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African Conflicts: Their Causes and Their Political and Social Environment

Abdalla Bujra *

1. Introduction

During the four decades between the 1960s and the 1990s, there have been about 80 violent changes of governments (Adedeji 1999, 3) in the 48 sub-Saharan African countries. During the same period many of these countries also experienced different types of civil strife, conflicts, and wars. At the beginning of the new millennium, there were 18 countries facing armed rebellion, 11 facing severe political crises (Adedeji 1999, 5), and 19 enjoying more or less various states of stable political condition. And some of the countries in the last two categories have only recently moved from the first category. A UNDP representative paints the picture in these terms:

A snapshot of explosive conflict in today's Africa presents a worrying picture: of Eritrea and Ethiopia; of the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, the last with the longest-running civil war on the continent; of Sierra Leone with gruesome atrocities against civilians; of Somalia, Burundi, Guinea Bissau and Lesotho, the latter reeling from South Africa's recent intervention" (Gordon-Summers 1999, 328).

Somewhere it is added wryly that this is not the picture of an African Renaissance.

This picture of a continent in turmoil raises several questions, which I hope to deal with in this paper**. These questions are:

- How many types of conflicts are there in Africa?
- What are the causes of these different types of conflicts?
- How long have these conflicts been going on? Are they temporary or long-term phenomena?
- What are the strategic and policy implications for resolving these conflicts?

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In this paper, I will start with a simple definition of conflict for the purpose of classifying the many conflicts, but will not engage in definitional polemic.

Secondly I will discuss the different causes of conflicts advanced by different writers and organisations such as the UN and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). My aim here will be to indicate the complexity of conflicts in Africa and to indicate that different types of conflicts may have different causes.

Thirdly, I will try to indicate clearly that during the last 150 years of Africa's contemporary history, different types of conflicts have emerged during different periods because of varying political, economic and social conditions or environments.

Finally, I will briefly discuss the policy implications for resolving conflicts at the national and regional levels.

2. Types of Conflicts in Africa

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Aide-Memoire equates conflict in Africa to civil war and describes four dimensions of a civil war, one of which is that "significant military action must take place with at least 1000 battle related deaths per year (inclusive of civilians) [...] recorded" (ECA Aide-Memoire 2000, 2)! Presumably if there are 950 deaths, then the conflict will not be a civil war but something else – a hostility? Or if the recording system of the rebel movements in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) or Uganda is not up to the standard of the military bureaucrats of the Western military or the UN Blue Helmets, then the conflict will not be considered to be a civil war! I am raising this issue in this manner in order to bring to attention: (a) the difficulties we are facing on this issue, and (b) that even if we accept the definition of civil war described by the Aide-Memoire, it is still important to point out that a civil war is only one type of conflict taking place in most African countries. It could be an important type, but nevertheless one type.

Given the fact that there are several types of conflicts in African countries, a broader definition of conflict, which takes into account the African conditions and relies less on recorded numbers as criteria, will, in my view, be more useful.

Writers often discuss *conflict* in Africa without any attempt at describing or defining the term. They often use terms such as civil war, violent conflict,

civil strife, hostility, war, and political instability, interchangeably. I am not a definition hard-liner, but there is a need to clarify the concept or phenomenon one is writing about. A rule of thumb definition would be useful here in contrast to that of the Aide-Memoire.

I use the term conflict in this paper to mean a violent and armed confrontation and struggle between groups, between the state and one or more groups, and between two or more states. In such confrontation and struggle some of those involved are injured and killed. Such a conflict can last anything from six months to over twenty years.

Given this broad working definition, we can proceed to discuss the different types of conflicts that are and have taken place in Africa.

Conflicts can be categorised in various ways depending on the type of criteria one uses. For example Salim (1999) classifies conflicts in Africa as follows:

- boundary and territorial conflicts,
- civil wars and internal conflicts having international repercussions,
- succession conflicts in territories decolonised,
- political and ideological conflicts,
- others including those related to transhumance and irredentism.

Similarly, Collier and Binswanger (1999) classify conflicts into (a) loot seekers and (b) justice-seekers, classification which is based more on value judgment rather than analytical criteria. Nevertheless, both Salim and Binswanger use what they consider to be the objectives of the rebel groups as criterion for classifying conflicts. Others, as I will do below, classify conflicts on the bases of the actors involved in a conflict. Still others are concerned only with conflicts in which the state is a party to the conflict.

In general, most writers tend to think of conflicts in Africa as being political conflicts such as wars between states, armed rebellion against states (ranging from small-scale low intensity conflicts to large-scale civil war), armed secessionist rebellion (also of various scales), and coup d'état. Indeed, most African conflicts which are reported and which draw international attention, are those which fit the above description.

There are, of course, other types of conflicts which in the past were not given much attention. These are urban violence – sometimes they take the

form of ethnic conflict, sometimes religious conflict, and sometimes they are class-based – the poor of many ethnic groups attacking government properties and installations, or attacking shops and houses of the rich and middle classes. Urban violence, however, tends to be intermittent rather than continuous. Urban violence is not a new phenomenon but has been taking place since the colonial period. While urban violence and conflicts last only for a few days, a specific incident or situation often triggers them. In the past such violence was focused against the colonial authorities for deplorable living conditions and colonial control system. However, recently urban violence has taken the form of reacting to poverty and to struggles between supporters of political parties – parties which are often ethnically based.

In rural areas of many countries there are many conflicts which are ethnically based, mainly over grazing land and over cattle amongst pastoral people. Similarly, there are conflicts over cultivable land amongst peasant farmers within the same ethnic group and also between ethnic groups. Sometimes these inter-ethnic conflicts over land and cattle develop into rebellions and armed fighting between the ethnic groups and the state, when the latter sends in the military to stop the fighting or even to take side¹.

For example, the Karamajong of Uganda and the Pokot of Kenya (on either side of the Kenya/Uganda border) have been fighting over grazing land and over cattle for more than three decades. Such conflicts amongst pastoralists are common and widespread in many countries. Similarly conflicts for fertile and cultivable land have been taking place amongst many ethnic groups in many countries.

Most of these rural conflicts over land and cattle have been going on over a long period, with very little attention given to them. Even today most such conflicts go unnoticed and unreported – unless large-scale killing and injuries takes place and the state intervenes militarily.

The distinction between the two categories of conflicts – political conflicts in which the state is involved in one way or another, and the less well-known urban and rural conflicts in which generally the state is not a party, and which conflicts are not well reported² – is useful. While most research publications and media reports cover the political conflicts, little research has been done to indicate the extent of the latter type of conflicts in African countries. At the beginning we pointed out that during the *four* decades of independence there have been roughly 80 violent changes of government. This fact is basically given to indicate the extent of conflicts in Africa. But it is important to point out that this is only one type of political conflict.

There are *other* political conflicts – mainly rebellions and civil wars which are well known. Yet we do not really know the extent of the urban and rural conflicts as described above. Indeed there may be more of these latter type of conflicts than the political conflicts. And if this is the case, the policy implication here is serious. While the states are more concerned with rebellions against them, the real arena and drama of conflicts in most African countries may be somewhere else. And the state's normal reactions to these "other" conflicts are simply to send the police, paramilitary and the army to quell the conflicts. As we will point out below, different conflicts *emerge* under different political, social and economic conditions. Similarly, their causes may be different. And unless these issues are properly understood by the states, it will be difficult to manage and resolve these conflicts in the short term, let alone tackle their long-term root causes. Lack of comprehension of their conflicts by African states has led to the present situation where there are no strategies, policies or mechanism for dealing with on-going conflicts in their countries. Still less are there any strategies for tackling the long-term causes and conditions of conflicts. We will discuss this issue below in Section 4 of the paper.

It may be useful at this point to give some examples of the various types of conflicts. Our criterion for classifying the different types will be the actors to the conflict. The two broad categories of African conflicts are inter-state conflicts and internal conflicts.

2.1 Inter-State Conflicts

These arose as a result of the colonial boundaries and although the OAU Charter declared the borders inviolable, nevertheless, almost all the inter-state conflicts were caused by claims over borders. Some important features of African borders which were the bases for claims to change them, and claims which led to border conflicts, are:

- many borders were imprecise;
- some borders were straddled by a large ethnic group considered strategic by one side of the border;
- some borders passed through strategic terrain desired by countries on both sides of the border;
- some borders passed by areas rich with mineral resources all of which fell on one side of the border, thus excluding the other country.

Inevitably, one or a combination of any of these factors became the bases of a claim by one country or another to change the border or to claim territory which fell on the other side of the colonial border. Thus the first border war was between Algiers and Morocco immediately after independence (1964/65). The latest and strangest border dispute is between Ethiopia and Eritrea. In between there were several short border conflicts mainly in West Africa. Altogether there were very few border conflicts, given the number of states – 52 for the OAU as a whole, and 48 for sub-Saharan Africa. And most important, many of these border conflicts were easily resolved (the exception being the present Ethiopia/Eritrea conflict). The main reason for this was that the basis for the claims to change the borders were very weak and that the states concerned did not have sufficient resources to conduct a sustained war. One must also add that the moral pressure amongst the Heads of States of the OAU on each other was remarkably strong and effective.

Finally, it is necessary to point out that most of these border conflicts occurred during the euphoric decade of independence and during the 1970s when the cold war influence was very strong in Africa.

2.2 Internal Conflicts

As indicated earlier, there are several types of internal conflicts and these are presently the majority of conflicts in Africa, especially since the end of the post cold-war period. These conflicts can be divided into two broad categories: (i) those conflicts in which the state is a party to the conflict; these are therefore politically driven or instigated conflicts, and (ii) conflicts between groups within the country and which the state is not a party to. What follows is a brief description of conflicts in each of these two broad categories.

