Wars in the Twenty First Century: The African Dimension

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Abstract: *The history of mankind is replete with the issue of conflicts and wars. War has been throughout history a normal way of conducting disputes between political groups and nations. It seems that no human activity can be actualized without an element of conflict since there have always been differences in preferences in beliefs, religion, policies and approach to fundamental issues affecting different individuals/nations. The fact that comparative advantage of materials and human resources are more in favour of certain groups than the others makes conflicts concurrently palpable in human relations. It is therefore absolutely impossible for any nation to maintain a policy of isolation without interaction with other nations; and the process of interaction leads to disagreements. It is in the course of inter-group relations that conflict erupts, especially where the rules binding such a relationship are not well defined and properly understood. Although, we sometimes attribute conflicts to heterogeneity of societies but we must also not forget the paradox that most disastrous conflicts of our time emanated from homogeneous societies such as the war we are witnessing in Somalia where the people have a common language, cultural affinities and historical heritage. The main thrust of this paper is to critically assess the concept of the new kind of war that is rampart in Africa.*

1. Introduction

Most scholars of international relations recognize the problem of war as a core central issue. For some, the stability of the international system is usually defined in terms of its proximity to or remoteness from the occurrence or likelihood of large-scale war. Many scholarly works devoted to probing the causes of war have been published, although interest in this subject has declined since the end of the Cold War. Gilpin (1981) prior to World War I, writes Michael Howard, historians were interested in the causes of

specific wars but devoted little attention to the quest for the causes of war in general. War as a recurring phenomenon was taken for granted. In Howard's view, the causes of war have not changed fundamentally throughout the centuries. Just as Thucydides had written that the causes of the Peloponnesian War were "the growth of Athenian power and the fear this caused in Sparta", some of the principal causes of World War I were also seen as the growth of Germany's power and the fear this aroused in Britain.

War, according to Howard (1983), does not happen by accident, nor does it arise out of subconscious, emotional forces, but rather from a "superabundance of analytic rationality". The fears of those who make the decision for war may be rational or irrational, or both. If fear is a basic cause of war, then we are forced to conclude that war is the product of both rational and irrational factors and that an understanding of its causes – and of ways to prevent, control, limit, regulate and terminate it would require a comprehensive approach to the problem. Whether war as an institutionalized form of state behaviour can ever be totally abolished from the international system is a larger question that cannot be answered until we understand the nature and causes of war, and the war of a "different kind" that has affected Africa.

Among the recent efforts to understand at a general level the origins of war, Donald Kagan, surveying conflicts from the Peloponesian War (431 – 404 BC) to the Cuban Missiles Crisis of 1962, reaches several conclusions. He sees war not as an aberration, but instead as a recurring phenomenon. It is a uniquely modern western characteristic, not substantiated by historical experience, to believe that humans can so transform themselves as to make war obsolete or impossible. According to Kagan (1995), basing his conclusions on comparative historical analysis, war is the result of competition for power. In a world of sovereign states, such competition is a normal condition that sometimes leads to war. He is also of the opinion that states seek power not only for greater security or economic gain, but also for "greater prestige", respect, deference, and instant honour". Kagan also concludes that "fear, often

unclear and intangible, not always immediate threat but also of more distant ones, against which reassurance may not be possible, accounts for the persistence of war as a part of the human condition not likely to change. Thus, in this paper an attempt will be made to critically assess if the nature of war, causes of war has changed and what the new form of war is in Africa.

2. Wars and State-Building in Africa

The African state remains at the heart of African politics and the process of capitalist accumulation in the economy. Once in control of the state political power, politicians and policy makers sit tight and wait until they are removed by natural death as in the case of the head of the junta in Nigeria, General Sani Abacha, in June 1998, or the late Felix Houphuet-Boigny who, though blind, still ruled Cote d'Ivoire until he died. Or removed by violence as Lurrent Kabilla did to Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire in 1997 who later died in exile. The politics of the African state, therefore, precipitates a trend of endemic mass violence, violence that stems largely from authoritarian rule, exclusion of minority or majority from governance, environmental crisis resulting in reckless resources exploitation, misappropriation of national revenue, social and economic deprivations, inequity and injustice (Ekpo and Omowe, 2001). It could also take the form of the inability of the states to manage social and political conflicts arising from externally induced economic and political policies like the structural adjustment programme of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and terrorist activities, among others.

