Conflict and conflict resolution in Africa: Engaging the colonial factor

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Abstract

By engaging the colonial factor in African conflicts, this article seeks to understand the ineffectiveness of efforts at conflict management in overcoming the disasters that brought the conflicts to the African continent. It claims that conflict in Africa does not always stem primarily from crises of national governance and the failure of governmental institutions in African countries to mediate conflict, and revisits the colonial factor as the root of many conflicts in Africa. The article reconsiders the conflict management and conflict resolution debate and indicts former colonial powers and powerful organisations for maintaining colonial-style approaches to African conflicts at the expense of a desire to address the fundamental issues that divide the parties to the different conflicts. It argues that the colonial factor ought to be a consideration in attempts to address African conflicts because the roots of many post-colonial conflicts in Africa remain buried in Africa's past and, specifically, in the colonisation and de-colonisation processes. Making the claim that conflict resolution is more than the suppression or perhaps the elimination of overt violence, it argues that envisaging and/or imposing peace-keeping forces at every turn on various African conflicts does not provide the desired durable outcomes.

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Introduction

> *I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals mainly with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes* (Martin Luther King Jr 1963).

The conflict resolution community seems to pursue conflict resolution efforts in Africa from a variety of purposes and interests and with policies that are often replete with ambiguities and contradictions. This situation may be the reason why many African conflicts may be silenced but remain largely unresolved. As Zartman (2000:3) has pointed out, although African conflicts involve the activities of seasoned peacemakers using the best of personal skills and recently developed knowledge about ways of managing and resolving conflicts, international efforts at conflict management have not been particularly effective or efficient in overcoming the disasters that have brought them to the continent. The critical question then is how we understand the problem of conflict resolution in Africa when the actors, mainly external to Africa, propagate the idea of peace and conflict resolution corresponding mainly to their own interests and view of Africa and the world.

Although some scholars on conflict in Africa (Obasanjo 1991, Anyang' Nyong'o 1991 and Msabaha 1991) agree that conflict in Africa stems primarily from crises of national governance and from the failure of governmental institutions in African countries to mediate conflict, this article engages the colonial factor as the root of many conflicts in Africa. It argues that this factor must be taken into consideration in the attempts to address African conflicts because the roots of many post-colonial conflicts in Africa, such as the recent case of South Sudan, remain buried in Africa's past and, specifically, in the colonisation and de-colonisation processes. The article also argues that conflicts at sub-national and national levels in Africa are of several types, and that imposing peace-keeping forces as has often been the case, or merely imposing new political and economic institutions on the various African conflicts, may not provide the desired durable outcomes. Furthermore, and based on the same premise, the article questions how far a just and equitable future can be structured on an unjust past.

The Colonial legacy as basis of conflict

Some scholars, including Mokwugo Okoyo (1977), Bonny Duala-M'Bedy (1984), Claude Ake (1985) and Herman J. Cohen (1995), consider the numerous conflicts in Africa as a natural consequence of Africa's colonial past. Okoyo (1977:93), for example, posits that 'political instability is rooted in the very structure of society and, for most new countries, in the colonial past'. He also adds that 'Africa's post-colonial present can be said to have been fashioned for Africa by Africa's colonial past'. Subscribing to this viewpoint, Ambassador Herman J. Cohen (1995) asserted that 'the sources and consequences of Africa's internal conflicts have their roots in colonialism, the subsequent processes of de-colonisation and state formation, and the ensuing crisis of nation building'. For Cohen, the colonial state was fraught with contradictions. As he put it, 'The modern African state was created by colonial powers out of ethnic and regional diversities, and rendered conflictual by gross inequities in power relations, and in the uneven distribution of national wealth and development opportunities' (Cohen 1995:11). In other words, the basis had been created for many of the conflicts experienced in post-independence Africa. Duala-M'Bedy (1984:10), subscribing to this viewpoint, asserted that 'the problems being experienced by modern African States are based on our colonial experience'.

Cohen (1995:11) also indicted the de-colonisation process when he observed that in many countries the contradictions of the colonial state were passed on to the independent states through a flawed process of de-colonisation. He argued that 'conflict, recurring instability, and bad governance in Zaire, Rwanda, and Burundi can be traced back to the hasty and unprepared granting of independence by Belgium in 1960'. He also considered the major wars in Angola and Mozambique as arising out of 'panic de-colonisation from a revolutionary and chaotic Portugal in 1974-75'. Insofar as the war in Sudan was concerned, he traced it to 'the manner in which the Anglo-Egyptian administration brought the North and the South together, but kept them apart under a separatist policy for most of the Condominium rule, and then left them in a centralized unitary state without constitutional guarantees for the disadvantaged South'

(Cohen 1995:12). These are only some examples of the conflicts in Africa which General Obasanjo (1991) described aptly as the continent with the greatest number of conflicts.