2.2.1 A Rebellion to Overthrow a Government

Rebellions, by groups outside the military establishment of a country and which aim to overthrow a government, are the most common type of political conflict in most African countries. These rebellions are generally initiated by urban elites who are dissatisfied with the way the government had treated them and their region or ethnic group. They mobilise a section of their regional or ethnic supporters, acquire arms clandestinely and often supported by a neighbouring country and sometimes by an outside power as well. Initial grievances of the leadership of such a rebel group would vary from being blocked from achieving political power, under representation of their region/ethnic group in the government and administration, their region

deliberately neglected from access to development funds, to blockage of their ethnic groups from the private sector, and allocation of their land to other ethnic groups (of the ruling ethnic group), etc. These grievances may be shared by other ethnic groups, in which case the rebel group forms alliances with others and the rebellion becomes more widespread. The sustenance of such rebel movements is only possible if it is supported by a neighbouring country from where it can have bases and arms supplies. While in the past recruitment for these rebel groups was difficult and narrowed to one ethnic group, the situation has changed dramatically during the last two decades. Increase in population, the largest proportion being young people, and the deterioration of many African economies, especially the agricultural sector, have resulted in a large section of the youth being unemployed, landless and very poor. Hence, the youth become an important and accessible pool for recruitment at a very low cost to rebel movements. More importantly, the easy availability of small arms has enabled such rebel movements to turn into powerful and destructive forces capable of causing serious harm and destruction in rural areas. Since small arms do not need much training while their possession gives considerable power to those who possess them, rebel movements thus become very attractive to the youth, including those in their early teen. Ethnic division therefore is no longer important to recruitment and to the organisation of rebellion across ethnic lines. In almost all the sub-regions there are various local languages which become lingua franca within the rebel movements.

Conflicts between state and rebellions trying to overthrow them vary in intensity, scale, and duration depending on many factors. These factors also vary depending on the depth of the grievances, the political indoctrination of the supporters, the quality of the leadership, the strength and weakness of the state, the seriousness of support from neighbouring states and the outside powers. During the cold war, these types of rebellion were favourites of the super powers; and the more these powers were involved, the longer and bitter the conflict became. The conflicts in the Sudan and Angola are classic examples. However, since the end of the Cold War, the same two civil wars have continued for almost a decade, despite many outside attempts at resolving the two conflicts. Obviously, other factors have intervened to sustain these civil wars. In both cases, the rebels seem to have built a strong military force and some civilian support. In both cases, support from neighbouring countries is crucial; in both cases, critical support from an outside power is also very important, especially in the case of the Sudan. In Angola, the control of the diamond mines is very important for the sustenance of UNITA and support from other African countries to break the arms embargo has been and is also crucial, as revealed recently by a UN Report. In the case of the Sudan, the prospect of recently

operationalised oil wells in areas claimed by the SPLA is a new factor, which may sustain the rebel movement for a longer period. The complexity of these large-scale civil wars is obvious and unless both the grievances and the external support are seriously addressed, it will be difficult to resolve these conflicts which have now reached a kind of stalemate. There are other rebellions, for example in DRC, Burundi, etc., which have or are reaching the stalemate stage. Others such as those in Senegal, Namibia, Uganda, Congo Brazzaville, etc., have yet to reach the stalemate stage.

What is of immediate importance therefore is to ensure that these rebellions do not escalate to the level and scale of those in the Sudan, Angola, DRC, Burundi, etc.

Finally, it is useful to point out that very few rebel movements have succeeded in overthrowing their governments. Many have been suppressed by military force within a short time; others have negotiated their way to power sharing; yet others have lasted for a long time reaching a virtual stalemate, such as the SPLA and UNITA.

2.2.2 Secessionist Rebellion

While the rebellions which want to overthrow the government are driven by the possibility of gaining political power and the prospect of economic gains, the rebellions seeking secession are often driven by their perceived political, economic and cultural oppression. Such rebellions often go through a similar development process, but are usually defeated by military force. Both the African governments and the international community are generally not sympathetic to secessionist rebellions. Hence, very few secessionist movements have succeeded compared to those rebellions which aim at overthrowing their governments. The most spectacular secessionist war was that of Biafra in Nigeria that ended in catastrophic failure. The Eritrean war, on the other hand, succeeded for different reasons. Another example was Guinea Bissau, which separated peacefully from the Cape Verde. Despite the limited success of these secessionist rebellions, they have nevertheless caused considerable damage and destruction.

2.2.3 Coup d'Etat

Violent and undemocratic change of government by the military is one of the most common methods of achieving power. As mentioned earlier, there have been roughly 80 such violent changes of government in Sub-Saharan Africa during the last four decades. A coup d'état by the military of a country can be instigated and even carried out by outside forces such as in

the Comoros. However, most coup d'états are carried out without external instigation or support. They are generally the expression of a struggle for power between contending groups amongst the elite. And when the military feels it has been left out of such struggle, it generally takes over power on behalf of itself or on behalf of an ethnic group or an alliance of such groups.

2.2.4 Cold-War Sustained Conflicts

During the 1970s and 1980s, the vicious competition between the super-powers in Africa was an important factor, if not in starting conflicts, certainly in sustaining them. The Americans and the Russians in particular, and less so openly the British and the French, competed for (a) “the hearts and minds” of the African elites and their followers; (b) political and diplomatic allies; (c) strategic allies; and (d) mineral resources. The rivalry and competition took various forms: supporting governments, overthrowing governments, supporting/opposing political parties, covert activities in support of or in opposition to governments, and supporting, if not initiating rebel movements. What needs to be emphasised here is that, at the time, the support or opposition of one super-power or another was a very powerful force in the political survival or demise of an African government. So powerful were these cold war interventions that they set in motion socio-political forces in some of the strategic countries, processes that led to serious internal conflicts which have outlasted the Cold War itself and continued until today. In the Congo of 1964, the Americans intervened to remove Lumumba and install Mobutu, an intervention which has set in motion serious and unforeseen consequences which are unfolding to this day. In Somalia, it led to the collapse of the state. In Angola, it has led to the long and tragic civil war. Similarly in Mozambique (through the proxy of apartheid South Africa), it has led to another vicious civil war which has fortunately been temporarily resolved. In the Sudan, the civil war continues to evolve, taking different forms every few years. The continuation of these civil wars is, however, sufficient indication that the Cold War interventions were not the single determining factor which cause these civil wars. Internal divisions, colonial legacy, history of cultural oppression, intense rivalry and competition for political power, etc., a combination of these factors constitutes the root cause of these major conflicts. More significantly, because the fundamental causes of the conflicts have not been addressed or resolved, they have lasted longer, and the duration of these conflicts has given them “independent” internal dynamics that keeps them going.

2.2.5 Many-Sided Conflicts to Seize State Power

In countries where certain specific conditions prevail, several rebellions emerge independently, each of which is trying to capture the capital and take over power. In the process, each of these rebellions form temporary alliances which do not last more than a few months, and at the same time fight other groups in different fronts. Needless to say each of the rebel movements is supported by a different neighbouring (or distant) country – financial support, supplies of arms, diplomatic support, giving refuge to the various levels of the leadership, etc. Furthermore, each patron of a rebel group has its own interest, mainly in terms of its potential influence in the future government if its group succeeds in getting to power.

The specific conditions for this type of conflict are the following elements: (i) a very weak government; the reason for the weakness of the government could be many and we need not go into them here; (ii) a deterioration and deep malaise of the economy, widespread poverty and a large pool of unemployed, landless and aimless youth; (iii) the state and its few institutions are the sole means of accumulating wealth; (iv) the availability and control by the state of easily exploitable natural resources; (v) deep divisions in a stratified society based on ethnicity, race, religion, and cultural and economic oppression of various groups by a ruling class/group. These conditions enable various competing elite to mobilise their respective groups in order to gain power by seizing state power by force. Ease of recruitment of man/youth power, accessibility of small arms, support from outside make it very tempting and feasible to start a rebellion with the ambition of toppling the weak government. However, under these circumstances, if it is easy for one group to start a rebellion, it is equally easy for another to do the same. And when one rebellion starts, soon it is followed by others. And within a short period of time there are several rebellions in one country, fighting the small, weak beleaguered government as well as fighting each other. Soon too the government itself is reduced to the status equivalent to that of the rebel groups and all pretensions to legitimacy disappear. Often the government collapses leaving behind a dangerous vacuum. This leads to an intensification of the conflict between the remaining rebel groups, until (i) through alliances, a powerful faction emerges and takes over power, (ii) without any alliance one faction defeats the others militarily, (iii) through negotiations sponsored by the OAU, a sub-regional organisation, the UN, etc. The classic examples of this type of situation are Sierra Leone and Liberia. Congo Brazzaville and DRC are more complex examples of the same type of situations. It is necessary to add here that a ceasefire based on an agreement that one or an alliance of groups share power is basically a temporary solution. The forces which

fought in the civil war can easily be mobilised to “go back to the bush”. How long the peace lasts will depend on: (i) how militarily strong the new ruling group/s are and how weak the opposition groups are, (ii) how acceptable *the* post-conflict arrangements are to the groups which have accepted to give up fighting and join the “power-sharing” arrangements. The history of negotiated peace of African conflicts and the agreements made, is basically a history of “broken agreements” .

There are several reasons for breaking such agreements. Firstly, agreements are not backed by any form of guarantee – particularly external guarantee. Secondly, many of the agreements are reached under heavy pressure from the mediators, both African and outsiders; thirdly, the agreements generally concern themselves with ceasefire arrangements and power sharing at the ministerial level; these agreements do not touch the root causes of the conflict. The Arusha Peace Accord for Rwanda was an exception, but even that highly sophisticated Accord was eventually “broken”. Fourthly, the post-conflict arrangements are generally very vague and several groups involved in the conflict become immediate losers. Fifthly, civil society in all these situations is left out, both at the negotiation and implementation stages. Finally, resources to implement some of the immediate and needy social sector programmes, including demobilisation, which are generally promised by donors, do not materialise or at best only half is provided and this after long and time-wasting request procedures. *The transition from a society in conflict to a post-conflict society is crucial. Yet, very little is known of how this should be done.*

2.2.6 Rural Conflicts over Resources

Earlier, we have described briefly this type of conflict, which is possibly the most widespread. Yet little is known or is reported on these rural conflicts. These are conflicts over grazing land, over cattle, over water points and over cultivable land. These conflicts go back a long way, in some cases to the pre-colonial period. However, major changes have been introduced in the countries’ economies such as changes over land laws which often contradict customary laws, confiscation of large tracts of land for ranching and large-scale farming, and increase in population. Most important is the rise of rural inequalities – between rich and poor/landless farmers, between rich ranchers and poor cattle owners. These changes have led to a considerable competition for the scarce resources of land (cultivable and grazing, including water). Furthermore, environmental deterioration in land productivity and scarcity of water has contributed to the intensity of the competition. Amongst pastoral societies in particular, the system of grazing which involves movement of large cattle herds to water points and in search

of pasture, has created a serious problem. Private ownership of land has restricted these necessary movements of pastoralist and the impact has been serious and catastrophic on pastoralist societies.