In March 1998, the United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, tried to sum up conflicts in Africa as follows:

> Since 1970, more than 30 wars have been fought in Africa, the vast majority of them intra-state in origin. In 1996 alone, 14 of the 53 countries of Africa were afflicted by armed conflict, accounting for more than

half of all war-related deaths worldwide and resulting in more than 8 million refugees, and displaced persons. The consequences of those conflicts have seriously undermined Africa's efforts to ensure long-term stability, prosperity and peace for its people… Preventing such wars is no longer a matter of defending or protecting allies. It is a matter of defending humanity itself (Annan, 1998).

Inasmuch as the statement above captures the gravity of the security problems in Africa, it is no less than one of the manifestations of the paradoxes of the nature of the state and its inherent insecurity problems. In fact, the antidote to these wars in Africa can only be located in its root cause, the crisis of the state. Yet, very little or no effort is made to rethink the African state both in terms of its ideals and security systems, and the general social and economic well-being of its people. Part of the problem stems from the conception of the African state.

Scholars have advanced at least four different models to describe the African state, taking note of its nature and mode of surplus extraction. First, is the neo-Marxist state model. It focuses on the ruling class and on the influence of industrialized capitalist countries like the United States has on the African economy (Fatern, 1992). Second is the corporatist model concerned with the state's ability to co-opt social groups, especially capital and labour, with the potential to challenge its hegemony, (Nyang'oro and Shaw, 1989). Third is the absolute model, directing its focus on the state's project of increasing control over its people and territories, (Callaghy and Ravenhill, 1993). Fourth and finally is the patrimonial state, similar to the absolute state in the sense that it contends that the state wants to increase its power. But it is different from the absolute state because the ruler is only interested in mobilizing and controlling resources for personal rather than national reasons, and that any service to the common good is just accidental

(Jean-Claude, 1999). Each of these models sheds light on crucial aspects of the nature of the African state and how it functions. Yet, none of them really perfectly characterizes the state in independent Africa. Without exception, all states in Africa are extractive in character.

Most analysts have come to a consensus that the nature of the African state system significantly contributes to the general state of insecurity on the continent. William Zartman and other Africanist scholars have attributed the mutations in African conflicts to the unfinished character and disjointed developmental nature of the African state (Nwokedi, 1996).

In the main, the states in Africa are predatory or prebendal (Joseph, 1987), being used as a mechanism for the accumulation and the expropriation of the national wealthy by a few privileged individuals who control the lever of political power. It is symbolized by a personalization of political power which is seldomly acquired through legitimate democratic process but through coups or counter-coups, and the adoption of a one-party system. In the function of the state, there is a deliberate unwillingness on the part of the power wielders to blur the boundary between the private and public sphere in the state. Thus, in a recent lecture delivered at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, the renowned Africanist scholar, Richard Joseph, stated that "such practices have now gone beyond prebendalism", (Joseph, 1987) to a system based on pure confiscation of public assets. In a prebendal system, legal niceties and procedures governing the operation of state offices are used as cover behind which state resources are appropriated. Under the confiscatory system, however, commonly referred to as a "lootocracy", government officials have simply seized public assets without even attempting to disguise their behaviour behind legal niceties. Thus, the state has been weakened by the low identification of the citizenry with the various units of governance (Nwokedi, 1996).

The French Africanist scholar, J.F. Bayart, had objected to the use of such terminologies like prebendalism, patrimonial or neo-patrimonial in describing the nature of the state, preferring instead to conceive of the state in Africa as "*la politique du ventre*" – sheer "kleptocracy" glamourised and elevated as a system of governance.

While the degree of prebendalism and beyond or in the final analysis patrmonialism and neo-patrimonialism is relative from one state to another, the outcome is significant for all the states concerned. The control of the state becomes the foremost stake in national politics and to achieve this end, every means is justified. As was noted by Crawford Young, the post-colonial state has a propensity for over-consumption. A greater percentage of the Gross Domestic Product – diverted to the administration of the state, the defence budget, the public services, the proliferation of sinecures and contract awards – has climbed to astronomical proportions especially in Mobutu's Zaire (Yong, 1988). Obsessed by the desire of maintaining the *status quo*, the maintenance of national security becomes the only reason for the regime, and in the process, political opposition or even dissent is driven underground.

Many of the civil wars in the continent which are clear threats to security – Liberia, Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda and Zaire – started as manifest group reaction to political exclusion and marginalisation which the authoritarian state has entrenched. It is, therefore, not surprising that analysts like Naomi Chazan should posit that the state in Africa has undergone a cycle of attempted consolidation, the entrenchment of hegemonic domination and more recently deterioration if not disintegration (Chazan, 1988). African citizens have generally disengaged from the state, since the state has come to be seen as an external and often oppressive force; the nature of the African states, therefore, accounts for the rampant insecurity and the absence of any semblance of legitimate authority, leaving mere anarchy in most parts of the continent.

3. Causes of Conflicts in Africa

For all the volatility and instability that have characterized politics in Africa, it is amazing that, with the exception of Nigeria which slid into a civil war between 1967 and 1970 and discounting the on-off conflict in Senegal's Casamance province, the continent knew no major systemic

breakdowns until the very late 1980s/ early 1990s when first the Mano River Basin. The Mano River Basin area is a region of West Africa covering Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone (Olukoshi, 2004). In reality, the Mano River Basin area defines an emergent political jurisdiction and not a unified ecological zone as may be assumed. An examination of its ecology shows a wide diversity of topographical conditions. The area includes the undulating plateau and rolling hills of the northwestern section, the savannah grasslands of the north; the elevated promontories, brilliant beaches and mangrove swamps along the Atlantic coast, and the tropical rainforest in the South and Southeast.

Post-colonial governance institutions in most African states, such as Guinea, Sierra-Leone and Liberia have been shaped by their domestic and external context and circumstances. Among the relevant constituent factors, four seem critical: these include the nature of the colonial experience, the pattern of interaction among internal actors, the structure and response of the regional and international environment within which they operate and the quality of leadership in each country. Although colonial experience initially helped to shape governance structures, other elements have become important since the attainment of independence. The degree of success in aligning and reconciling interests among various elites and the predispositions, orientations and leadership strategies employed by the leaders have elicited domestic and external responses that have not always ensured peace and advanced development.

In West Africa Liberia was the first to suffer conflict. On Christmas Eve in 1989, insurgent Charles Taylor invaded the country with only 100 irregular soldiers armed primarily with AK-47 assault riffles; within months, he had seized minerals and timber resources and used the profits to purchase additional weapons he needed to equip his forces. In 1995, Taylor's ill-trained and undisciplined insurgents toppled the government of President Samuel Doe. However, the fighting continued for seven more years (Dokubo, 1999). Sierra Leone was next. In 1991 Taylor and a disgruntled officer from Sierra Leone, initiated an informal alliance. Soon weapons and fighters were flowing back and forth across the borders between the two countries. In 1999, the civil war in

Sierra Leone had claimed the lives of more than 50,000 people while another 100,000 had been deliberately injured and mutilated. In mid-1999 the combined efforts of the UN and West African peacekeepers prove successful in helping to broker a peace agreement. However, the conflict in the Mano River Basin claimed an estimated death toll of nearly 2 million lives (Dokubo, 2000). Recently, the so-called Arab Spring has accepted change with the contours of leadership, with democracy being the only game in the continent. The issues of legitimacy, exclusion and misappropriation have been the bane of those nations. If wars do ensue, it will be for personalisation and concentration of power and resources of the state.

4. Africa and the New Wars

There has been a considerable amount of literature on the causes of war in Post-Cold war Africa. Some analysts, strategists and policy think-tanks have continued to devote resources and energies towards explaining and demonstrating how "looting", "corruption", "failed states", "warlordism" and the "resource curse" or "environmental scarcities" in Africa breed violent conflict, perpetrate crises and threaten global peace and security. In some cases, such analyses are hinged upon typologies, pathologies and descriptive name-calling, which tend to distort the root causes of these types of war, but more fundamentally, turn a blind eye to the role of trans-national actors whose interventionist and economic roles, deepen local contradictions and contribute to the outbreak and reproduction of new types of war in Africa. African states or "rebels" are often blamed for the "habit of conflict", a point that runs through sensational global media reports on war, political crises, famine, disease, corruption and poverty on the continent.

This tendency is also evident in mainstream "new" political economy of war analysis, and the policy documents of multilateral and development agencies. It is a perspective that concentrates more on the failings of Africa, and the need

for the international community to intervene to put a stop to the endless misery, corruption, the so-called "new barbarism", poverty and violent conflict. Thus the emphasis is on showing how the struggles over (scarce) resources and patrimonial networks of corruption by African "statist" elites or warlords conspire to undermine and subvert the state and economy, provoke and sustain war.

It is also keen on showing how Africa has failed to evolve or imbibe "modern(ist) rationalities" or overcome "backward cultural habits," leading to the subversion and collapse of its institutions, violence, and generating security threats to the rest of the world. It is also possible to glean a rational-choice underpinning to some of the dominant perspectives that present the struggles over economic resources by corrupt elites, states or rebels as the primary motive for violent conflict. The implication of these positions is that their assumptions also filter through to the policy outputs of international agencies, and where these assumptions are based on faulty or wrong premises, the policy outputs (that they impose on post-conflict societies in the name of peace building) are wrong-headed, and end up further complicating or worsening the problem of war, rather than resolving it.

It is therefore important to raise certain questions about this representation of the root causes of war on the continent. Apart form addressing some of the risks attendant to some of the limitations of the explanations for war, it would form a basis for directing more attention to the processes of globalisation and trans-global actors in the deepening crises and war on the continent. Thirdly, by making the case for re-examining the new forms of war in Africa, it would establish a balanced and firmer footing and highlight what Clauswitz did not know about war.

5. War Economies

The new political economy of war as postulated by Collier and Hoeffler (2001), and his group within the World Bank, and which generated some controversy and spirited debates in the 1990s, is hinged on the position that, "economic considerations often shape the calculations and behaviour of parties to a conflict, giving rise to a particular

war economy". It imposes the logic of economic rationality on wars or violent conflicts. Posing the question in terms of the greed versus grievance binary logic, the war economy perspective initially dismissed grievance as a cause of war, by concentrating on demonstrating how greed was the main motive for war. Rather than perceiving war as the result of a disruptive systemic breakdown, it is seen as an economic enterprise by certain groups within society.

The most sophisticated articulation of the war economies perspective comes out in the work by Collier asserting, that, "economic agenda appear to be central to understanding why wars start". He further argued that grievance was often used to mask economic motives in order to gain support, legitimacy locally and within the international community. Collier and Hoeffler, in their attempt to predict the risk of the outbreak of war using a data set of conflicts between 1990 and 1999, and "logit regressions" seek to draw the connection between greed and conflict.

Conflict is also linked to the nature of the economy, with economies where primary commodity exports being more likely to fuel conflict. Primary commodities do not require "complex and delicate networks of information and transactions such as manufacturing", and are not capital intensive, tend to breed conflict. Also those who control the territory within which extraction is done, can tax, or collect rents from the trade. Such rents, "predatory" taxes and profits are used in buying arms and paying fighters thereby perpetuating war, and making it a means of livelihood (Collier and Hoeffler, 2001).

In response to the criticism of his early war economies postulations, Collier diluted his highly statistical and economistic determinants of war, by shifting the emphasis to the "conflict trap". He now links conflict not to "the motives of rebel actors" but to the "opportunity for organised violence" (Collier, 2001). Some of such opportunities are believed to lie in the proportion of young men in the population, and their levels of education. More men with lower levels of education are more likely to be involved in violence for greed or private gain. Other opportunities lie in

the nature of natural resource endowments of a particular country. But in the final analysis, while the war economies perspective has basically abandoned the privileging of greed over grievance as the main cause of conflict, a lot of premium is still placed on opportunities for, and the feasibility of rebellion in resource-rich contexts as a trigger of violent conflicts.

As noted, "the explanatory power initially given to Collier and others to the exploitation of natural resources by rebel groups for purposes of self-enrichment as the principal cause and driver of war has had a marked impact on international policy-making towards civil wars, especially within the United Nations." Part of the attraction is purportedly related to the desire of the policy community for "quick fixes" and technical solutions that economic and quantitative analyses appear to provide. At a more fundamental level, it provides justification for certain kinds of international intervention – targeted at the economic motives and opportunities for conflict and more fundamentally tied to state reform in ways that promote market-led development. While for the most part, the transnational component/actors are hardly sanctioned, the real causes of the conflict are not identified and attended to, thereby raising the risk of a future regression.

Yet when we examine the root causes of war and conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Nigeria's Niger Delta, it is possible to establish several trends. First, the wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia were the result of a complex combination of political, economic and historical factors, as well as the deep-seated crises that engulfed both countries. Secondly, the crisis coincided with the fall in global prices of the countries traditional exports and the rise in the costs of imports, particularly petrol. Thirdly, the descent into civil war coincided with the implosion of the state and the rupturing of the social contract between the state and its citizens and increased external pressures for economic reforms policies, which undermined the capacities of the states to offer social protection and deliver on welfare to its citizens.

As a result, the states resorted increasingly to repression to keep protests against unemployment, devaluation, increased user fees and inflation in check,

further eroding their legitimacy, and opening the door to civil war as their claim to authority was violently challenged. In the case of Cote d'Ivoire, the collapse of the cash crop economy following the fall in global coffee and cocoa prices to drastic cuts in state welfare spending, the adoption of drastic IMF austerity measures including the devaluation of the national currency – the CFA Franc, by one hundred per cent and the appointment of an IMF technocrat, Allasane Ouatarra as Prime Minister. The protests provoked by the growing unemployment and the attendant social crises were compounded by the death of the county's President and patriarch, Felix Houphouet-Boigny in 1993. After his death, a power tussle ensued between Allasane Ouatarra and Konan Bedie, the President of the country's national Assembly. In the course of the struggle, the notion of citizenship became part of the conflict.

The use of "Ivorite" "as the criteria for participation in the distribution of scarce resources (jobs, property, power) within the country" and "national preference" (Reno, 2003) was used to exclude Allasane from all subsequent elections (allegedly one of his parents was Burkinabe), but more fundamentally stripped all suspected immigrants (including indigenes of communities in northern Cote d'Ivoire) of rights of citizenship.

Even those who were born in the country by parents or grand-parents that had migrated from neighbouring countries were basically stripped of their citizenship rights. The atmosphere of mistrust, and fear driven largely by the manipulation and deployment of identity politics and exclusion eventually contributed to the outbreak of civil war in 2002 and the *de-facto* division of the country into two, separated by French and a multinational UN peacekeeping force: north controlled by rebels and the south controlled by the government.

The implication of the foregoing is that the roots of the civil wars in these West African states are more complex and lie in a combination of factors. It also echoes the point well made that the greed of rebels alone cannot explain the cause of civil wars. Beyond this, it makes the case for a more nuanced reading of the "multi-causal" roots of war, based on

a case-by-case approach, rather than broad generalisations that are not well anchored historically and empirically.

6. Shadows of Violent Conflict? State Predation, Failure and Collapse

Another perspective is represented in the work of Reno (2003). War is presented, not just as the opposite of peace, but the emergence of an alternative political economy of violence hinged upon "shadow states and economies". Reno constructs economic predation around the shadow state that exemplifies the "nexus between corruption and politics", in which public office holders create a parallel state built on personal ties, patronage and illicit deals that profit their patrimonial networks.

The shadow state is built upon personal ties that exploit (subvert) state institutions for private gain. It is based on a "kleptocracy" in which leaders and public officers pilfer state resources and undermine public institutions, while the real state collapses. In this connection, a collapsing shadow state breaks up into several factions that pursue conflicting personal economic interests, hence the descent into "warlordism", and civil war. Reno illustrates the connections between the shadow state and violent conflict in Africa, by drawing on cases in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Uganda and the DRC (Reno, 2003). He paints a rather sobering picture of the ways in which state officials, armies and rebel movements across the continent are engaged in 'free style looting', and concludes that "the economic interests of belligerents may even be an obstacle to the termination of conflict" (Ross, 2001).

7. Resource Curse/Environmental Scarcities

The resource curse thesis is hinged upon the resource wealth-violent conflict nexus. It attempts to explain, why in spite of being relatively well endowed resource-wise, African countries remain poor and conflict-ridden. Ross (2001) presents a concise description of the resource curse based

on findings, 'that natural resources play a key role in triggering, prolonging and financing conflicts.' In an earlier article, he observed that, "many of the poorest and most troubled states in the developing world have, paradoxically, high levels of natural resource wealth. There is a growing body of evidence that resource wealth may harm a country's prospects for development". This echoes among others the views of de Soysa and Hoeffler which seek to draw a nexus or correlation between natural resources and civil war.

This perspective combines three objectives: explaining how economic predation of resources fuel violent conflict, why states fail to transform resource-rich into prosperous industrialised economies and how natural resource wealth contributes to (the lack) of development. It shows how resource abundance tends to nurture misgovernance and the absence of the rule of law, and blocks economic development, subverting the state and feeding conflict. In a sense, conflict is seen as being one of the consequences of the absence of growth. Beyond this lie the attempts to identify the "type" of resources that rigger, or prolong certain kinds of conflict. It also seeks to demonstrate how institutional weakness or poor governance could translate into the inability to effectively manage resource wealth and contribute to the lack of development, stability or even conflict.

This perspective has contributed to a plethora of (econometric) modelling and statistical regression analysis of the resource type-conflict type analysis, which also seeks to calculate the probability and duration of conflicts in resource-rich poor countries in the developing world. For instance, Ross is of the view that "lootable resources" such as minerals and drugs lie at the trigger non-separatist conflicts, while "unlootable resources" such as oil, natural gas and deep-shaft minerals, are implicated in separatist conflicts or civil wars.

It is however important to note that the resource-conflict perspective has become more sophisticated than Ross would have us believe, as it is now widely regarded that economic mono-causality as an explanatory framework has its limitations. More recently, the view has moved towards

the recognition of a "multiplicity of causal linkages", but the literature still persistently remains centred on "advancing the natural resources-civil war research agenda". The result of this is that although there is a recognition that many causes lie at the heart of conflict in the developing world, the methodologies borrowed from liberal economies and applied to political science, peace and conflict research are best suited for unravelling the central problematic of the resource-conflict nexus, and providing enduring solutions to the crises of development and the cycle of wars in developing countries.

The "resource curse" thesis is of limited analytical value. It thrives on typologies and the simplistic notion that resource wealth inevitably leads to conflict. In a rapidly globalising world, it has been argued that the international scramble for, and exploitation of Africa's resources has been intensified, leading to unprecedented poverty, de-industrialisation and social crises and deepen the conditions for civil strife. The nature of the resources: economic and strategic, the power relations that its control and production spawns, and the ways such relations feed into issues of access, ownership, distribution, democracy and social justice are fundamental in understanding the conflict nexus. It only partly explains why a resource-rich Norway is not embroiled in "resource wars", while a resource-rich Nigeria is confronted by insurgent Ijaw militia in the Niger Delta. Violent conflict is not just produced by internal contradictions or factors, but is more often than not embedded in globally refracted contradictions arising from the intensified exploitation of Africa's resources and the predations of a transnational elite – local, national and global.

8. Environmental Scarcities

This approach is essentially hinged on the view that population growth beyond a particular threshold places pressures/stresses on renewable natural resources/the environment leading to the relative scarcities of resources. Environmental scarcities are also noticeable where resources are being rapidly depleted as a result of degradation or unsustainable patterns or forms of exploitation and

production. Such scarcities are most associated with the developing countries, where they trigger off conflicts over shrinking renewable resources.

At the heart of this perspective to violent conflict is the manipulation size-natural resource linkage. Kaplan, a decade ago, constructed a frightening picture of a coming anarchy in a "Hobbesian" West Africa, as the result of an imminent demographic-environmental catastrophe. Thus, in a neo-Malthusian fashion it assumes that population growth beyond the rate of replenishment of renewable resources (leading to scarcity) triggers off violent conflict in developing countries. The primary concern is therefore with environmental security, which among others, seeks to prevent threats emanating from the environment – environmental conflicts or resource wars, from threatening global security.

However, this approach has taken on board questions related to the dynamics of environmental conflicts or more specifically, 'resource scarcity-induced conflicts.' These include issues such as the likelihood, duration, consequences and measures that can prevent environmental conflict. This has led in part to the adoption of modeling and quantitative analysis to reinforce existing qualitative work in the area. Some of the conclusions emphasize the role of external interventionism to break the cycle of environmental conflicts and the need to combine effective environmental governance with population growth control measures to promote environmental security, peace and development.

The resource curse and scarcities approach are indeed related and tend to proffer explanations for "resource conflicts." This perspective has been writ large in the explanation for Africa's civil wars that are often presented as resource conflicts. Yet, rather than providing explanations on how these scarcities are "produced", they are often presented as natural, often linked to natural resources that occur as if placed in particular regions/countries by some invisible hand. However, in some cases, the paradox of resource-rich areas such as the Niger-Delta being one of the poorest and underdeveloped regions in Nigeria does show that scarcity may indeed be the result of distributive

inequities that could be the result of historical injustices and political marginalisation.

Thus, rather than present such conflicts as "resource conflicts", it would be more accurate to describe the "politics" that revolve around the issues of ownership, access rights, justice and the ways in which the exploitation of natural resources by forces of global capital deepen social contradictions and conflict in Africa. As in politics, given the dominant mode of production that is tied to land, resource conflicts do not arise from the mere possession of these resources, but rather from the power relations surrounding their ownership and control, and the distribution of the benefits: accumulation versus dispossession, leading to a cycle of resistance and repression. In more ways than one, what appears on the surface in most of Africa as "resource conflicts" are linked to demands for redistribution, citizenship and social justice – in fundamental terms, to democratic struggles. This much can be gleaned from the on-going low intensity conflicts in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta where insurgent Ijaw ethnic emancipators are locked in a confrontation with state security forces and oil multinationals in a struggle over the control of oil.

Thus, there is a need for an alternative debate or analyse that should inform the understanding of wars and armed conflicts in Africa. A starting point will be to move more in the direction of a holistic analysis that draws upon the interrelated nature of social phenomena, rather than mono-causal explanations, or stereotypes of political behaviour in Africa. Emphasis should be placed on the substance and dynamics of "irreconcilable differences between actors", or the connections between violent conflict and "structural inequality or injustice". Apart from this, some focus should be placed on the differences in the 'cocktail of causes' that vary from one country to the other. Economic factors alone do not explain conflict. They could be useful in explaining why wars could be prolonged or how global networks and hegemonic forces can also benefit from wars in Africa. It is also necessary to include a critical appraisal of the role of external or global hegemonic factors, policies or triggers, in the eruption and prolongation of civil wars in Africa. Thus, rather than place overwhelming emphasis on the internal causes, equal attention must be

paid to growing role of external forces within the context of a globalising world to post-Cold War civil wars in Africa.

9. Conclusion

Most wars involve very real incompatibilities between the basic moral objectives of the two sides, and it is a historical fact that ordinarily the population of each side deliberately and without any element of crowd irrationality supports the carefully formulated policy of the leadership. However, in their zeal to eradicate war, political scientists cannot ignore the non-conspiratorial and quite rational processes in social life that turn the peace loving into warriors. It is the behaviour of these people that is at the core of the theory of war as a rational instrument of conflict resolution.

But as far Africa as is concerned, the dominant perspectives are inadequate for understanding the complex roots of, and local and international dynamics of conflict in Africa. A re-examination of the causes of the violent conflicts in Africa are driven by historically rooted contradictions that are further complicated by socio-economic factors and the politics of exclusion, as well as changes in Africa linked to the end of the Cold War. As Hutchful and Aning rightly observed, the roots of the conflicts in Africa "are intertwined with the issues of political and economic marginalisation, as well as social exclusion, identity and citizenship." Thus the core issues in the understanding of wars in Africa relate to issues of inequality, injustice, social and power struggles at the local, national (sub) regional and global levels. Mainstream conflict analysis on Africa appears to privilege struggles over resources, state failure and "warlordism", over the quest for justice, democracy, power and the role of various fractions of international community and transnational networks in creating "scarcities", and deepening internal contradictions that directly influence the outbreak and duration of war. .

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