It is important to underscore that, like the afore-mentioned conflict cases, the roots of many current conflicts – latent and manifest – including the cases of Western Sahara and British Southern Cameroons, can also be traced to colonialism and the de-colonisation process. This being the case, any thinking which regards the colonial factor as irrelevant today may be misplaced. The need for a colonial analysis remains pertinent because the workings of colonialism's culture are still with us and because post-coloniality is highly engaged with colonialism (Thomas 1994). As this scholar of colonialism's culture has argued, '[I]f we had transcended colonial images and narratives more comprehensively, perhaps we would not need to discuss them at all, but there is no emptiness at present in which such a confident silence can be heard' (Thomas 1994:195). In the case of British Southern Cameroons, for example, the United Kingdom (UK) failed to nurture a United Nations (UN) Trust Territory to Statehood in accordance with the UN Trusteeship Agreement. Rather, the UK lobbied the UN to hastily lump together British Southern Cameroons and a Trust Territory of France without constitutional guarantees for the disadvantaged former British Territory of Southern Cameroons. While the on-going Western Sahara conflict is about the right of self-determination afforded other former European dependencies, the conflicting situation in Côte d'Ivoire following the death of the country's first President, Houphouet Boigné, is also closely associated with the nature of the country's independence and political leadership.

Cohen's assertion has a major implication for understanding the various conflicts and the attempts to resolve such conflicts on the continent. If the causes and consequences of the conflicts have their roots in colonialism, the processes of de-colonisation and state formation, and the ensuing crisis of nation-building, then any attempt to resolve the conflicts must also transcend the concepts of 'new institutions that will increase participation, legitimacy, and redistribution' and 'good governance' (Cohen 1993:7) recipes to also address other root causes of the problems. From the perspective of this analysis,

the 'crises of internal governance' and 'new institutions' in Africa can both be traced to the colonisation and the de-colonisation of Africa. Any discussion of 'internal or national governance' therefore cannot exclude the structure of the state and the political leadership as inherited from colonialism, given that the basis for African states and political leadership in most of the continent is colonial.

Bryson and Crosby (1992:3) defined leadership as the 'inspiration and mobilization of others to undertake collective action in pursuit of the common good'. Considered from this standpoint, political leadership in many parts of Africa even today can hardly be said to be African leadership because it was, for the most part, imposed on the people by colonial powers. Okoyo (1977:93) described the situation in the following words: 'Colonial rule was for all practical purposes military rule and by a simple transference the new political class which inherited the mantle of the colonial masters also inherited the latter's concept of leadership role that was structured in authoritarian terms'. Examples are legion in Africa where the colonial machine did very little to prepare Africans for self-rule and, consequently, for good governance. In any case, no self-rule had been envisaged in the first place, and so the only education dispensed to the 'natives' was just enough to prepare them for subordinate positions as messengers and junior clerks in the colonial civil service. A majority of African leaders and the people in leadership roles at independence were chosen by the colonial masters from among this group. Once in power, they held tight to power, and usually with the support of the former colonial powers who gave the power to them in the first place.

African independence and African political leadership can be seen to be very closely related. Former colonial masters were not in search of good leaders of the people. The concern of the colonial masters at independence and beyond, for the most part, was to hand power to a group of cronies whose mission was always not to 'govern their people well' but to protect the interests of the metropole. In this regard, many political leaders of Africa, especially those in the former French colonies, were and continued to be imposed upon the people with almost no consideration for good governance. As University of Port Harcourt's Professor Claude Ake (1985:1212) put it, 'the circumstances of African history

conspired to produce an elite which could not function because it had no sense of identity or integrity and no confidence, did not know where it was coming from or where it was going'. The examples of the military and economic pacts concluded by French-speaking African leaders with France at independence are cases in point. In many cases, these pacts have not been rescinded half a century after independence and that is why former French colonies either still have the French military stationed in the countries or continue to call on France for military intervention as in the recent cases of Central African Republic and Mali. Let us now consider the basis of African nations or states, and the concepts of power and governance.

Colonial rule, power and governance in Africa

In Africa, the concept of state or nation is based on Africa's colonial past. Article 4 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union places emphasis on respect of state boundaries inherited at independence. African states have also remained spheres of influence of former colonial powers, and no power in the world has been interested in changing that situation. Duala-M'bedy (1984:10) asserted that 'the European concept of state has had a strong influence on African countries and that it was this concept of state that led to drawing up of arbitrary borders throughout Africa'. Such Eurocentric thinking, reinforced by technological and scientific achievements, is still very present in Africa. This is why most western literature on conflicts in Africa may still need further clarification in regard to specific conflict types. Some light will be shed on the typology of African conflicts later on in this analysis.