A recent phenomenon has added the intensity and frequency of conflicts amongst cattle grazing people. In countries with serious rebel movements, these have often raided the pastoralists for cattle in order to sell them for arms or for food. The pastoralists in their turn had to acquire arms to defend themselves. Another phenomenon is the highly organised and extensive cattle stealing from one pastoralist group by another (often led by outsiders), with automatic weapons often being used. This is because cattle have acquired considerable value because of the great demand for meat in the urban areas and also for export purposes. This is particularly the case in the Horn of Africa and in East Africa.

Examples of conflicts amongst pastoralists are many: among the Somalis, Oromos, Karamojong, Pokot, Masai, etc.

Examples of large-scale conflicts over cultivable land (involving ethnic groups) are not, I suspect, as frequent as those among the pastoralists. Nevertheless, there are recent examples of well-reported conflicts in Kenya (Rift Valley), Nigeria (Ife and Modakeke Yoruba communities), the DRC (between the Hema and Lendu, in Ituri District) and in Ghana.

2.2.7 Urban Violence and Conflict

Urban violence is now becoming more common than in the past, as Africa's rate of urbanisation is the highest in the world. Population is increasing dramatically in urban centres, while the economies of most African countries have been deteriorating thus raising urban unemployment to a very high level. The youth (under 18 yrs) make up more than half the population of African countries. The governments are no longer spending any money on the social sector – education, hospitals, housing and other urban social services – which have deteriorated dramatically during the last 15 years. These conditions in themselves, are sufficient to provoke and sustain major and continuous violence in urban areas throughout Africa. It is a miracle that that level of violence has not been reached.

The urban centres, especially the capital, are where politics is conducted and where politicians concentrate. The capital is also where (i) a large number of the volatile university students generally concentrate, (ii) where the opposition political parties practice their opposition to the governments, (iii) where the media (both local and international) is ever present in search

of stories, (iv) from where most of the advocacy NGOs and civil society groups operate and where most of the embassies monitor all aspects of a country's activities. And it is in the urban centres that differences in wealth are exhibited and sharply contrasted. Given these conditions and the presence of many of the most politically sensitised actors, it is not surprising that politicians mobilise their supporters and organise political activism which often results in conflicts between these supporters who are mostly ethnically based. And these conflicts are not only one-time affairs but take place frequently and over a longer period of time. Cities whose conflicts are well reported are Nairobi, Harare, Lagos, Khartoum, etc.

In this Section, we have tried to describe the different types of African conflicts and to show the complexity of factors and forces which trigger and sustain these conflicts. In the next three Sections, we will discuss the different explanations given on the causes of conflict in Africa, the historical and political environment within which these conflicts occur, and finally the strategy and policy implications in terms of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts.

3. Explaining the Causes of African Conflicts

We started our discussion of African conflicts by classifying the various types of conflicts. This is not an easy task because of the complex nature of the conflicts. We have also tried to indicate some of the social, economic and political conditions in which these conflicts take place (to be discussed further below). In this Section, we will look briefly at the various explanations given by some writers and organisations on the causes of conflicts in Africa.

It may be useful, however, to start with a general statement of caution. A recent major African Workshop on conflicts cautioned:

...Africa is a vast and varied continent made up of countries with specific histories and geographical conditions as well as uneven levels of economic development. The causes of conflicts in Africa reflect the continent's diversity and complexity. While some causes are purely internal and portray specific sub-regional dynamics, others have a significant international dimension. Notwithstanding these differences, African conflicts show a number of cross-cutting themes and experiences... (Adedeji 1999, 364).

This is a useful caution because, as we shall see below, there is a tendency by some writers to attribute a single deterministic cause to all African conflicts, past present and future! As Adedeji (1999, 10) points out:

Understanding the origin of conflict means, therefore, developing a framework for comprehending (a) how the various causes of conflicts fit together and interact; (b) which among them are the dominant forces at a particular moment in time; and (c) what policies and strategies should be crafted to address these causes in the short, medium and long term.

In this Section, we will therefore look at the causes of the conflict and how they fit together while in the next Section we will look at the dominant *forces* in particular historical periods. In the last Section, we will briefly look at the policies and strategies *for* resolving conflicts.

We start with the explanation given by the Aide-Memoire. The Aid-Memoire is concerned with civil wars as per its definition and reports that the “core explanatory variables are economic”. It then describes the determinants of the risks of civil wars as follows:

- poorer countries have a considerably higher risk of civil war than rich countries;

If this is supposed to apply to Africa only, then it is not necessarily true mainly because most of the African countries are very poor by most standards; furthermore, civil wars are found in both poor and rich countries. The statement is too general.

- countries with abundant natural resources have a higher risk of civil wars;

These are the rich countries in Africa and according to the earlier generalisations they are supposed to have a lower risk of civil war!

- countries where governments are dysfunctional have a higher risk of civil wars;

Are there countries with dysfunctional governments which have had peace and development over a long period?

- fractionalised societies (ethnic and religious) have a lower risk of civil wars;

The argument that rebel movements find it harder to organise a rebellion and to be cohesive, is rather strange and goes against all the evidence in Africa. Firstly, it took only the Ibos to start a major civil war in Nigeria – a highly fractionised society; and the Ibos were cohesive and well organised. Secondly, the civil wars in Uganda, the Sudan, Angola, DRC, Liberia,

Sierra Leone were and are being carried out by rebel movements which are organised across ethnic lines.

- finally *there* is no need for polarisation of society (ethnically or religiously) in order to have a civil war, if “political dysfunction and or development failures” are the condition prevailing in a country !

The attempt to find general determinants and conditions in order to explain the high or low risk of civil wars, and ultimately their causes, is commendable. But in the efforts to do so we should not lose sight of the facts that (a) there are many types of conflicts in Africa apart from the narrowly defined civil war in the Aide-Memoire, and (b) as the quotation starting this section of the paper clearly states, Africa is too large and varied a continent in terms of its geography and the historical and other specificities of the sub-region and countries and, therefore, generalised statements of explanations do not necessarily explain its many conflicts. But this tendency is very strong amongst most writers who have tried to explain the causes of conflicts in Africa.

Collier and Binswanger argue that (a) Africa has the highest level of ethnic diversity than any other continent, that African countries have small populations and therefore large numbers of ethnic groups, and that many African countries are distinct in having many multiple groups with strong identities; (b) because African countries have many ethnic groups with strong identities (loyalties), “it is hard to organise rebellion across ethnic division”, and (c) that “many of Africa’s conflicts can be linked directly to contests for the control of resources such as diamonds, rubber and oil”.

The description of an African country (“nation”) is based on a static view of an idealised African tribe normally found in the traditional literature. The ethnic group of today is very different from that described by Collier and Binswanger. Even in the most ethnic conscious country such as Burundi, the reality is very different. Nevertheless, it is true that African countries are highly diversified ethnically. But the argument that ethnically diverse countries find it difficult to organise rebellion is not supported by reality. In the first place, rebellions do not have to be across ethnic boundaries. More importantly, many of the rebellions of the last two decades have been across ethnic boundaries. And the argument that many of Africa’s conflicts are caused by a contest for control of resources such as diamonds, rubber and oil again is not supported by reality. Such economic resources have sustained rather than caused some of the civil wars. And the absence of the resources in many other civil wars and other types of conflicts contradicts the “economistic” argument.

It is undeniable that intense elite political competition for control of the state is generally for purposes of using the state and its institutions for accumulation of wealth, i.e., rent seeking. But this is far from the deterministic argument that all African conflicts are caused by competition for control of economic resources. In any case argument based on economic determinism is not new and is generally attributed to Marxism. But even the Marxists have a more sophisticated level of argument when it comes to conflict: that the superstructure of any society is too sophisticated to be guided entirely by economic forces, particularly when it comes to conflicts.

Adebayo Adedeji, on the other hand, admits that competition for economic resources is an important factor in conflict, but is not the only one. Firstly, he argues that “competition for resources typically lies at the heart of conflict. This accounts for the intensity of the struggle for political power in many an African country” (Adedeji 1999, 10). This may explain the competition amongst the elite in a stable political environment. It does not follow, however, that competition for economic resources is the cause of all rebel movements. As we have pointed out earlier and will do so later, these rebel movements have much more complex causes than a mere need for economic resources.

Secondly, and at a slightly different level, Adedeji argues that universally, conflicts are the result of lack of security – a psychological fear of political uncertainty. “Throughout the world, conflicts are the consequences of the *fear* of the future, lived through the past”. It is the “collective fear of the future based on a history of social uncertainty, due to the failure of the state to arbitrate justly between or provide credible guarantee of protection for groups, resulting in emerging anarchy and social fractures” (Adedeji 1999, 10). Here, it seems that Adedeji is arguing that at a deeper level, conflicts are caused by fear of anarchy and political uncertainty more than simple competition for resources. But where there is political stability and the fear and uncertainty of anarchy is absent, it may be logical to draw a conclusion that competition for political power amongst the elite (and this need not result in an armed and organised conflict) is driven by competition for resources. But then how many African countries have this kind of solid long-term political stability?!

Adedeji’s Workshop on Comprehending and Mastering Conflict in Africa (held in Mali, in 1998), set up a working group which concluded that the causes of conflict are multiple; they include political, economic, social and cultural causes (see Annex 1; Adedeji 1999, 331).

Clearly both Adedeji and the impressive calibre of African participants in the Workshop do not subscribe to the deterministic “competition for resources” generalisation as the sole cause of African conflicts.

The recent UN Secretary-General’s Report on Africa (UN 1999, 3-5), discusses the cause of African conflicts. Briefly the Secretary-General’s views on the causes of conflicts are:

(a) Historical legacies: (i) the colonial boundaries forced on the newly independent states a simultaneous task of state-building and nation-building. State-building led to heavy centralisation of political and economic power and the suppression of pluralism. But the challenge of forging a genuine national identity from among disparate and often competing communities has remained; (ii) the character of the commercial relations instituted by colonialism, also created long-term distortion in the political economy of Africa. The consequences of this pattern of production and exchange spilled over into the post-independence state. As political competition was not rooted in viable national economic systems, in many instances the prevailing structure of incentives favoured capturing the institutional remnants of the colonial economy for factional advantage; (iii) across Africa, undemocratic and oppressive regimes were supported and sustained by the competing super-powers in the name of their broad goals but, when the cold war ended, Africa was suddenly left to fend for itself.

(b) Internal factors: ... the multi-ethnic character of most African states makes conflict even more likely, leading to an often violent politicisation of ethnicity.

External factors: In the competition for oil and other precious resources in Africa, interest external to Africa continue to play a large and sometimes decisive role, both in suppressing conflict and in sustaining it.

Economic motive: Very high on the list of those who profit from conflict in Africa are international arms merchants. Also high on the list, usually, are the protagonists themselves.

Particular situations: In Central Africa, they include the competition for scarce land and water resources in densely populated areas.

- In African communities where oil is extracted, conflict has often arisen over local complaints that the community does not adequately reap the benefit of such resources, or suffers excessively from the degradation of the natural environment.
- In North Africa, the tension between strongly opposing visions of society and the state are serious sources of actual and potential conflict in some states.

The Secretary-General's Report summarises very well the general causes of African *political conflicts* – conflicts in which the state is one party to the conflict. It does not deal with other conflicts in which the state itself is not a direct party.

The OAU, like the UN, is much more concerned with preventing, managing and resolving conflicts. However, as an inter-governmental organisation, it treads very carefully when it comes to the causes of conflicts in African countries, since different member states may have very different views of these causes. After all the OAU, like the UN, concerns itself with political conflicts and since member states are in general one party to such conflicts, the states have very strong views on the causes of conflicts in which they are involved. Hence, as far as I know, there is no official OAU position on the internal causes of political conflicts in African countries. Senior individual officials may probably agree with the UN list of causes enumerated above.

Other younger African researchers tend to give more attention to “political” causes rather than “economic” ones. In a recent special issue of CODESRIA's journal *Africa Development*, several young researchers discuss specific case studies of conflicts from various countries in the different sub-regions of the continent. These researchers are clearly attracted by the argument that political forces are largely responsible for the many conflicts in the respective countries they discuss. They clearly describe the complexity of the processes which lead to conflict: poverty, youth unemployment, inequality in the distribution of development resources, ethnicity, elite manipulation of grievances and use of sectarian ideologies for mobilisation purposes, all these come to play. The political arena is wide and the struggle to seize state power ostensibly in order to redress grievances leads to the weakening of the state, its eventual collapse and capture by one group or another sometimes with support from outside.

What follows are four of these case studies and the explanations of the causes of conflicts by the young researchers. Two case studies are from Nigeria and one each from Kenya and Congo Brazzaville.

The Case of Political Conflicts in Nigeria (by William O. Idowu 1999)

Idowu (1999) argues that the continuous conflicts in Nigeria are political in nature and they are the result of: (a) the absence of democracy; (b) the specific structure of the Nigerian federal system has encouraged local and ethnic loyalties and therefore failed to develop a national consciousness/unity or citizenship; (c) the control and monopoly of the

Federal Government by the northern Hausa/Fulani and the consequent oppression of the other regions and ethnic groups in Nigeria. As a result of the continuous struggle first to remove the military regime, which has been controlled by the Northerners, and secondly by bringing about a democratic system of governance, the conflicts will disappear:

If one state is so powerful as to be able to vie in strength with many of them combined, it will insist on being the master of the joint deliberations. If they are two, they will be irresistible when they agree, but whenever they disagree, everything will be decided on a struggle for ascendancy between the two rivals. In the present-day, the "Northern elites'" refusal to share power is the single most important reason why tribes have been resurgent and ethno national consciousness has come to override overall Nigerian Nationalism" (Idowu 1999, 53).

If conflict in Nigeria means the absence of democratic behaviour and the absence of democratic behaviour spells the absence of democratic governance, it follows therefore, that conflict in Nigeria is interwoven with the absence democratic governance.

Owing to the absence of genuine citizenship, Nigeria has witnessed a series of baffling contradictions: a state of political conflict and instability, an irreconcilable struggle for power, reflected in antagonism and warfare, the politics of alienation, exclusion, and domination, accompanied by an incredible variety of micro-nationalism and pseudo-nationalism; and regrettably a forlorn search for the existence, establishment and sustenance of a well-rounded, vibrant system of democratic governance.

The Case of Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria (by Toure Kazah-Toure 1999)

The Southern Kaduna zone has occupied a volatile position in the twentieth century history of inter-group conflicts and tensions in Northern Nigeria. It has experienced complex conflicts, occasionally violent, mostly assuming ethnic form. Linked with these have been questions of social equality, citizenship, community rights and democracy. All this has taken place in a rural zone, which is a miniature of Nigeria, with about forty ethnic groups.

The Pre-Colonial Period

In the late nineteenth century, state formation in the Southern Kaduna zone was less developed than in the northern emirates.

These acephalous societies experienced limited conflicts among themselves. These socio-political formations were generally non-expansionist. Inter-

ethnic disputes and conflicts were based on the question of land, control of fishing and hunting areas, and the ownership of other resources. Armed clashes occasionally occurred, but on a small scale.

Inter-ethnic conflicts featured mainly in the relationship between the Southern Kaduna zone and the neighbouring emirates, which were feudal, predominantly Hausa Muslim. The Hausa began to emigrate to the zone and established settlements as a result of the expansion of international trade. Local people also emerged as agents of Hausa merchants. From the second half of the 19th century, there were a series of slave raids in the zone by agents of the northern feudal lords. These raids involved some of the Hausa settlements in the zone as well as some of the indigenous people. The slave raids devastated, destabilised, and even depopulated some of the communities, with serious consequences. But stubborn resistance by the various polities to violent slave raids and to military and political aggression continued.

The Colonial Period

Then came British colonialism that took control of the zone. Colonial military operations against the people went side by side with the establishment of administrative structures. The emirates aristocracy were imposed as overlords on the people in the zone and the Hausas or their agents became the chiefs. In matters of finance, recruitment of staff, and major decision-making, the chiefs and all others were subordinated to the Hausa-Fulani emirs. And they in turn derived their power from the British.

Church schools became the dominant institutions for acquiring education, which favoured the non-Muslim since education involved simultaneous conversion into Christianity. Eventually, this led to a major division in the zone between the Muslims and Christians and traditionalists. From 1910 onwards, there were a series of revolts mainly directed at the administration dominated by the Hausa-Fulani..

In the course of the decolonisation process, political parties and organisations, which occupied more prominence among the non-Hausa ethnic group, focused more on reforms of the regional administration, integrating the elite within the system, the issue of ethnic discrimination and inequalities, rather than on the concern for national independence.

The Independence Period

When Nigeria got its independence from the British in 1960, the various contradictions and points of inter-ethnic conflict had not been resolved. The post-colonial order was founded on the same socio-economic and political structures which were already in existence.

The ruling class which inherited political power from the colonialists was composed of the most conservative and aristocratic forces, who were the main agents of colonial domination. The NPC government which ruled the Northern Nigerian state, including the Southern Kaduna zone, was characterised by massive repression of popular organisations. From 1959 onwards, there was an explosion of mission schools in Southern Kaduna and a massive influx and output was recorded. Christianity was rapidly embraced by the non-Muslims. An educated elite that emerged continually felt that it owed more to the missionaries and the ethnic groups than to the state.

A series of reforms (under the military regimes) to reduce the powers of the emirs were carried out. But the emirs, the chiefs and the so-called traditional rulers continued to wield influence in political affairs. The military regimes seem to have been their main sustenance.

In Southern Kaduna, in recent times, ethnic conflicts have assumed the additional dimension of a Muslim versus Christian dichotomy. The 1980s saw the rise in religious fundamentalism, with an influx of foreign influence, ideological and material, on Muslim and Christian sects.

The working people in Southern Kaduna have been enmeshed in serious difficulties. The SAP has been characterised by a collapse of the school system, public health system, and so on. Rural poverty is growing and the majority of the people face massive destitution. Even the majority of the elite have been pauperised. Retrenchment of workers is part of the daily reality. There has been massive retrenchment by the military which had been a major employer in the zone. In an area with a shortage of land suitable for farming, the pumping of ex-soldiers back into the peasantry, without any concrete resettlement scheme, has made them restive. This is linked with the growing ethnic communal conflicts which is now fought in military style. Some of the retired military officers have joined these conflicts.

In March 1987, there were ethno-religious clashes amongst students in Kafachan, the biggest town in Southern Kaduna. The crises took a serious

dimension and spread to all the other major towns in Kaduna state. The conflict was the most spontaneous inter-ethnic religious carnage in the history of the state. In 1992 another explosion took place between the Hausa and Ayab, and the conflict extended to other parts of Kaduna state.

This analysis by Kazah-Toure (1999) has investigated the complexity of ethnic conflicts and governance, at different phases of the historical process, and the ways in which the socio-economic and political systems generate ethnic conflicts.

In the pre-colonial times, the conflict in the area of study was mainly between communal formations and feudal emirates in the Sokoto Caliphate, and concerned slave raids.

With the imposition of British colonialism, there was a transformation in ethnic relations. Alien and undemocratic governance, feudal institutions, and practices were superimposed on ethnic groups to which all these were anathema. Furthermore, there was enforced physical and social segregation over settlements, schools, control of markets, and between the so-called migrants and the so-called indigenous peoples. Conflicts, besides being ethnic, also had a religious dimension.

Post-colonial reforms were superficial, and there was no deep attempt to mediate conflicts in inter-ethnic relations. In recent times, more than ever before, the state occupies the centre of the stage in giving impetus to the divisions and complex conflicts which manifest themselves in ethnic forms.

The multi-ethnic nature of Southern Kaduna zone is not the cause of the numerous and deep ethnic conflicts. Some of the problems are located in the conditions of existence and the absence of rights faced by the ethnic communities and people.

Only equity, equality, and a democratic order could provide a bed-rock of unity and peaceful co-existence which could soften ethnic conflicts.

The Case of Ethnic Conflict in Kenya (by Oanda Ogachi 1999)

The independent Kenyan government was largely formed from Kenya's two major ethnic groups: the Luo and the Kikuyu. These two communities constitute the greater part of the overall population of Kenya. Their areas were the most penetrated by capital during the colonial period and therefore the Luos and Kikuyu people were the most influenced by the colonial

economy and culture. These two groups had formed an alliance in the dominant nationalist party, KANU, which became the ruling party.

The remaining ethnic groups were much smaller and they feared the domination which began to happen at independence. They formed KADU, which stood for Regionalism – devolution of power to the regions as opposed to a strong centralised and unitary government – as a way of protecting their interest. The first President of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta, was also the leader of KANU. In 1964, he convinced KADU to merge with KANU and the leader of KADU, Daniel Arap Moi, became the Vice-President of Kenya.

However, very soon after independence the dominance of government and political arena by the Kikuyu-Luo alliance became clear and overwhelming. Immediately after seizing state power, Kenyatta started implementing his agenda of looking after the needs of his basic community the Agikuyu. By 1978, he had secured for them the state government, a vast homeland in the Rift Valley and along the Kenya Coast, put commerce in their hands, in appropriate alliance with Asian and European bourgeoisies, and underwritten their security by manning the police, the military, intelligence and the brutalizing apparatuses such as the general service unit.

It is in these lands – the Rift Valley and the Coastal Region – that serious ethnic violence took place in the decade of the 1990s.

When President Kenyatta died and Moi came to power in 1978, he found that (a) the government and the military, police and intelligence, (b) most of the available fertile land, and (c) the private sector open to Africans – all these strategic areas were dominated and controlled by the Kikuyu. And Moi, during his 14 years as a quiet and obedient Vice-President, had seen how the state was used as an instrument to create the Kikuyu domination he was now facing.

President Moi therefore set out to address this situation confronting him and to redress the inequalities suffered by his ethnic group and his allies – the small tribes who had lost out during this period (i.e., the followers of KADU who had merged with KANU in 1964). Moi's Kalenjin ethnic group in particular had lost large tracts of very fertile land in the Rift Valley which was then in the hands of mostly Kikuyu farmers.

To redress what he perceived as economic inequalities brought about by 15 years of Kikuyu rule, he carried out the following:

- (i) Members of the Kikuyu community in the higher levels of Government were replaced by members of the ethnic groups from the old KAOU alliance, mostly Kalenjin – Moi’s tribe;
- (ii) Moi started a policy of wresting business from the hands of the Kikuyu and undermining their hegemony and dominance in the private sector controlled by Africans;
- (iii) Moi’s followers (a coalition of small tribes) were less educated and less urbanized. They needed to be “upgraded” through education if Moi’s project of pushing his tribe and his allies into the economy and government is to be sustained. To achieve this, the educational infrastructure in the Rift Valley was modernised and a series of reforms in the educational sector were carried out in order to favour his ethnic group!

It can be safely argued that by 1990, two decades of policies to advance ethnic and individual economic interest, had created a volatile ethnic situation in Kenya. At this point a number of significant forces were beginning to affect the political arena and the economy of Kenya.

Firstly, SAPs, which had been introduced in the 1980s, had by the early 1990s led to an increase in the level of poverty throughout the country. The degree of social exclusion and marginalization among the population had widened and the level of discontent amongst the poor in the rural and urban areas was rising dangerously.

Secondly, the World Bank was demanding serious and extensive economic reform to be carried out immediately. If these reforms were to be carried out, then Moi’s people and allies whose economic interests he had been advancing would be the losers and the Kikuyu whom he had been trying to undermine and downgrade economically would be the gainers. Moi was thus faced with a serious dilemma and the pressure from the World Bank and other donors was increasing.

Thirdly, political conditionalities were now being imposed on him, particularly with regard to moving from one-party rule to a multi-party system through elections. This immediately created a serious new factor of political uncertainty regarding his own and his party’s power in the immediate future.

The pressure for these economic reforms and political liberalisation was growing in intensity from both the IFIs and the donor community, as well as

from an emerging but vociferous coalition of urban elite – lawyers, lecturers, other professionals, religious groups and foreign NGOs.

These pressures inevitably led to reaction from Moi and his supporters. Firstly, the old KADU idea of Regionalism – (*Majimboism* in Swahili) – began to be publicly advocated by the politicians in government. Regionalism would essentially limit the possibility of a future domination of the regions of the smaller tribes by the large tribes, especially the Kikuyu as happened during the Kenyatta era. This is a threat by the ruling party KANU which is brought up every time the opposition push too far in their demand or when KANU feels threatened.

Secondly, ethnic clashes began to take place in the Rift Valley in 1991. These continued intermittently for several years and spread over a large area of the Rift Valley and Masailand. Later, similar clashes took place in the Coast Region. Large numbers of farmers and land owners in these two regions and those who came from other regions were evicted and forced to leave the regions. These ethnic clashes over land took place intermittently throughout the decade of the 1990s.

In the meantime, during the early 1990s, Moi gave in to liberalisation allowing political parties to operate and stand for election. The strongly independent media was also strengthened in its scrutiny of government. Moi held an election in 1994 and both he and his party won. Another election was held in 1998, and again he and his party won.

On economic reforms, however, Moi fought hard with the WB/IMF accepting piecemeal reforms until towards the end of the decade, in 1999 when he relented.

However, it is important to note that these reforms may, at best, improve the economy of Kenya, but at the same time they will sharpen the inequalities and increase poverty despite the belated desperate efforts of the WB to evolve a “poverty alleviation” programme. The programme, at best, may make a small dent in the growing mountain of poverty but poverty will continue to increase. Hence, this fundamental problem will continue to provide the condition or environment for conflicts in Kenya.

Furthermore, the issue of distribution between the ethnic groups of the wealth to be generated from the private sector has not been resolved. Clearly, the history of independent Kenya has been a struggle between the ethnic groups to capture state power in order to siphon off wealth to their region or ethnic group. If the argument now is that pluralism will stop this

practice and that wealth distribution between regions and ethnic groups will be taken care of by the market, then this is an assumption which is fundamentally flawed and flies in the face of history and present reality.

The Conflict in Congo-Brazzaville (by Anne Sundberg 1999)

The Congo has been trying to install democracy since 1991. A conflict within the political class, after the end of the Cold War, led to a weakening of the state, which in turn, made it possible to promote demand for a national conference.

The state no longer constitutes a supreme authority with monopoly over the use of force. Instead, a number of feudal lords/warlords claim an equal right to supremacy and to their own territories.

The state is conceived as something that can be possessed. The Congo's natural resources have always been the object of a power struggle rather than the basis for development and improvement of living conditions for its people.

Ethnicity may be explosive when it is politicised. Ethnic war and ethnic cleansing took place in 1993, in a situation where different ethnic groups had intermarried and where their children consequently were "mixed".

During the ethnic war of 1993-94, two ethno-political blocks emerged in Brazzaville, each of them with its own militia. Militias have been part of the political picture since a few years after independence, but the democratisation process, or rather the multi-party system, seems to open up "the market" for militias. Every political leader of any importance needs his bodyguard. The militias are not only formed by the political leaders, but are also an initiative from below, because the young are aware of how they can explore the situation.

Owing to increasing poverty during the last decade, the clan system has disintegrated. Neither family nor clan have sufficient means to use for their survival strategies. The young have to look for other benefactors. They are used by the politicians while promoting their own interest. Each politician seems to have his guard or militia. The politicians use young, poor men for their needs in the struggle for power, and they hand out the arms themselves. The young men recruited are mostly school dropouts and have no jobs.

In the 1993-94 conflict, the ethnic element was much more important and

ordinary people took part in the killing and looting. But the 1997 conflict is clearer in the sense that it is a war between two warlords, two politicians who have been enemies for a long time and who are alienated from the people. In this war ordinary people have tried to keep out of trouble and have left Brazzaville in hundreds of thousands.

Sassou Nguesso was supported financially by the French petrol company ELF. Similarly, the Angolans helped him because Lissouba allowed UNITA to operate from Congo Brazzaville. Lissouba, who was elected as President of Congo, was eventually overthrown by Nguesso after bitter fighting between their militias. Nguesso is now president of Congo – unelected but recognised in Africa and internationally. But the Lissouba militia and supporters from his region continue the struggle against Nguesso and his government, hoping that one day he will overthrow Nguesso.

In this paper I have tried to show how the frustrations of poor young men with no opportunities become dangerous, especially since the politicians have handed out weapons so freely. I have also tried to show how ethnicity is used both by politicians and people to compete for power. In the Congo, the young men, who have become individualised, feel “abandoned”, i.e., deceived, by the political leaders

The four case studies from Nigeria, Kenya and Congo Brazzaville show that: (a) many of the political conflicts in African countries are mainly about seizing state power; (b) ethnicity rather than any other line of division seems to be critical in these conflicts; while politicians’ appeal to ethnicity may be described as “base manipulation”, the astonishing reality is that ordinary people are mobilised and do injure and kill for these objectives; the issue is therefore not as simple as “manipulation by politicians” and the identity to people’s ethnic groups seems to be stronger than given credit for; (c) the fundamental purpose of the struggle to seize state power is to use the state to further one’s economic interest in both the private and the public sectors. It can be argued that these case studies may not entirely be representative of all political conflicts. This may be true. Nevertheless they are significant examples of political conflicts from some important countries and sub-regions.

The brief review of the various explanations by different writers regarding the causes of African conflicts confirms our view of the complexity of these conflicts and the different contexts in which they occur. The UN Secretary-General has summarised, in general terms (and in impeccable UN language), the commonly accepted explanation of the causes of conflicts in African countries. But the case studies take us further in that they clearly

indicate the interactions of the various causes and the variations in which the different causes are combined, thus making the conflicts in some countries take a different form from others thus leading to the specificities of countries and the dynamics of different sub-regions. Indeed, the case study of the Southern Kaduna zone clearly shows the different types of conflicts which take place under different historical circumstances or environments. It forces us to understand that conflicts in Africa are part of larger historical processes and that in order to understand their causes, it is necessary to place them within the political, social and economic environment of a particular historical era and in a given country and sub-region. And this is what we intend to do in the next section.

4. The Context of African Conflicts: Past and Contemporary

Having attempted to classify the types of African conflicts and having briefly reviewed the causes of these conflicts, it is necessary now to look at the context or environments within which these conflicts occur. Our main argument here is that the political, economic and social forces together constitute or provide an environment within which conflicts occur; that these environments change according to a particular historical period thus affecting both the nature and extent of conflicts; and finally that the combination of these forces vary in different countries and sub-regions thus giving conflicts in those countries their specificities. In particular, we will look carefully at the changes in the type and extent of conflicts during the different decades of the post-independence period and argue that the increase in the number and type of conflicts is directly related to the specific dominant forces extant during each decade. We have identified these decades as: (a) the nationalist-euphoric phase (1960-1970); (b) the Cold War phase (1970-1989, including the SAP decade of 1980-1990); and (c) the transition to democracy phase (1990-2000). Obviously, the forces which are dominant in these different phases and which, in our view, have affected the conflicts of the time, continue and interact with the forces in the next phase. Thus the forces which are dominant during the transition phase did not necessarily start in 1990, nor have they ended in 1999. These are processes which are continuous and assume importance in certain periods but lose their significance in other periods. Annex 3 presents a table which shows the increasing number of conflicts during the four identified decades. And this is clear evidence which supports our argument below.

4.1 Conflicts in the Pre-Colonial Era

The contemporary history of Africa clearly shows that conflicts of various types and scales have existed in pre-colonial Africa (contrary to the

idealised folk history of a peaceful African past). These past conflicts were of many types – wars of conquests between powerful states/kingdoms, internal rebellions in such kingdoms, interventions of slave raiders, conflicts between ethnic groups over pasture, over cattle, over fertile land, and reciprocal killings over murdered kin. However, the pre-colonial history is not simply a “bloody history”. There were long peaceful periods in different kingdoms, societies and regions during which important developments and progress at all levels were achieved. However, despite the peaceful periods, there were many unresolved conflicts everywhere which were dormant and which were carried over into the colonial period.

4.2 Conflicts during the Colonial Period

The process of colonial conquest met with considerable resistance from African societies. Ancient unresolved conflicts and other hostilities between African societies, which came under colonial rule, were fully exploited by the new rulers. Old hostilities were deepened. Furthermore the establishment of the colonial order involved major disruptions of almost every African society – be they unified kingdoms, fragmented kingdoms, or small isolated societies – first amongst agriculturists and later amongst pastoralists. These disruptions were first and foremost at the political level despite the famous indirect rule. Secondly, there were major disruptions in terms of the economies of the various societies, in particular the introduction of individual ownership over land, the mass mobilisations of labour (through taxation system and through sheer force) to new plantations and the mines. Thirdly, there were deep disruptions through the imposition of new principles, rules and values established by the colonial powers to regulate relations between individuals, between groups and between them and the new colonial authorities.

During the colonial period, three important conditions developed which were conducive to and directly contributed to conflicts amongst different groups as well as with the colonial authorities in each colonial territory:

- a. At the political and administrative levels, “old or traditional rulers” were strengthened and given more powers which were economically more rewarding than in the past. Their political and social capital was augmented and, more importantly, their wealth increased considerably. In traditionally stratified, feudal, semi-feudal and caste-like societies, groups occupying traditionally higher status became more powerful in most respect. And this led to considerable tension with those of lower positions and commoners. This tension often led to open conflict in many such societies during the colonial period and in some cases has unfortunately

continued to the present. Some of the most extreme cases of this type of conflicts are to be found in Nigeria, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda. The colonial powers also created, in many countries, “new rulers” in the rural areas. These new rulers, like their traditional counterparts, were also given more powers and as a result accumulated wealth and political and social capital. Indeed everywhere, the colonial powers deliberately selected particular ethnic groups and gave them preferential treatment, as the new chiefs, as new local administrators and civil servants, as recruits into the police and the colonial army.

In Eastern and Southern Africa where settler colonies were implanted to develop settler/enclave economies, plantations and mining economies were created and large-scale appropriation of land took place as well as mobilisation of large labour force to run these economies. To organise and run such economies, the colonial powers introduced: (a) civil law from the metropolitan countries for the settlers only, (b) imported minority groups from Asia and also from other African countries to run service sector commerce and the lower ranks of the civil service, (c) large-scale labour movement required elaborate control and supervisory system which was run by Africans under tight control of colonial and settler officers. Inevitably, these imposed systems of administration and control created tension between those who gained from the colonial system and those who lost and suffered from it. The conditions for conflict between different ethnic groups, between the colonised and the colonisers, and between the different racial groups were created and deepened. As a result there were many conflicts all over Africa resulting from the political and administrative system of the colonial situation, which took place and which were unreported. Some of these tensions erupted independently of the nationalist struggle, some were part of that struggle and some remain dormant and erupted years later after independence.

- b. The economic disruption which took place caused considerable problems and tensions in almost all African countries. Individual ownership of land, the development of an agricultural economy for both internal market and for export through large-scale plantations as well as small-scale farming inevitably led to shortage of land in fertile areas, economic differentiations, landless peasants and inevitable tension and conflict over land and other resources. The same process took place amongst pastoralist communities. There was also a process of uneven regional development and

underdevelopment which often meant that the ethnic groups in the developed regions gained more from the colonial economy and often at the expense of those groups in underdeveloped areas. In urban areas the economic differentiation was even sharper; in some countries it followed a racial line while in others it was between ethnic groups. A process of class formation began to take place, but it did not go far enough to the point of actual classes being formed and certainly not class consciousness. This process went much further amongst the poor urban population than amongst the rich and middle "class". The period between 1900 to 1950 thus saw the establishment and deepening of these economic processes in both the rural and urban areas. During the same period the population of African countries increased dramatically. This economic process and population pressure led to considerable tension and conflict over resources, especially over land in both the cultivable and pastoral regions of most African countries. In urban areas, tension and conflict was mostly between the poor underclass and the colonial authorities. The landless pauperised peasants, the poor small traditional farmers, the pastoralists who lost land and cattle, these became important categories who not only resented the colonial authorities, but also those countrymen who had gained at their expense from the colonial system. Tension and conflict between people in these categories and others as well as with the colonial authorities became endemic. Thus when the nationalist movements led by urban elites started, people in these categories formed the immediate backbone of the movements. Others who were doing better under the colonial system joined later. This provided a temporary unity in each country in order to focus the struggle against the colonial authorities. But the tensions and the deep lines of conflicts were there and were carried over into the independence period. And the unity was acceptable to those who lost during the colonial period not only because of fighting a common enemy, but also because the national leadership promised to address their demands. As we will see later, when the nationalist leadership failed to fulfil their promises, conflicts between groups and between them and the states started re-emerging.

- c. The tensions and conflicts which developed as a result of the imposition of political and administrative structures and those which developed as a result of the economic processes of the colonial economy, these tensions and conflicts did not simply remain at the structural level. Nor were they temporary phenomenon, which were expected to disappear after a brief period.

They were translated into values and expectations and stored in long historical memories through a process of effective socialisation. Both individual and collective memories affect both latent and manifest behaviour, often hostile, towards other groups and towards the state. And these memories can be exploited on a large-scale during the nationalist period, and presently by opposition leaders during election periods. But more significantly, these memories need not be exploited by leaders from outside the groups. They are thus the bases for the many localised conflicts which take place in both rural and urban areas, conflicts which when they are at low intensity level pass unnoticed, but get noticed when they reach a certain level of violence. Needless to say, these memories were carried over into the post-independence period.

4.3 Independence and Conflicts in Africa, 1960-2000

The independence period is roughly 40 years for most countries. Post-independence conflicts went through several phases. These are:

4.3.1 The Phase of the Nationalist Governments, 1960-1970

As pointed out earlier, important areas of tension and hostilities were generated during the colonial period and which resulted in many different types and size of conflicts with different capacity and duration.

However, just as the nationalist struggle subsumed the on-going conflicts especially during the 1950s, similarly the euphoria of independence suppressed those same conflicts and the new ones which were emerging. Thus during the euphoric period of 1960 to 1970, there were very few inter-state wars and even fewer internal civil wars and other forms of rebellions against the state.

It is important, however, to remind ourselves that during this period there were many smaller or low intensity conflicts, especially those between ethnic groups, which went unnoticed. For example, there were violent conflicts over land disputes in Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan, etc.; there were also inter-ethnic urban conflicts in Zambia, Kenya, Nigeria, etc.; and some anti-government rebellions in Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, Zanzibar, etc.

It is useful to note that during the 1960-1970 period, both media and research coverage of problems and conflicts in African countries was very poor even in urban areas. Hence, many of the low level intensity conflicts were highly localised and went by unnoticed, sometimes even by the

governments of the countries.

It is also important to point out that although the Cold War was already in full swing during this period, it had not become the dominant foreign factor in Africa. The former colonial powers continued to have considerable interest and influence in African countries, mainly in order to consolidate their own economic and political interests with the new mostly inexperienced nationalist governments. Almost all foreign interventions in Africa (overt and covert or through technical assistance) during this period were from the former colonial powers – except in the former Congo (later Zaire and now DRC) where the Americans and the UN intervened in addition to the former colonial power.

4.3.2 African Conflicts and the Cold War, 1970 -1989

One of the ironies of the post-independence history of Africa is the declaration by the UN of a Development Decade for Africa (1970-1980), a decade which saw African economies deteriorate to unprecedented levels and during which conflicts, both major and minor, increased dramatically. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, African economies were in their worst state since independence, that it became conventional wisdom that the WB and IMF should formulate new economic policies for African countries and supervise their implementation with the aim of radically restructuring these economies, thus paving the way for the introduction of SAPs especially during the decade of 1980-1990. The immediate effects of SAPs are now accepted, even by its authors, to have sharply increased poverty and economic inequality without necessarily improving the economic performance of the African economies.

The context of the ironic situation of the 1970s and the direct interventions of the financial institutions in formulating and managing the African economies was the new post Cold-War environment with the following factors constituting important elements of this environment.

- (i) the direct intervention of the Cold War rivalry in Africa both in terms of ideological competition and actual military and political interventions;
- (ii) the failure of the nationalist governments to deliver what they had promised during the struggle for independence and when they took over power;
- (iii) the deterioration of the economies of most countries and the dramatic increase of population in all countries;

- (iv) the eruption during the 1970s of unresolved tensions and conflicts carried over from the colonial period as well as from the first decade of independence;
- (v) the serious pauperisation of the ordinary people, but particularly of the middle class, as a result of the SAPs programme, and the realisation by politicians and civil servants of the loss of their sovereignty. This new situation created new and intensified tensions between ethnic groups; it created an explosive tension and hostility between people and their governments, and between people/governments and the international financial institutions.

The Cold War factor was critical during this period. During the euphoric phase of the 1960s, many African governments practised some form of democracy. However, by the early 1970s most of the same ruling elite had decided that such democracy simply encouraged “tribalism” or ethnicity which would lead to internal conflicts, the disintegration of the new countries and the negation of their efforts at nation-building. Hence, many countries felt that there was a need for a stronger state to wield the many ethnic groups together to suppress the on-going and traditional hostilities and conflicts amongst ethnic groups, and, more importantly, not to allow opportunistic politicians to exploit ethnic differences and bring about serious divisions in the country. Most ruling parties thus soon adopted a one-party system of rule as part of their effort to have a strong government which would be able to keep the country together and stem out tribalism. Another argument for a strong state was to enable it to plan the economy and to intervene in its implementation so as to bring about quicker economic development. Needless to say these moves towards a strong state and controlled economy, deteriorated into strong oppressive states whose ruling elite used the institutions of the state to accumulate wealth and plunder the public sector. The Cold War rivalry as represented by the Americans and the Russians inevitably looked at African countries from their strategic point of view. They supported African rulers who were their allies, maintained them in power and helped them crush their opponents. Given such support most African states not only became politically oppressive but also seriously misused the country’s resources under all kinds of guises. Americans and their allies – Britain, France, Portugal and South Africa – intervened openly and recklessly in support of dictatorial governments which were openly creating internal tensions and conflicts. Hence, blind support by the Cold War warriors (USA and the Soviet Union) of many unpopular and oppressive African governments inevitably led those aggrieved groups to carry out many coup d’etats, start secessionist movements and rebellions against their governments. A combination of these forces produced a dramatic increase in conflicts in most African

countries. In the 1970s, these conflicts ranged from the many coup d'états of the "corporals", secessionist rebellions, armed inter-ethnic conflicts to take over the state, and many other smaller low-level conflicts, which as usual went by unnoticed. In the 1980s, there were continuations of conflicts which had erupted in the 1970s, and also considerable tensions and hostilities amongst the middle class as well as the urban poor for economic improvement and political changes.

4.3.3 African Conflicts and the Post-Cold War Era, 1990-200

The ending of the Cold War brought about major global changes which impacted dramatically on Africa's overall development. The major factors which have affected Africa and thus set the new environments for conflicts in the 1990s can briefly be enumerated as follows:

- (i) the withdrawal of automatic support to authoritarian African governments and the concomitant financial and military assistance that accompanied that support;
- (ii) the rapid globalisation of the world trade, the tightening of loans, the dependence of African countries on private investment, and the non-competitiveness of most African economies;
- (iii) the increasingly critical role in African economies played by the international financial institutions (WB/IMF in particular) and the extensive political conditionalities which they and the entire donor community impose on African countries – democratisations and good governance and all the institutions associated with the kind of democracy demanded by the donors;
- (iv) the increasing role of many different types of organisations, both foreign and local, in monitoring the governance and human rights record of African governments especially in situations of tensions and conflicts. The system of monitoring in place in most African countries is formidable. It starts with the Western Embassies, the international media, human rights organisations (foreign and local), NGOs and Civil Society Groups (foreign and local), the UN agencies, donor organisations, the local media etc.;
- (v) the effects of SAPs in the form of dramatic increase in poverty in both the urban and rural areas and the increase in population have led to heightening of tension and conflicts because of competition over resources such as cultivating and grazing land, water, etc.
- (vi) the easy availability and accessibility of small arms from international arms dealers as well as from rebellious which took

place in the 1970s and 1980s of Mozambique, Uganda, etc., and from African countries which produce arms. To give some idea of the scale of small arms available, there are, according to some estimates, “at least 8 million weapons in West Africa, with more than half in the hands of insurgents and criminals” State Department 1999, 5).

- (vii) the conflicts which had not been resolved in the 1980s and new ones which had developed in the 1990s have added to the number of conflicts during this post Cold-War decade from 1990-2000.

5. Preventing, Managing and Resolving Conflicts: Strategies and Policies

Conflict, depending on the scale, intensity and duration, causes enormous humanitarian problems, and economic dislocation and destruction. All conflicts, whatever their scale, intensity and duration, are therefore extremely costly in terms of human suffering and destruction of property. More importantly, any conflict, but especially those which are very destructive (e.g., Chechnia) or those which last long, carry emotional wounds and retributive memories over a long period of time and often rekindle the conflict many years later. Hence, therein lies the importance of reconciliation policies as distinct from the immediate arrangements agreed to by the parties during the resolution of the conflict – whether the solution is achieved through negotiations or other means such as by military force. These issues have important policy implications and need to be carefully thought through and reflected upon.

Our concern here, however, is to focus on other dimensions of conflict. We will look briefly at (a) the question of long-term strategies and policies to prevent and deal with the root causes of conflicts, and (b) the question of managing and resolving conflicts once they start.

5.1 At the National Level

Most conflicts in Africa during the last two decades have been internal and occur within countries. They must therefore be dealt with first and foremost at the national level. Each country must develop strategies and policies to deal with the root causes of conflicts and to have effective and efficient mechanisms to deal with and resolve conflicts once they have started.

5.1.2 Conflict Prevention

Preventing conflict is essentially a long-term process and it needs long-term strategies and policies whose impact will prevent the emergence of conditions which give rise to conflicts. These strategies and policies are fundamental to all countries which aim at minimising serious conflict in the long run. We suggest the following:

- *Nation-building:* Given the heterogeneous nature of almost all African countries, a fundamental objective should be to revive the concept of nation-building initiated and developed by the nationalist leadership at the beginning of the independence period but which was later abandoned in most countries. Furthermore, at the core of this concept is a long-term strategy to develop a national consciousness through cultural policies, mainly implemented through the educational system. Central to this concept is the acknowledgement of cultural diversity within a framework of national unity. Details of these policies will vary from one sub-region and country to another. Countries could benefit from examining the Tanzanian example which has been more successful than most African countries in its nation-building strategy and policies. Where there has been no efforts to develop consciousness of national unity, serious divisive tendencies have led to conflicts, to disintegration of countries or to catastrophic civil wars. A homogenous culture by itself is not sufficient to keep a country united and prevent serious conflict as the examples of Somalia, Burundi and Rwanda clearly show. While in Somalia the state collapsed, in Burundi and Rwanda, they had and still have cultural homogeneity and strong centralised states but with catastrophic civil wars. Tanzania and Uganda are good contrasting examples of what are the implications of having or not having national unity.
- *Political system:* There is a need to develop a political system whose rules allow competition for power and which guarantee the possibility of alternate groups achieving power within a reasonable period of time. The system should allow large numbers and groups to be involved in the selection/election of decision-makers at different levels of the power structure. Several important principles are absolutely critical to such a political system: (a) extensive devolution of power; (b) accumulation of wealth through the use of state institutions must be totally forbidden; (c) the principles of good and democratic governance must be fully implemented, i.e., transparency, accountability, independent judiciary and complete

civilian control of the military; (d) extensive involvement of indigenous independent civil society groups in national and local affairs especially in the monitoring of policy implementation and service delivery.

- *Economic development:* A free market economy is important in the economic development of a country. However, it is now clearly acknowledged that the economy should not be allowed to generate serious poverty and that policies and affirmative action programmes must be developed to minimise and reduce poverty. And poverty is an important cause of conflict. Similarly, it is equally important that economic resources and development funds should be evenly distributed between the regions and groups in the country. Clear and serious uneven distribution of economic resources between regions and ethnic groups is known to have led to conflict, sometime to serious secessionist rebellion.

These are long-term strategies which if carefully and properly implemented are most likely to minimise the development of conditions favourable to the emergence of conflict. But even if these strategies and policies are carefully followed, they do not necessarily guarantee the absence of various types of conflicts. It is most likely that the kinds of conflicts which might emerge in countries with such long-term strategies and policies are likely to be less serious and more amenable to management and resolution. Hence, even in the best of conditions it is important for countries to develop their own mechanism for managing and resolving conflicts as soon as they occur.

5.1.2 Mechanisms for Managing and Resolving Conflicts

Most African countries today have no mechanism for managing and resolving conflicts between groups especially politically instigated conflicts except through the use of military force. It is prudent today for countries to assume that they are likely to have several types of conflict which their judicial systems cannot deal with and that resorting to the military may not be the wisest course of action. Hence, it may be useful for countries to think of having a permanent mechanism for dealing with such conflicts. It is our view that countries have several options:

- *An independent arbitration council:* The first option is for a country to set up an independent arbitration council which could be made up of up to ten elderly and wise individuals from across the country and walks of life. A Secretariat and a pool of experts should support such a council. The state and the private sector, especially wealthy

nationals of the country, should contribute and provide it with adequate finance. Guarantees to enforce agreement should be an essential method of resolving conflicts. However, the moral authority of the council rather than the military force of the state should back its decision. Military force should be used as a very last resort.

- *Outside mediator:* A second method of resolving such conflicts is to involve a mediator from outside the country – a wise man or woman acceptable to both parties to the conflict. Again, moral authority and agreement between the parties should back the decision of the mediator rather than military force of the state.

Both these methods of resolving conflicts should involve civil society groups as much as possible – their role being that of witness to the proceedings and decisions, and also to informally persuade the protagonists of the necessity of resolving their conflict through negotiations rather than through force. Their collective moral pressure can play an important role in the process of resolving a conflict. They can also play an important role in the implementation of the agreement reached.

- *Reform of judicial system:* Thirdly, it is suggested that the judicial system of most countries should be reformed and their capacities augmented in order to enable them to deal with these types of conflicts (between groups fighting over land, or politically instigated conflicts between groups, or between one or more groups and the state itself!) In these situations the part of the judicial system dealing with such conflicts should be seen to be independent. And if the state is seen to be willing to listen to grievances through a third party and to accept decision which may go against it, it will go a long way in creating a climate conducive to resolving conflicts through negotiations. The use of a trigger-happy military has never resolved conflicts; it generally suppresses it for a while until it surfaces again with deeper grievances.

Even if a country has not initiated long-term strategies and policies to tackle fundamental causes of internal conflicts, such as Burundi, Sierra Leon, etc., such countries should seriously contemplate setting up mechanisms for resolving conflicts along the lines suggested above. Other mechanisms could be just as useful. The important issue here is to create a framework and an ideology of reconciliation and confidence amongst the people as a whole, but more so amongst the conflicting parties that the government is

serious about resolving conflicts and addressing grievances of those in conflict.

5.2 At the Regional and International Levels

Until recently, the OAU was constrained by its Charter from intervening in internal conflicts taking place in African countries. Furthermore, the history of UN intervention to solve internal African conflicts has been, to put it mildly, rather inglorious and unsuccessful. The Congo (early sixties), Somalia, and Rwanda (in the 1990s) come to mind as examples. Yet the UN has enormous capacity – of expertise, financial and military power – for intervention. And such capacity has been demonstrated several times – in Iraq, Bosnia and Yugoslavia (Kosovo), to mention the most recent examples. But such capacity has not been utilised positively and effectively in Africa. And the feeling in Africa is that there is a double standard operating when it comes to the issue of peacekeeping in Africa.

Africans have taken note of this unpalatable international reality. While in the past the OAU was constrained from dealing with internal conflicts of its member states, this situation has now changed. In 1990 in Addis Ababa and again in 1993 in Cairo, the Summits of African Heads of State and Government effectively empowered the OAU to take steps and get involved in resolving internal conflicts taking place in the member states. This empowerment needs to be strengthened, but the basic decision to involve the OAU in internal conflicts of member countries has been made. More importantly a “Mechanism for the Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflicts” has been set up in the OAU and is already operational. This *Mechanism* needs to be strengthened. Clearly, therefore, within the OAU, there exists the framework and the commitment for resolving both inter-state and internal conflicts in African countries. What is lacking is expertise and resources for peace enforcement. The OAU has already mediated and overseen major and sophisticated mediation and negotiation efforts in central Africa and the horn of Africa. What it lacks is the capacity to enforce peace and ensure implementation of agreements painstakingly negotiated. Our suggestions therefore are:

- a. the international community and African Member States themselves should contribute to the strengthening of the OAU Mechanism for Prevention, Managing and Resolving Conflicts;
- b. strengthen the OAU links with the sub-regional organisations such as ECOWAS, SADCC, IGAAD, etc., so as to enable the latter to have the capacity to intervene in conflicts such as those in Liberia, Sierra Leon, Lesotho, etc.

- c. strengthen links with the UN so that the latter can provide resources (financial and expertise) to support OAU efforts to resolve conflicts in African countries;
- d. the OAU should, as a matter of principle, involve civil society in the mediation and negotiation process;
- e. where serious and sustained civil war has taken place, the OAU and the sub-regional organisations, should undertake serious study of the process of returning conflict countries to normalcy – the transition of societies from conflict conditions to post-conflict conditions. This is particularly important with regards to the reconstruction of the state and the government, the integration of the various military forces in society, the role of civil society groups, and the reconstruction of the shattered economy. Most crucial is the immediate implementation of programmes to bring about reconciliation.

However this research, should be part of a wider and long-term programme of studying the nature, type and causes of conflict as well as methods of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts at the three levels: national, sub-regional, and regional.

6. Conclusion

I want to conclude this paper with a few and very brief points.

Firstly, as suggested at the end of the Kenya case study, Kenya's post-independence history and political reality today is that the core of the political struggle between KANU and the Democratic Party (largely a Kikuyu Party) is to capture the state so that KANU can continue its programme of pushing the Kalenjin and the smaller tribes into a dominant political and economic position, while the Democratic Party wants to defend the position of the Kikuyu and consolidate it further. If, however, it is now being argued that political liberalisation and economic reform will change both the objective and method of this struggle (i.e., the use of the state for advancing sectional interest), then this argument is seriously faulty. It is our view that the objectives of furthering the interest of the two ethnic blocks through the state will remain and continue as in the past. Hence, the dynamics of the Kenyan political system under pluralism and under a reformed economy will continue to generate similar conflicts in the near future. And this argument can be extended to Nigeria, Congo (Brazzaville), and other countries. In other words, pluralism and growing economies are not a panacea for African conflicts.

Secondly, it is our view that the recent experience of the transition to democracy in most African countries has brought to the fore ethnicity and perhaps reinforced ethnic identities, not only in the political arena, but in many other areas of the “national” activities. It is not popular these days to say that the present situation has vindicated the first generation of nationalist leaders who had argued with strong conviction that pluralism (the Westminster type democracy, as it was called in the 1960s) will bring about *tribalism* contrary to their mission of building a nation. And, consequently, they argued for a one-party system with internal democracy. They argued that one-party rule would enable the state to be strong and to overcome divisive ethnic and religious tendencies. It may be useful, as a way of seriously searching for prevention and management of conflicts, that the nationalist argument should be seriously revisited rather than be dismissed out of hand. Strong states need not be oppressive and undemocratic states. No one can seriously argue that Western states, which are very strong, are undemocratic. Indeed it may also be useful to rethink the idea that Western liberal democracy is the only form of democracy which African countries should adopt or transit to.

Thirdly, there is little doubt that pluralism and the transition phase have considerably weakened the African state. It is automatically being assumed that African leaders, once in power “naturally” misuse their power, become oppressive and autocratic. Hence, they must be carefully watched. Thus a formidable array of so-called “monitoring”, but which is effectively a surveillance system of African governments in the most obtrusive and intrusive way possible, is in place in every African country. The IFIs, the Embassies, the donor community (= the IFIs + the Embassies + the UN), the powerful foreign media and their local agents, the human rights organisations, advocacy civil society groups (financed by the donor community), religious groups, etc., all these organisations with various powers of rewards and punishment, but all very vocal through their media, are watching the African government on a daily basis, ready to jump at the smallest government act they dislike.

The assumption is that if this array of monitoring is not in place and is not vigilant, African governments will revert to their old tricks of oppression and autocracy. Clearly, therefore, the African governments are now much weaker and highly constrained than they were a decade ago. This has led some people to argue that the weakness of the African state during this decade has opened a Pandora’s box of conflicts everywhere. This point of view is carefully and clearly expressed by H.E Ato Meles Zenawi. “African states are by definition weak.... The classic case is of a state being too strong and too powerful, thus leaving no room for civil society. The African

state is illustrative of the other extreme of civil society bereft of protection that can only be afforded by states with capacity to discharge their rudimentary functions. Weak states and stability can hardly mix Without effective states with the necessary capacity to govern, the fate of Africa will remain bleak, including in the area of the prevention of conflict and their resolution” (Meles Zenawi 1999, 2).

The argument here is not for a strong undemocratic and oppressive state, but rather for a strong, democratic state which is not constantly being weakened by being constantly told how to govern.

Notes

1. Recently it was reported (by the BBC) that the Government of Uganda distributed arms to an ethnic group – the Teso – so that it can defend itself from attacks by another ethnic group, the Karamajong, who are said to be well armed. The government’s justification for this move is that it does not have enough manpower to protect the Teso, who do not have arms to defend themselves and who are being attacked by the well-armed Karamajong.
2. In the last few years, however, the ubiquitous presence of the media in all so-called “trouble spots” has increased the reporting of most urban conflicts and some rural conflicts. But these reports are very superficial, often erroneous, and mostly biased.

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Annex 1: Categorisation of SSA Countries by the Prevailing Political Condition as of the Last Quarter of 1998

Countries faced with armed conflicts	Countries under severe political crisis	Countries enjoying relatively stable political condition
(Category 1)	(Category 2)	(Category 3)
Angola	Cameroon	Benin
Burundi	Comoros	Botswana
Central African Republic	Djibouti	Burkina Faso
Congo (Brazzaville)	Gambia	Cape Verde
Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire)	Ghana	Cote d'Ivoire
Eritrea	Madagascar	Equatorial Guinea
Ethiopia	Malawi	Gabon
Guinea Bissau	Niger	Guinea
Kenya	Nigeria	Mali
Lesotho	Togo	Mauritania
Liberia	Zambia	Mauritius
Rwanda	---	Mozambique
Senegal	---	Namibia
Sierra Leone	---	Sao Tome & Principe
Somalia	---	Seychelles
Sudan	---	South Africa
Chad	---	Swaziland
Uganda	---	Tanzania
---	---	Zimbabwe

SOURCE: (Adedeji 1999, 5).

Annex 2: Causes of Conflict Identified by the Working Group

Political

- The struggle for power;
- Lack of visionary leadership; external influence;
- Lack of good governance and transparency;
- Non-adherence to the principle of human rights.

Economic

- Poverty;
- Inequitable distribution of resources and national wealth;
- The negative effect of the external debt burden and the international financial system.

Social and cultural

- Social inequality;
- System of exclusion and ethnic hatred;
- Role of the political class in the manipulation of ethnic and regional sentiments;
- Cultural detachment and the search for identity with extra-African culture;
- Defective educational system.

SOURCE: (Adedeji 1999, 331).

Annex 3: Armed Rebellion and Civil War Lasting More Than One Year

Country	Year Started	Continuous	Intermittent	Resolved	Total
DRC 1	1960s	DRC	---	---	2 Continuous
Kenya 1	>>	---	---	Kenya	2 Resolved
Nigeria 1	>>	---	---	Nigeria	---
Rwanda 1	>>	Rwanda	---	---	4 Total
Angola	1970s	Angola	---	---	---
Burundi	>>	Burundi	---	---	3 Continuous
Cameroon	>>	---	Cameroon	---	3 Intermittent
CAR	>>	---	---	CAR	2 Resolved
Chad	>>	---	Chad	---	---
Comoro	>>	---	Comoro	---	---
Ethiopia	>>	Ethiopia	---	---	---
Mozambique	>>	---	---	Mozambique	8 Total
Congo		Congo			
Brazzaville	1980s	Brazzaville	---	---	---
Djibouti	>>	---	---	Djibouti	3 Continuous
Mali	>>	---	---	Mali	1 Intermittent
Mauritania	>>	---	---	Mauritania	3 Resolved
Niger	>>	---	Niger	---	---
Senegal	>>	Senegal	---	---	7 Total
Lesotho	1990s	---	---	Lesotho	---
Liberia	>>	---	---	Liberia	1 Continuous
Sierra Leone	>>	---	---	Sierra Leone	4 Resolved
Somali	>>	Somali	---	---	---
South Africa	>>	---	---	South Africa	5 Total
SUMMARY					
	1960-70	1970-80	1980-90	1990-2000	Total
	2	3+2	3+5	1+8	9
Intermittent	---	3	1+3	4	4
Total	2	8	11	13	34
Percentage	5.88	23.53	32.35	38.24	100%