A Cross-Cultural Approach to Contemporary Conflict Analysis I: Need to Demystify Myths and Realities Surrounding African Conflicts

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Abstract: *It is a fact that conflicts are still very prevalent in almost every human social organization. Some scholars say, since they are so endemic to the unique innate aggressive characters of human beings, nothing could really be done to permanently prevent their occurrence no matter how hard we may try. There is therefore a need to devise a workable formula to mitigate both their frequencies of occurrences, as well as, intensities of their destructiveness on the societal fabric. That such phenomena occur more in some regions than in others, is also a fact vividly highlighted by the glaring unique characters of each location. At the moment, there can be no notion of a generic analytical frame applicable uniformly to all social settings across the world. Such a view portends to also generate intensely raging controversies and fissions in the academia. The contention here pertains to what could constitute the real and remote causes of these phenomena generally in these highly prone areas. This dilemma is further aggravated by the usual sentimental attachments to primary cultural values and individual predilections/stereotypes often known to have grossly tainted most existing analytical frames. At the end of the day, hope for a consensual position becomes fleeting. But this readily also invokes a burning desire in one to harness a holistic picturesque frame these existing frames. The desire here is to move research further in a new direction devoid of such strictures of cultural/individual stereotypes and predilections. However, to tackle such a chore here, this paper seeks to critically assess some of the primary hypotheses of the existing theories with a view to synthesize such a multi-culturally robust and a non-generic analytical frame. This frame I have referred to elsewhere as the ASRI model. As it were, focus of these critiques is especially made applicable to the African context. The reason is that, Africa stands out as perhaps one unique region in the world where there has been a rather high frequency of conflict outbreaks in the recent time. And since Africans are also multicultural in character, no better place than in Africa should such a critical focus be premised on.*

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Introduction

Arguably, there seems to be a correlation between human sentimental attachments to their prevailing cultural values, individual predilections and the patterns or characters of conflict that could break out in the human social milieu. Such variations also present us with two possibilities that are critical for conflict analyses generally. These are: first, the notion that such variations directly impact on the intensities of conflict dynamisms; the frequencies of their occurrences; as well as the unique characters of their intractability or otherwise across multiple cultures worldwide. Second, cultural variations and individual predilections are bound to taint the fundamental assumptions that one can ideally make about these phenomena. In these sense, there can be no notion of a generic approach to conflict analyses or one with easy-fit hypothesis that could span multiple cultures as it were.

The existing analytical frames in this study area are therefore ideally region/culture specific on the long haul. If we then take this view as given, it does vividly highlights also gravity of the dilemma/frustrations currently faced by analysts and scholars alike in their seemingly forlorn attempts to make rational sense out of the flux of subsisting conflicting behaviours exhibited by actors in multiple cultures worldwide. It is however, against such a hypothetical backdrop that one proposes to commence on the critical task of assessing the veracities or otherwise of the fundamental logics advanced by some of the existing theoretical frames. These models seek to explain the crucial causal-factors linked dialectically to conflict outbreaks generally in the recent time. Nonetheless, the main thrust of the arguments advanced here is intended to offer one a veritable stand plank needed to harness what promises to become a melting pot analytical frame that could be applicable to almost every human social settings.

As it were, from a critical purview of some of the central themes proffered already by scholars in this study area, there is a glaring indication that seven major themes appear quite dominant in the discipline. These consist of: 1) the 'historical accident' thesis inherent in the Historical approach; 2) the innate destructiveness of 'man's psychological make-up' as proposed by the Psychological approach; 3) the vagaries of mischievous usage of 'misinformation' and its linkages to conflict dynamisms as advanced by the Mass Media approach; 4) the vital connect between 'exploitation-competition' in human economic exchanges as linked to conflicts in the views of the Political Economy approach; 5) the notion of material 'scarcity and competition' for basic life survival needs/resources and the links to conflict as advanced by the Malthusian approach; 6) the intervening variables of awry evolution of 'dysfunctional social relations' as being complicit in conflict outbreaks – as proposed by the Sociological approach; and 7) the vagaries of awry evolution of 'social institutional frameworks' as basic conflict primers – which also resonates widely in the Anthropological approach. Consequently, in the proceeding sections of this paper, attempts are therefore made to critically analyze each of these hypothetical standpoints as proposed by the different schools. This is with a view to ascertain their applicability or otherwise to general conflict outbreaks trends. The special focus here is on trends in the African context for logical reasons explained hereunder.

The rationale for such a specialized/dedicated focus is premised then on the fact that, Africa stands out as unique in its perennial characterizations by scholars, analysts, commentators and pundits alike – as one region where there are pervasive and seemingly unending spiral of conflicts. Multiple analytical schemas have also been deployed by analysts in a bid to unravel the causal factors complicit in these social maladies. But all these frames thus far, have been to no avail and have neither offered a fool-proof methodological approach needed to tackle conflicts headlong on the continent. Therefore, such a dedicated focus here is intended to move academic research forward in a new direction. Logically, this promises to be in the right direction, and away from the pervading

standard Eurocentric region-specific and individual cultural predilections/stereotypes that have been deployed over time in interpreting general trends on the continent.

The Historical Approach

Nicolo Machiavelli, Hans Morgentou, and A. J. Taylor are key proponents of this school. And a common basis of their arguments is anchored on the fact that there is hardly any human society that is perfect and therefore free of conflicts. To them, what generate conflicts generally are the usually lopsided manners human societies have most times tended to evolve over the years resulting in the so-called *'historical accidents'* that usually are some of the causal factors complicit in conflict outbreaks.

As these scholars also claim, such accidents are largely the results of oversights or failures of the political elites to aptly respond to historical events. Or even when they do, the measures adopted are relatively inadequate to prevent the slide toward social and political anarchies most time. The claim therefore made by Taylor (1991)[1] for instance that human evolutionary history is heavily tainted by the cumulative results of the behaviours of elite statesmen's is therefore subject to sundry challenges by other counter-claimants. For instance, one view argues that, statesmen merely react to the unfolding processes of societal historical evolutions according to their individual perceptions and cultural stereotypes or predilections. Therefore, conflict outbreaks generally are said to result from the manners in which the elites seek to respond to such changing phases of human history and not the changes themselves that are the causative agents for conflict.

Taylor (1991) also posits that, statesmen could only be said to be responsible for the characters of unfolding human history in the extent to which - from an empirical point of view, such events could be linked dialectically to their personal or collective failures or errors in human judgments in response to such instances of historical incidents in human evolutions. He even takes this position further by arguing that, most statesmen renowned in world annals are 'crooked opportunists' who did not create but merely exploited emergent accidents of history to their advantages. And within this context, emergent conflicts in human history can be associated with the political/diplomatic blunders of key international statesmen in their individual and collective failures to fully comprehend and aptly interpret as well as adequately respond to dynamics of the unfolding historical dramas in world history'.[2]

How then does such a theoretical position apply to conflict outbreak trends in Africa when placed within the context of the critical linkage between accidents of history and conflicts as advanced by this school of thought? As stated at the onset, African states generally share commonality of past experiences of European Colonial rule. The British, French and Portuguese traditions are the dominant dimensions of European colonial here here. It is also a fact that, the debilitating effects of post-Colonial legacies across the continent have been well documented by scholars over the years.

But the question that readily begs for answers here is: should rational responses to conflict outbreaks be also encumbered by such a historiography of the contextual locales in attempts to establish such a vital causal linkage? And if such an option is considered appropriate, how then does one proceed to redress the series of blunders made by statesmen in Africa that had obviously resulted in such emergent conflict outbreaks? As it were, in response to such a position here, one would also be mindful of the adversities of European post-Colonial legacies across the continent that readily impedes rational policy choices and actions by elites in the public space.

However, an affirmative response here is intended to further buttress the claimant that, obviously a vital link does exist between the unique patterns of Africa's historical evolution through

the European era. This view is further amplified by the seemingly uniformed patterns of awry responses made by the early African nationalist elites and statesmen in tackling emergent historical dramas resulting in the kinds of accidents witnessed in the processes of state evolutions resulting in the characters of conflict outbreaks across the continent. In that instance, Colonial rule can actually be said to be one rude *'historical accident'* in European-African exchanges that have readily conditioned a series of political conflict outbreaks and other socio-economic crises across the continent over time.

Generally speaking, the logic of European colonial rule was a generalized premise anchored on the need to exalt exclusivity of ethnicity as a principal modifier in the evolving national political calculus of these states. And this development had over time generated intense competitive exchanges between the composite ethnic groups within each state in post-Colonial Africa. Inter-group quarrels, competitions and rivalries over resource control and power distribution have been some of the notable milestones in the evolutionary processes of developments in the standard African post-Colonial state.

The central themes in these raging controversies are tied to demands for equitable power-resource sharing and inclusion by all composite minority ethnic groups within their national political processes have also been largely ignored and have often come at great costs in maintaining national peace and political stabilities over time. Most times, responses by the political elites to these demands have been quite authoritarian and high-handed - resulting in gross human rights abuses and perpetual marginalization of minorities from national political/economic processes.

Within the context of such a hypothetical proposition, an adequate response to conflicts on the continent would then be one that seeks at the onset to fully grapple with dynamics of the specific manners of historical evolutions in each conflict location on the continent. This is with a view to ascertaining the origins and dynamics of the real causal factors at play. And this adds-up to the need to fully redress all emergent historical errors and blunders made by statesmen in the recent past and present time that had resulted in such gross human rights abuses, oppressions and marginalization of certain targeted minority groups in the public space.

By implication also, a peace agreement that is initiated and supervised by an external agency for instance, ought then to be one that is premised logically on the rationale of how best to link such emergent peace agreements to a formula that seeks to correct, rectify or redress the anomalies stemming from such blunders and errors made by African statesmen in the recent past and present as they responded to the so-called emergent 'accidents of historical' evolutions within their states.

In this sense, a historiographic trace-up of the conflict dynamisms in each conflict location in Africa also ought to be a logical take-off point and a vital component of any neutral initiatives aimed at intervention in the internal affairs of a state in question. If we then take the positions advanced here in the foregoing as given, they present us with compelling reasons to proceed on to the analysis of the hypothetical positions canvassed by the Sociological school.

The Sociological Approach

R. J. Rummel (1977)[3] is a key proponent of this school of thought. This school premises its arguments on the vital links between the manners a society had evolved over time with the evolving characters and dynamics of emergent conflict outbreaks. Using the so-called 'social field' and 'catastrophe' theories as bases for highlighting the vital links between actors in an interactive context and the operating environmental structures, Rummel asserts that, every human society generally evolve around two states of temporary equilibriums: these are peace and conflicts. According to him, these transitions will occur usually within an interactive interface between what he calls the *'structure of expectations'* of actors and their *'power balance'* calculus measured relative to an intervening

'social field'. This view captures the *'social field'* as where any emergent conflict could also be perceived of as constituting a social relational *'helix'* of sort.

The logic of Rummel's thesis is premised again on the notion that, if there are substantial gaps between actors' 'structure of expectations' and their 'power balance' calculus, there is a general tendency for temporary negative systemic instabilities or conflicts to trigger-off. These are intended generally to disrupt and redress dysfunctional patterns of social exchanges occurring between the composite actors within such a socially interactive system. On the other hand, when these variables become closely approximate with each other, there is a tendency also for positive systemic stabilities or peace to trigger off.

According to Rummel, this is the result of the 'gap effects' acting on ensuing social relationships between actors which assume generally the character of 'shocks' that are intended to restructure such social relationships into more acceptable frameworks for the benefit of all actors active within such a social matrix.[4] The effects of such sudden changes in social relationships and as occasioned by extraneous factors such as technological advancements and associated structural changes, are dominant themes also well highlighted by the likes of Quincy Wright (1965). Wright posits for instance that, "to estimate the probability of war at any time involves therefore, an appraisal of the effects of current [technological] changes upon the complex of inter-group relationships throughout the world."[5] This view presents us with the ever present possibilities that technological advancements of all sorts would always be catalysts that can alter the entire rubric of the strategic calculus envisaged in the Rummel analysis.

Nonetheless, Rummel expatiates further on the notion of five factors normally acting to shape the nature of an emergent *'conflict helix'*. According to him, they consist of: 1) 'Balancing of power' – or the relative changes in actors' inherent power capabilities, 2) 'Balance of power' – or the stable conditions of equilibrium attained in distribution of capabilities and interests between actors, 3) Actors 'structure of expectations', 4) the character of 'gap effects', and 5) the characters of emergent disruptions or shocks that could lead to new changes in relationships.

And as it seems here, any critical analysis of conflict outbreaks ought to also come to terms with a full understanding of the dialectical linkage between all these factors enumerated here by Rummel in his analysis. As it were, utilities of using the so-called 'gap effect' or the so-called 'Richardson effects' analogies as working formulae for redressing conflict outbreaks generally, is also well documented by the likes of Lewis Fry Richardson (1960) in his notable piece on the *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels'*. Here, he asserts that the propensity of war between two nations – for instance, is tied to the length of their common borders. This is so much so that, where the length of their borders is long, there is always a tendency for frequent conflict outbreaks between them. The converse also holds true for subsisting conditions of peace between them.[6]

We can also transpose such an analytical framework to explain the pervading internalized trends of inter-border conflicts occurring within the African state during the immediate post-colonial era. This schema also has relevance in the course of analyzing the pervading internalized trends within these states that have also experienced a huge deluge of internalized political upheavals during the early phases of attainment of their national political independence. Here, it could be argued that, such internal conflicts were mostly triggered-off when the 'distance' a group or other groups were allowed access into mainstream national affairs were perceived generally as been appreciably very wide.

It is a known fact that marginalization and oppression of minority groups are some of the prevalent factors known to have triggered-off conflicts across Africa over time. Within the purview of the hypothetical position of this school, a feasible response and a more effective approach to conflict outbreaks on the continent would therefore be when a vital aspect of an agreement between disputants. This ought to be dialectically tied to a dire need to shorten the gap of 'expectations' and

inherent 'power capabilities' – as applicable to each inter-state disputant, and internally, between composite groups within a state structure.

Such social structural re-arrangements could also have the general tendency to positively influence the psyche of members of such groups over time towards adoption of sustainable peaceable predispositions over time. In this context, a peace overture for instance, would then also necessarily have to redress both the material and psychological aspects of such pervasive socio-economic and political marginalization and denials suffered by such minority groups over time.

The logic of this approach here, is premised on the generally realization that obviously, groups across Africa have now become accustomed and seemingly become resolute in their aspirations to live egalitarian lives within the rather faulty ambience of their post-Colonial state structures. That a group is to be considered majority or minority – as these trends suggest, has to be the result of a social stratification formula that is premised on an outcome of consensual negotiations between these groups rather than one obtained through impositions or through the wilful political manipulations of the real numerical strength of each group.

The Psychological Approach

Proponents of this school premise their arguments on the notion that, the nature of man is generally full of evil, that he is pathologically very destructive, selfishness, egoistic and competitive. And such a character is what brings him in constant aggression and conflict with others as people generally jostle for dominance over territories, affections, power, authority and resources. Here, the tendency is said to always be a general resort by man to the use of force in what one of its major proponents – Sigmund Freud (1933) calls a scenario likened to 'survival of the fittest'. According to Freud, "conflicts of interests among mankind are in the main usually decided by the use of force. This is true of the whole animal kingdom from which mankind should not be excluded."[7]

Kenneth Waltz (2001) also adds an interesting dimension here when he alludes to the nature of man as a principal factor in conflict outbreaks in the human society. He affirms that, "according to the first image …..the locus of the important causes of war is [to be] found in the nature of man. Wars result from selfishness, from misdirected aggressive impulses, [and] from stupidity. Other causes are secondary and have to be interpreted in the light of these factors."[8]

As it were, the main thrust of arguments advanced here, is a central predication on the assumptions that, the human psychological composition at any moment in time, would have a vital role to play in any conflict outbreak scenario. Franz Alexander (1941) also adds an interesting dimension to this position here. He informs also that, "anyone who is blind to the ubiquitous manifestations of human aggressiveness in the past and present can be rightly considered a man who does not face reality. If he is not of subnormal intelligence – unable to grasp events around him – his inability to face facts must be of emotional origins, and he may be considered a neurotic."[9]

Theoretically speaking therefore, the issue of man's aggressive propensities has been well documented by renowned scholars over time. But it would seem, one of the most captivating imagery of man's innate aggressive character is that best captured by Charles Darwin's (1964) piece on the *'Origins of Species By Means Of The Principles of Natural Selection'*.[10] In this context, as the mainstream hypothesis of this school proposes, an efficient approach to conflict outbreaks – especially pertaining to Africa, could therefore be one likened to the task of first exploring ways and means to redress man's innate predisposition – a psychiatric panacea for his conflicting behaviours.

This is what Alexander also explains, could consist of a scenario where there is a conscious attempt made by all stake holders in a conflict, to begin the process by ascertaining fully first under

what conditions individuals involved in a conflict are generally more prone to peaceful conducts as well as aggressive conducts from a psychological point of view. In prosecuting such a task, Alexander suggests that, "since war is the most common [social] phenomenon and real peace the extremely rare exception, it seems more promising to approach the problem of peace and war not by asking what the causes of war are, but by studying the causes or more precisely, the conditions of peace [in human society]. If war is a permanent phenomenon of human history, one might more easily expect an understanding of its deeper roots if one tries to establish those unusual conditions under which peace can exist."[11]

In accordance with the manner this school surmises its main theme here, it is evident conflicts would always be taken to mean a common feature of the human society. And hence these upheavals should ideally always be treated as *e*ufunctional variables needed in the social restructuring of such mal-formed states across Africa. In this light, a practical approach needed to tackle conflicts for instance in this region – especially from a non-generic point of view, would then be one that seeks to harness the *e*ufunctionality or otherwise of such social upheavals whenever they do occur on the continent. The idea here is to use them as guiding beacon in such much needed restructuring efforts in these states.

And there is however, a dire need for the timing of any external interventions to also be worked out perfectly to rhyme with that crucial stage in the 'conflict circle' where there already exists a 'mutually hurting stalemate' and when individual protagonists to the conflicts are more likely to be amenable to such external initiatives aimed at solving the questions surrounding the dispute(s). Ideally, this is when individual predispositions to conflicting behaviours wane generally and when they begin to see the futilities in sustaining such conflicts any further than necessary.

It is therefore to the individual psyche or general predispositions or the make-ups of the actors' mindset in a conflict scenario that one can begin to search for answers and opportunities to curtail such aggressions generally. It is already proven beyond all counter-contestations by scholars in this area that aggression is generic and inherent in man. And there is also a general consensus that human aggressions can only be curtailed or mitigated mostly during those crucial moments when there exists already a general mutually hurting stalemate or a general individual foreboding about outcomes of the conflict. It is at this instance that man is readily more inclined toward a personal re-orientation towards peaceable behaviours.

At the end of the day it makes sense to echo Alexander who also highlights succinctly that, "from the point of view of psychiatry, it would seem that the pacifist, who thinks of elimination of war as an actual possibility, might be considered a neurotic. [And] [h]e might easily be called a dreamer, subject to wishful thinking, [and as someone] who does not dare to face reality and who escapes into fantasy."[12] But the central question this view raise here is, are human beings really always wholly composed of such aggressive tendencies? As it were, from available data on the subject of evolution of man's psychology, there are ample indications that, he also possesses a peaceable character that usually come to the surface at some other more auspicious or critical moments. Such a view which is predicated on man's dualistic characterization, is further buttressed Alexander (1941) who argues that, "central to a current view that war is the unavoidable manifestation of man's innate destructiveness, we have good reason to believe that both war and peace are compatible with human nature [or his mindset]."[13]

Thus, given the foregoing analogies, it becomes evident that, conflicts on the African continent for instance, ought not to be treated ideally - according to the prevailing Eurocentric stereotypes in the discipline, as social anomalies and as if Africans are pathologically prone to aggressions or conflicting behaviours. In essence, these emergent conflicts should be seen as natural fall-outs in the faulty evolutional progression of these post-Colonial states towards full-fledged nation-statehood. The central theme of every solution to these conflicts ought then to be anchored on

a general premise of dire need for broad based mutual consensus between the composite ethnic groups within each state as perhaps the only viable option for evolving a shared common national ethos.

Be that as it may, in spite of the fact that peace and conflicts are inherently vital components of the human character, with specific references to trends across Africa, it would seem also that, the logic of looking first at what factors that could generate peaceful conducts – a vital theoretical prop of this school, appears to present us with sundry limitations if we adopt such a hypothetical frame in the analysis of trends across Africa. This is for the major fact that, the continent has seen longer periods of conflicts than peace and a rational analytical frame ought to be one which beams its primarily search lights on the real-time causal factors for such conflicts –ideally, in the direction of dysfunctions of European Colonial interventional and rule in Africa.

Viewed logically, it is to the strictures of those crucial environmental factors that readily make African elites and indeed their individual ethnos to become inherently competitive and aggressive, that ought to be some of the crucial primers for hypotheses in conflict analyses focusing on trends in Africa. Therefore, a more logical approach that takes cue from the tenements of faith of the psychological school ought to be one that acts generally in the converse. And this will require us to first tackle those conditions that generate such intensely competitive exchanges between ethnic groups and individuals usually leading to conflicts, before we can then focus on those factors that could generate co-operation between the composite individual elites and their ethnic groups within each state.

As it seems, ethnicity, prevalence of the praetorian guards in the public space administration, as well as high level corruption and lack of transparency in civic administrations are top in the list of some of the debilitating factors that readily culminate in competitive exchanges leading to conflict outbreaks on the African continent. Notably, certain bold initiatives have already been taken by African leaders recently under aegis of the African Union (AU) and other regional organizations – especially, with references to the African Peer Review Mechanisms (APRM).

And this is in addition to the other initiatives made under the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). These are all laudable efforts made by African leaders to apply the fundamental positions of the psychological school – but in the converse. Here, the focus has generally being on how best to redress the root causes of Africa's prolonged political instabilities leading to the sundry conflict outbreaks witnessed over the years by devising ways and means to put viable leashes on the mindsets and individual predispositions of African leaders .

The Mass Media Approach

The manner in which information is manipulated by the mass media is also contingent upon how conflicts could break out generally within a social context. Scholars like Geoffrey Blainey (1988) in his exposé on the *'Causes of War'*, explains that wars and other conflicts generally stem from deliberate misinformation or misconceptions about a co-protagonist's real or inherent capabilities and intentions.[14] For instance, trends leading to the outbreak and escalations of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 – where the Rwandan National Radio played an active role in misinforming the populace and in mobilizing the Hutus against the Tutsi minorities, is a good example here of how the illicit use of mass information media could generate and also escalate a conflict generally.

Any response to such a conflict outbreak therefore, ought also to urgently provide a credible alternative channel and logistics for counter mass communication needed to balance out such misinformation disseminations by one of the protagonists to a conflict. The adverse effects of the use

of propaganda during a conflict circle have also been well tackled by many scholars in the discipline. It is also widely known how the government radio in Rwanda wilfully conjured grim enemy imageries of the Tutsi minority group – most times portrayed as filthy 'cockroaches' that ought to be exterminated by every rational Hutu person if the latter were to live any meaningful life thereafter in Rwanda.

The Tutsi minority and the informed members of the international community that came belatedly to the rescue of the Tutsis were hamstrung to adequate respond to such lopsided imageries of a co-protagonist to the conflict by the other. And indeed many years after, there has thus far not been any real efforts made to counteract such ugly and de-humanizing imageries that had readily compelled even the most benign Hutu-person to collaborate in such heinous mass-killings as witnessed in 1994.

As it were, ugly imageries about the Tutsis are still prevalent across the region many years after this unfortunate incident. There have even been recent tensions between the two rival ethnic groups in neighbouring Burundi, Uganda and elsewhere across the region. It is an indication that the prolonged disputes between the two groups have not been fully resolved and there is an ever present conflict-primer waiting to be re-ignited again on the slightest provocation. Yet the international community seem unperturbed as it were about the spectre of another round of ethnic pogrom in the region. The idea conveyed here in this hypothetical position is that, there is need to also tackle the auspicious factors that enable such illicit use of mass media agencies by conflict protagonists within the frame of the analysis. And in the case of the Rwandan episode, such hate-laden imageries owe deep roots in the long years of socio-economic and political disparities between the two main groups in the country under Belgian colonial rule. The Tutsis were the favourites for the colonists – so favoured as it were because of their fair skin and elegant body physiques. Therefore, the cockroach imagery of the Tutsis was intended to demystify their pre-eminence as well as to subjugate them mentally and physically to an imagery of the Hutus' racial superiority. Consequently, a final resolution of this conflict portends to be one that will tee-off by redressing such pervasive inequalities and a specific focus on how to assuage long years of bruised inter-ethnic egos across Rwanda's subsisting racial cleavages.

The Political Economy Approach

One central theme of this school is the hypothetical dialectical connect between productive the specific patterns of productive activities, property ownership, class formations occurring within a society and how these generate conflict generally. Karl Marx and Max Weber are some notable scholars who have established dialectical linkages between these two sets of variables.

Position of this school is largely focused on the notion of how the emergent class competitions between the property and the labour class act largely as the principal basis for conflict outbreaks in the society. In this light, the political economy school submits that peace can only be created if the ensuing disputes occurring at that critical interface between *'labour exploitation'*, *'capital production'* and *'profits'* are equitably resolved in the interests of all parties involved in such lopsided economic exchanges. In this sense, a person's class location has a direct connect to possibilities or otherwise of his general predispositions toward conflicting behaviours as well as the character/intensity of his/her involvement in it.

This view is taken a step further by Erik Wright (2002) who explains that, "a person's class location, [is] defined by … [his] relation to property, [which] systematically affects material interests, [and] in this sense material interests so defined do influence actual behaviour"[15] The essence of responding then to conflict outbreaks across Africa for instance – using the analytical prism set by the

hypothetical positions of the *political economy approach,* would also invariably warrant a dire need to redress aged-long inter-group social-economic inequalities on the continent. Across Africa, it is a standard trend for one group in a state to perpetually oppress the others because for the fact that its elites control the instruments of state power and authority – and by extension also, the natural resources therein.

Ideally, there can be no really generic social class structures anywhere across Africa if we critically assess these trends against the backdrop of the standard variables applied elsewhere across the world in constructing social stratification systems. This view is tied to the argument that ownership of the means of (industrial) production - which has been pivotal in the allocation of class status in most Western societies, has been placed effectively outside the purview of the evolving African standard class system. This deliberate oversight has been perpetrated through the wily designs of Western agents of global capitalist in their construction of awry colonial arrangements that have forcibly co-opted both the African economies and people into its mainstream – and wilfully marginalized at the global capitalist periphery.

Consequently, what Africans have at hand at the moment, are bogus political class structures largely determined by the awry characters of bogus European colonial legacies. The matrix consist of the political independence granted to the colonies by the Western agents and the resultant political authority granted the emergent states to exercise salutary controls and claims to ownership rights over their natural resources. And that their natural resources fuel industrial productivity in the capitalist core states, only make these states and their elites even more susceptible to the wily antics and manipulations of the powers at the global capitalist core.

It is also a fact that, the available means of industrial production – the heavy-duty machines and industries needed to extract and process most of these natural resources, are largely owned and remotely controlled from the capitalist core states. And that, the standard African state is centrally patrimonial in character – with excessive powers appropriated by the national government, a grip on the national government by these agents of global capitalism, presents an open ticket for the perpetual exploitations of these states in the capitalist periphery.

Thus, viewed against such a backdrop where every productive national activity devolves from and indeed revolves around access to the seat of national political power across Africa, the evolving social class structures across Africa are therefore heavily tainted by the characters and outcomes of national politics. What then can be regarded as some sort of class formations, are ideally mere bogus political hierarchies of ethnic groups. These are usually determined by the inherent numerical capabilities of a group that enables it to compete for control of the seat of political power and authority in their various states.

The logic of such an arrangement here inheres also in the fact that whoever controls the seat of national power also exercises de facto control over the state's huge economic and other natural resources/social amenities. This also includes the right to arrogate to itself and ethnic group, a premiere political class position. This is one reason why politics has also become such an intensely competitive game of numbers and ethnicity across the continent over time.

The way it seems, the strange admixture of ethnicity and application of the formula of national power sharing premised on the numerical strength of a group relative to others – as basic benchmarks for political class arrangements across Africa is quite faulty the way it seems. Such lopsided arrangements have made it perennially and practically difficult to really tackle and proffer easy-fit solutions needed to resolve emergent political conflict outbreaks generally on the continent.

Ideally speaking, from a sociological point of view, evolution of a definitive social stratification system in any social location has always been consensually negotiated or at worst imposed forcibly by a dominant group. But then, such impositions have never always been prosecuted

in the kinds of political voids created by prevailing trends indicate across Africa at the moment. Charles Tilly (1975), in his famous thesis on *'The Formation of National States in Western Europe'*, argues that war and the resultant peace negotiations have been veritable mechanisms used in Europe to address the thorny issue of inter-group cohesion and indeed also by implications the evolving patterns of social stratification based on the logic of imposition by force in emergent new states on the continent.[16]

It is a fact that, the generic post-Colonial African states are obviously different in very many fundamental ways and manners from their counterparts in Europe. Structurally, they are largely defective as a result of the awry manner of their malformation by European powers. In their rabid quest for territories and natural resources on the continent during the height of the imperial era as driven by the industrial revolution, the European powers involved in partitioning of Africa decided wilfully to throw rational thinking to the winds in constructing foundations of these states.

Some of the notable fault-lines in these states pertain to scenarios where highly incompatible ethnos have been forced to co-exist together without prior contacts or any frameworks of consensual agreements between them. This adds-up to perennially weak public sphere institutional outlays bequeathed to Africans by the departing colonists. These are structures that have largely also conflated the structural problems now experienced in the ongoing processes of nation building efforts being prosecuted across Africa generally.

For the European powers at the time, gaining unchallenged access to vital raw materials that abound across the continent and new territories was an end in itself that was not to be rationalized in any way by their ill-informed state creations efforts on the continent. It did not also matter whether they were lumping highly incompatible groups into administrative units in other to foster their primary aim of raw material acquisitions. Neither did it mattered if they decided – as they wilfully did, to hand over political power to preferred ethnic groups that could help them secure or safely oversee their vast economic empires on the continent as they began retreating back to Europe at the expiry of the Colonial era. It is a known fact that such singular acts of misguided greed and chicanery on the part of the European powers have been quite detrimental to the rather onerous tasks of evolving consensually negotiated social stratification systems between multiple groups within these states in the post-Colonial era.

The reason for dilemma is that these groups can now ill-afford to thread the same pathways charted by the European states – where groups fought each other to determine which of them is superior. There has also not been any real basis or indeed the political will power on the part of elites of each group to consummate consensual negotiations and a workable formula needed to determine which group ought to be granted majority status and which group ought to be minor in the evolving post-Colonial social class hierarchies across Africa.

The general recourse to a determination of a group's inherent power status by mere numbers according to Western democratic idealism seems to miss this vital link to the fact that, trends across Africa are quite different from what obtained in Europe during its formative years. In Africa – which is overtly communitarian in outlook, numbers obviously would not suffice in the ensuing patterns of the kinds of ethnically competitive politics played in the recent time. Rather, what could count for peaceable inter-group coexistence seems to inhere in a determination of how much each group contributes materially to the economic sustenance of each state unit – this is the only feasible formula for constructing an enduring social class structure.

It is also only from such a rational calculus that power can be equitably allocated accordingly to each group. Consequently, the logic of appropriation of premiere positions and arbitrary imposition of ethno-political class status across post-Colonial Africa by such preferred major or minor ethnic groups, has also presented us with some of the strategic fault-lines that have culminated in the continent's rather high spiral of conflict outbreaks in the recent time.

The way out it seems, there is a dire need to re-negotiate the foundational props of virtually all post-Colonial states across Africa. And this can commence through the convening of a series of sovereign national conferences which could act as perhaps the most auspicious panacea for enduring peace, political stability and inter-group cohesion on the continent.

The Malthusian Approach

Thomas Mathus (1798) is a principal proponent of this school of thought. And a central theme here is that general lack due to an over bloated human population and grinding poverty – leading to pervading hunger, are to be exalted as some of the principal causes of conflict outbreaks in human societies generally. This notion is predicated on the fact that, as groups and individuals compete intensely for access to such scarce natural resources within a social organization conflict outbreaks would certain be some of the unsavoury outcomes.[17]

Trends in Africa tend to also give credence to this position which is further buttressed by the growing consensus amongst some scholars in the discipline of a vital connect between poverty and conflicts – also prevalent in Africa. However, view against such a backdrop of such a view, trends across Africa cannot logically be interpreted as being largely all about how to fill empty stomachs with scarce food supplies. Rather, the central theme here pertains to how best a group could manoeuvre in the murky waters of crass national politics to guarantee the economic, political preservation and social relevance of their group members within the polity

Therefore, it is illogical to apply un wholesomely in Africa claims by the standard Malthusian cohorts that are premised on the central arguments linking prevalence of conflicts to the bloated population of the world - which has agreeably grown exponentially beyond man's capacity to feed itself adequately. But pertaining to Africa, it is also a fact that, most of the composite states have very large national populations and if conflicts are prevalent in them, could there be any direct correlations of these trends to the intervening connect between these two variables prevalent in the Malthusian analysis?

From a logical point of view, one can state putatively here that, if there has been prevalence of conflicts on the continent that are also dialectical linked to grinding poverty and marginalization in these states, then scarcity must be one remote causal factor. But as it were, scarcity does not impinge on trends in the same manners the Malthusians have proposed. In this sense, Africans are not fighting each other because they are hungry. Rather, on the contrary most African states are rich food baskets. Incidents of hunger therefore owe roots in the rather intense competitions for scarce political positions and offices at the central level with of course the heavy tolls on every other productive activity – including provision of adequate distribution/transportation networks which has grossly aggravated the food insecurity scenario in Africa. Thus, a conflict resolution approach for instance – which takes cue from such a critical perspective charted by the Malthusian cohorts, ought also to be one that would instead exalt the usefulness of issues like birth control mechanisms for instance, as some of the vital components of mitigating scarcity and by extension enhance conflict prevention and peace building manoeuvres in Africa.

On the other hand, it would also seem a deliberate blockage of food supplies to protagonists in a conflict could also be another feasible strategy needed to de-escalate a war generally and jump-start the peace process. This includes also general embargo on every other vital materials and emotional resources needed by protagonists to prosecute the conflict further. The idea here is premised on a dire need to quickly create a mutually hurting stalemate – pervasive scarcity of essentials in the conflict, as way to de-escalate the conflict itself. Trends during terminal phases of the Nigerian Civil war in 1969 – when starvation tactics was used by the Federal side against the

secessionist Biafrian side, clearly highlights the utilities of such artificial scarcity measures in a conflict circle.

Another dimension to the notion of scarcity/competition as linked to conflict outbreaks or conflict de-escalation scenarios, is the need to mitigate the usually intense nature of political competitions occurring at the moment in the public space across Africa. This can be achieved by demystifying the myths surrounding seats of national power if key powers and functions are divested from them and delegated to the composite regional units. Such dispersal of power and resources to the regions will tend to shift the locale of political competitions to the safe haven of the primary ethnos where they can best be controlled through imposition of common cultural norms to which everyone subscribe to.

It is also a fact that, political competition is ideally considered universally necessary for sustaining an ideal democratic set-up. But the same position cannot hold true for most Africans who have demonstrated keen resilience over time and a glaring yearning for a return to the basic modes of political community existing before the rather rude interruptions by European interventions. In this sense, political competitions in contemporary Africa have to be curtailed one way or another to the barest minimum if enduring conditions for peace are to be created and sustained across the board.

To apply the central theme of this approach in analysis of trends in Africa, one can then say here that, while power to control natural resources should be devolved from the centre to the regions or individual states where they originate from in the spirit of true federalism, this ought to be complimented by a workable formula to share or periodically rotate power between the major ethnos. On the other hand, the numerically diminutive groups should be granted regional autonomies to run their affairs as they deem fit and with little or no interference from the centre. Such an arrangement aptly echoes Arend Lijphart's (1976) position on the notion of 'Consociationalism' – which is considered here as perhaps one of the best panacea for conflict outbreaks in highly heterogeneous societies like we have across Africa today.[18]

The Anthropological School

This school of thought has two major sub-sects. One branch premises its arguments on the *eu*functionalities of conflicts in the historical processes of evolving human societies from the primitive stage to the modern era. Scholars like Max Gluckman and V. W. Turner attest to such a position and claim that conflicts are vital for a system's healthy maintenance over time.

For instance, according to Gluckman "conflicts within and between small social units promote the solidarity of the larger social units - particularly, the society as a whole [so much so] that rebellion against occupants of political positions serve to emphasize the value of those positions to society, and that expressions of hostility in ritual serves as symbolic re-affirmations of the unchallenged moral order within which the rituals occur."[19]

The focus of this group has also been greatly influenced by the second sub-sect that premises it focus on the 'structural-functional analysis' of human social systems in addition to the 'psycho-analysis' of the human personality. This theoretical variant places emphasis on the 'frustration-aggression' hypothesis that seeks to explain prevalence of competitive human personalities as relative to conflict outbreaks in human social organizations. Ideally, competitions generally create social cleavages where actors make all sorts of differentiations and identifications pertaining to which side of the disputes they tilt toward. |Such a view resonates in William Graham Summer who for instance posits that, "a differentiation arises between ourselves, the we-group, or in-group, and everybody else, or the other-groups, out-groups......The relation of comradeship and peace in the we-group and

that of hostility and war towards other groups are correlative to each other. The exigencies of war with outsiders are what make peace inside.*"*[20]

View then from a general point of, it becomes obvious that this branch of the anthropological school vividly highlights the dynamics in *structures of social relations* as well as their linkages to *competitive individual personalities* as the basis for interpreting conflict outbreak dynamisms in human social organizations. Such a frame of analysis, invariably offers a good stand plank also for external interveners to decide on when to engage in a conflict scenario and who to interact with in the task of devising ways and means to redress emergent conflict outbreaks in the society.

However, if one transposes such a frame in analyzing trends in the African continent, it is evident that, the subsisting patterns and *structures of social relations* are largely determined by overt sentimental attachments by actors to their primary ethnos on one hand. And on the other hand, the most pronounced patterns of *individual personalities* among the political elites have been those which can be characterized as *'high-handed patrimonial authoritarianism'* that brook no dissent of any kind to constituted authority – no matter how well intended.

If one also then conflates this with a scenario - as now prevalent across Africa, where politics is conducted on the primarily basis of group attachments and ethnic determinism, this is obviously an invitation to general anarchy. In the absence of any previous contest needed to determine which group ought to be superior, reliance on such individual elite traits of *'high-handed patrimonial authoritarianism'* in the public space, obviously is counter-productive and would certain result in tainting the overall outlook of the subsisting *structures of social relations* resulting in such high spiral of conflict outbreaks as witnessed over the years within these states.

Conclusion

Thus, given the foregoing analogies, one can assert putatively here that, given the existing theories analyzed on the causes of conflicts, there is an obvious central suggestion that, there is an abundance of sundry useful approaches needed to tackle spiral of conflicts anywhere in the world. However, the special focus of this paper on general trends in Africa prosecuted by applying the various hypothetical positions advanced by each school of thought in each instance, is intended to highlight the fact that this continent stands out as a unique location usually associated with incessant conflicts when compared to other locations across the world.

The dedicated approach adopted here in this paper, is also intended to amplify the argument that, there is indeed also a wide vistas for applications of a multiple of combinational frames of analysis in the area of conflict analysis across national cultures. This position is however taken a step further in another paper where I advance the notion that, a better approach to cross cultural conflict analysis, ought to be one which carefully synthesizes some of the key hypothetical positions advanced in most of these analytical schemas presented here in the foregoing analogies. This is with a view to creating a single picturesque analytical frame needed to tackle more effectively such vexatious spiral of conflicts occurring in almost any heterogeneous location across the world.

In the said subsequent write-up, this novel approach is christened the ASRI model which exalts the need to apply the three-property 'systems approach' as proposed by David Easton (1979) – but in its revised frame of analysis where the systemic properties have been restructured to accommodate a four-fold property consisting of the followings: the '*A*' – or actor-based factor; the '*S*' – or Social stratification-based factors; the '*R*' – or rule-based factors and the *I*' – or institution-based factors.

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Notes

1. See A. J. Taylor, *The Origins of The Second World War*, Penguin Books Ltd, New Edition, 1991, pp. 1- 55.
2. R. J. Rummel, *A Catastrophe Theory Model of The Conflict Helix With Tests, 1977.* Available Online At: http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/CAT.ART.HTM, pp. 1-45.
3. Ibid, pp. 34.
4. Quincy Wright, *A Study of War*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1965, pp. 1284.
5. Ibid, pp. 1284.
6. F. Richardson, *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels*, Pacific Grove, California: Boxwood Press, 1960, pp. 75.
7. Sigmund Freud, *Why War?,* Paris: International Institute of intellectual Co-operation, League of Nations, 1933, pp. 3.
8. Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State and War,* New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, pp. 16.
9. Franz Alexander, "The Psychiatric Aspects of War and Peace," *The American   Journal of Sociology*, Vol.46, No. 4, (January, 1941), pp. 505.
10. See Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species By Means of the Principle of Natural Selection,* Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1964.
11. Alexander, op cit, pp. 509.
12. Ibid, pp. 506.
13. Ibid, pp. 505.
14. See Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, New York: The Free Press, 1988, 3rd Edition, pp. 293.
15. Erik Olin Wright, "The Shadow of Exploitation in Weber's Class Analysis," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 67, (December), 2002, pp. 804.
16. See Charles Tilly, "Reflections On the History of European State-Making*.",* in: *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, 3-83 Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1975, pp. 42.
17. See T. R. Malthus, An *Essay on The Principle of Population,* London: Thoemmes Continuum, 3rd Edition, 1991.
18. See Arend Lijphart, "Consociation And Federation : Conceptual And Empirical Links," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 12, No. 3, (Sep., 1979), pp. 499 - 515.
19. Cited in Robert A. Levine, "The Anthropology of Conflicts," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 5, No.1, (March 1961), pp. 3.
20. Cited in Arthur Stein, "Conflict and Cohesion: A Review of Literature*", The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (March 1976) London: Sage Publications, Inc., pp. 143.

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