Political repression and non-respect for human rights are synonymous with bad governance. Political repression in Africa goes back to Africa's colonial legacy. Colonial rule was the antithesis of democracy, because it was premised on the usurpation of the fundamental right of self-determination and of the fundamental human rights of citizens and peoples. Okoyo's (1977) work underscored the fact that whatever legitimacy colonialism possessed was derived not from any set of agreed rules or consensus, but from the monopoly of the means of coercion and violence, and by its divide-and-rule strategies aimed at intensifying the cleavages (class, tribal, religious) inherent in the social

structure and at prolonging its rule. Colonial rule never raised the issue of good government. The only issues were power and violence, and that remains the tradition of politics that African leaders took to independence in their respective nations. These African leaders have not only retained the politics of power and violence, but many of them have also continued to reinforce the tradition. Ake (1985:1213) argued strongly that 'because many leaders in Africa were insecure when they inherited power, they continued to cling tenaciously to the idea of the ruler's exclusive claim to power'. This situation is verifiable in many African countries where leadership has been clinging to power for twenty, thirty or forty years – from Uganda and Sudan, through Chad and Cameroon, to Angola, Zimbabwe, and others. Power and bad governance, traditions inherited from colonial rule and the nature of de-colonisation, have been a major source of conflict in Africa. Although viewed in general terms as African conflicts, there is need to point out that conflict in Africa does not only vary from case to case, it is often traceable to colonial rule and the de-colonisation process. Let us now turn our attention to an examination of the various conflicts in order to categorise them.

Reconsidering African conflicts

Cohen's analysis focused on violent conflict in Africa, but this included the violent way in which intolerant regimes usually deal with political problems that could have been resolved through the political process and without violence. Any realistic appreciation of post-colonial African conflicts must begin with their origins or causes. The literature on African conflicts appears to view the conflicts mainly in general terms as intra-national or inter-ethnic. This view holds good to some extent, but it is far from being the general trend. Cohen (1996:1) asserted that most 'African wars were civil wars', and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Yearbook, for instance, also advanced the argument that 'more than half of the major armed conflicts in Africa occurred within national boundaries' (Lingren et al. 1991:347). The statement, 'occurred within national boundaries', is understood to mean the same as the umbrella description, 'intra-national'. Although the geo-political space in which a conflict occurs may be a nation-state, there is the need to make one clarification in this analysis. It is

that the conflicts occurring within a national boundary in Africa have different stakes and different root causes. The classification of African conflicts as mainly inter-ethnic and intra-national seems to have won great acceptance within the conflict resolution community. That classification, which appears to stem from Western knowledge of and consideration for African societies, may need to be expanded further. In this regard, an attempt to focus on the various types of conflicts in Africa from the standpoints of the subject or nature of the dominant issues involved in each category is important.

A close examination of the various conflicts occurring in Africa reveals two broad categories, namely intra-state and inter-state conflicts. Each of these two broad categories can be broken down further into what has been referred to as 'relatively abstract dimensions of conflict' (Kriesberg 1982:183; cf Burton 1990). These dimensions, in Kriesberg's words, include the issues in contention (resources and interests or values and ideology), the arenas in which the conflict is waged (families, communities, countries, or regions) and the contending parties (persons, organisations, classes, or peoples). In the light of these dimensions, we can consider African conflicts as belonging to the following six types: inter-ethnic conflicts, inter-state conflicts, liberation conflicts, civil rights conflicts, annexationist conflicts, and political transition conflicts. Each conflict type is discussed briefly below with examples provided.

1) Inter-ethnic conflicts: Opposing tribal or ethnic groups are mainly found within national boundaries although the inherent problems of artificial borders caused by colonialism have resulted in some ethnic groups being found in two, three or even more African countries. These conflicts are very recurrent although with less gravity in terms of the numbers of casualties, refugees and displaced persons, and the spread of disease, famine and environmental devastation. The examples of clan fighting in Somalia and Liberia where the control of power at the centre was/is one of the main issues are the high point of inter-ethnic conflicts, but these are only the exception and not the rule – given that inter-ethnic conflicts occur over any number of issues ranging from politics to socio-economic issues such as religion, culture or land and other scarce resources. Inter-ethnic or inter-tribal conflicts abound in many countries of Africa. In post-colonial Africa, these conflicts are greatly exacerbated by

the neo-colonial arrangements that characterise many African governments. In many African countries where leadership remains in the same hands and continues to serve colonial interests, state apparatus are known to sponsor some inter-ethnic conflicts as a divide-and-rule strategy.

2) