continue to be heard in the region as issues of nationhood continue to dominate national discourse. Again, the violent suppression of the *Shifita* rebellion in Kenya, while militarily successful resulted in a security nightmare as former combatants dispersed in band of bandits forcing the government to embark upon a costly forced villagization programme.³¹ In the long run, only the disintegration of Somalia into lawlessness ended the demand of ethnic Somali in Kenya to be allowed to join the greater Somali state. Again the Ndogboyosoi massacre, while suppressing protest by SLPP supporters over the manipulation of electoral votes by the ruling APC, turn out to be even more costly in the long run as its victims turned round to support the RUF against the government.

Again removing or otherwise compromising the leadership of the conflicting groups, while successful in the short run, may not have long termed advantages. It may have the short term benefit of removing the coalescing point of the conflict and thus curb conflict behaviour in the short term, but in the longer term, many of the issues in the conflict re-emerge whenever a new coalescing figure is found. The killing of Samuel Doe in Liberia and the dispersal of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), for instance, rather than remove them from the military equation, merely forced them into exile in Sierra Leone until the group metamorphosize into the United Liberation Movement for Democracy (ULIMO), that was to later play a definitive role in the Second Liberian Civil War. Also, the assassination of the first Hutu Burundi president by extremist Tutsis in the hope of subjugating them merely resulted in the dispersal and splintering of the Hutus into several armed rebel groups like the Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie–Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD-FDD) and Forces Nationales de

³¹ Hannah Whittaker, “Forced Villagization During the Shifita Conflict in Kenya, ca. 1963–1968,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 45, no. 3 (2012): 343-364.

Libérationthe (FNL). Again the exile of leaders like Pascal Lissouba, Goukonne Oueddei, Hissen Habré, Jean-Pierre Bemba, among others, rather than ensure lasting peace merely served as a stop-gap in the vicious circle of violence in the respective countries.

Agreements Made to Fail

The arms/crisis/violence management approach favoured in African conflict interventions and the tendency to promote individuals over issues usually shifts the focus of peace negotiations away from the important issues in dispute. Commenting on the conflict in Cote D' Ivorie Bar observed;

The typical ingredients of the internationally mediated peace agreements in African conflicts are the provisions on ceasefire, power sharing, disarmament, human rights, and elections. The path to peace is predicated on successful democratic elections. In Côte d'Ivoire, this recipe failed because it did not pay sufficient attention to citizenship, which is the underlying cause of the war. With the exception of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, the internationally engineered accords were often mute on citizenship. Instead, they focused on the distribution of power, disarmament, and elections. The end results were successive failed peace agreements.³²

In the case of Liberia, instability has been blamed on the predatory use of state resources to enact the prejudices of the ethnic groups in power against those with less power, starting with the Americo-Liberian in the True Whig Party, through the Krahn dominated government of Samuel Doe to the Gio/Mano domination during the Charles Taylor years.³³ It has also been blamed on the structure of the Liberian state as a peripheral capitalist construct with a "...criminalized, exploitative, exclusionary, negligent, prebendal, rentier and repressive"³⁴ structure. The centrality of these problems to the conflict notwithstanding, none of the peace agreements nor the national governments that followed addressed the issue. The shortcomings of the agreement in

³² Bah, "Democracy and Civil War: Citizenship and Peacemaking in Côte D'ivoire," 605.

³³ Emmanuel Dolo, *Ethnic Tensions in Liberia's National Identity Crisis: Problems and Possibilities* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Africana Homestead Legacy Publishers, 2007), 4.

³⁴ George Klay Kieh, Jr., "Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of Liberia's Civil Wars," *Liberian Studies Journal* 34, no. 1 (2009): 74.

addressing the issues in the conflict were so stark that one of the notorious figures in the conflict, General Butt Naked observed;

The peace process interprets the conflicts from their understanding. They are not interpreting the conflict from the grassroots, from the actual happening. . . They have come and collected those same people who were bosses over us and refused to go to the grassroots. Most of the guys you see who got the scholarships, DDRR scholarships, some of them did not even shoot gun.³⁵

This statement was not only an indictment of the different peace processes of the conflict but also an indictment of the mediation and conflict resolution prowess of the mediators.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement of August 2003 that ended the second Liberian civil war also failed to address this issue but instead included articles that tend to perpetuate the structures responsible for the conflict. The Governance Reform Commission, established by Article 16 of the agreement to address issues of political and economic accommodation, for instance, was structurally deficient. Even though Section (2e) of Article 16 sought to “...ensure a national and regional balance in appointments” the caveat of not “...compromising quality and integrity” meant that such a balance could never be achieved since there was no enabling instrument, like affirmative educational policies to assist in mainstreaming backward counties. Membership of the commission as stipulated in Section 3 was to be drawn from a list provided by civil society organisations and since such groups are traditionally found in urban centres, the representative character of the commission was questionable. Again the agreement restricted membership of the commission to those that have experience in “...Public Sector Management, Corporate Law, Finance and Audit Regulations, Trade Policies and NGO activities.

³⁵ Josef Teboho Ansorge and Nana Akua Antwi-Ansorge, “Monopoly, Legitimacy, Force: DDR–SSR Liberia,” in *Monopoly of Force: The Nexus of DDR and SSR*, eds. Michael Miklaucic and Melanne A. Civic (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press 2011), 265.

They must be men and women of known integrity with national and/or international experience.”³⁶ Given the second class status of indigenous Liberians and their general lack of sophistication it is clear that this stipulation was exclusionist in character and thereby failed to address the question of ethnic domination.

Again, membership of the Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA) did not mirror the need for political accommodation and inclusiveness. It gave prominence to the warring parties, which by the circumstance of their existence were not representative of the whole country. Out of the total number of 76 seats in the assembly, 36, representing 47% went to the warring parties with each of them (viz. Charles Taylor’s Government of Liberia (GOL), Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) awarded 12 seats. Since each rebellion and the groups they represent started from specific counties, the leadership tended to be dominated by people from such counties. Giving them so many seats in the assembly amounted to favouring certain counties, and therefore ethnic groups of those counties, over others. Each of the 18 political parties in the country, including Charles Taylor’s National Patriotic Party was given a seat each. This gave further advantage to Taylor since his GOL already had 12 seats. Interest groups such as the Bar Association, Business Organisations, Women Organisations, Trade Unions, Teachers Unions, Refugees and Liberians in the Diaspora/America had 7 seats and each of the 15 counties were given 1 seat. There was no compulsion on the Rebel groups, the political parties and the interest groups to reflect the geopolitical or ethnic divide in nominating their representatives. Although Article 29 of the agreement enjoined parties to “... reflect national and gender balance in all elective and non-

³⁶ “Comprehensive Peace Agreement Between the Government of Liberia (GOL) and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Political Parties, Accra, August 18, 2003,” *United States Institute of Peace*, accessed March 3, 2008, http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/liberia_08182003.pdf

elective appointments”, this provision was limited to the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) and did not extend to the NTLA, which had regulatory authority over the NTGL. But even more damning was the fact that agreement made no provisions for transforming the structures that gave rise to the two civil wars.

Although the above is specific to the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Liberia, most of the peace agreements that ended other conflicts on the continent follow the same pattern and therefore make the same mistake of favouring the belligerent parties while side-lining the issues in the conflict. A cursory glance at the agreements entered into on account of the conflicts in Burundi, Congo, CoteD’ Ivoire Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea Bissau, Uganda, Sierra Leonean, and Somalia reveal that the same prominence was given to the belligerent parties while the issues around which their belligerence centred were ignored. The failure to tackle the issues in the course of the peace process appears to explain the resurgence of the conflict as well as the incidence of copycat insurgency. Satisfying the belligerent parties inadvertently gives the impression that anyone who can muster an army that can hold its own against the national army will be rewarded and that group interest and aspirations can only be realised through the group’s participation in violence.

Beyond the Domain of the Warlords

The resurgence of violence after the warlords have been placated underscores the importance of tackling the issues in the conflict. Gradually the political elites are beginning to understand that the predatory use of state power to enact ethnic prejudices will embolden others to seek power in order to better their circumstance. Also, the practice whereby warlords capture territories and proceed to exploit the resources of the territory coupled with the tendency to reward them in peace agreements has also been seen as encouraging copycat insurgencies which

in the long run does not guarantee any warlord the spoils that he has acquired. Again the fact that many of the warlords and battlefield commanders in the various wars end up badly is an indication that the power that they assume is transitory and that the image of an all-powerful warlord is a myth. Warlords like Charles Taylor, Forday Sankoh, Joseph Kony, Bosco Ntaganda, Laurent Nkunda, Jonny Paul Koroma and Thomas Lubanga may have had their 15 minutes of fame but did not reap as abundantly as they envisaged from their orgy of maleficence. The field commanders who helped them along such as Sam Bockarie (Mosquito), Martina Johnson, Alieu Kosiah, Joshua Blahyi (Gen. Butt Naked), Vincent Otti, Issa Sesay either ended up dead or have become objects of disdain. Thus even though the rewards of the militant are plum and assuaging them guarantees short-term peace, such peace has been shown to be short-lived and has only served to show that there is need to move towards a more sustainable means of conflict intervention.

Another mistake that is often associated with the arms/crisis/violence management approach is the belief that post-conflict peace-building should be left to the government that emerges from a peace agreement. Thus most agreements usually contain a provision for a return to democratic governance through an electioneering process. But, as was observed in the Angolan case, "...a conflict with unresolved distributive questions, insisting on national elections where "the winner takes all" simply served to ratify the bipolarity of Angolan politics."³⁷ The same was true of multiparty elections in the case of Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Uganda. This suggests that there should be a process of national reconciliation aimed at uniting the disparate groups before elections. Even if we discount the fact that elections in a post conflict situation may not be free and fair, the distrust of the other party that is carried over from the conflict would affect the way

³⁷ Busumtwi-Sam, "Sustainable Peace and Development in Africa," 103.

each party perceives the results. Again, mediators should ensure that “the transition to democracy itself is also linked to the improvement of the living conditions of the people as a whole. Elections can buttress democracy if the policies that emerge thereafter address the real socio-economic concern of the people. Without that, major reversals of the democratic process are inevitable.”³⁸

What the above suggests is that post conflict peace building should not be left to a new and unstable government but should instead involve the external stakeholders who mediated the conflict. This will ensure that there is a forum for the airing of grievances by disaffected groups and that genuine complaints against the government could be redressed before it goes out of hand. Such a forum will also reassure such groups of their dignity and dissuade them from the path of violence. This is because, sometimes, a return to hostilities may not be due to any physical or material deprivation but due to perceived loss of human dignity. As Soyinka observes, “the quest for human dignity has proved to be one of the most propulsive elements for wars, civil strife and willing sacrifice.”³⁹ Thus where a perceived loss of dignity arising from disaffections with the new government is not mediated, there is a high propensity for a return to violence. African conflict mediators should keep in mind that “sustaining peace is not an activity with a precise beginning or end, but an ongoing process of reform and adaptation designed to institutionalize new rules of the game that reproduce and reinforce new collective identities and interests, structure choices towards certain behaviours and not others, and specify acceptable ways of making decisions about the settlement of political disputes and the use of force.”⁴⁰ Without such an engaging process, the notion of containing and transforming conflict situations would remain a dream

³⁸ Sejanamane, “Peace and Security in Southern Africa,” 65.

³⁹ Wole Soyinka, *Climate of Fear* (London: Profile Books 2004), 87.

⁴⁰ Busumtwi-Sam, “Sustainable Peace and Development in Africa,” 106.

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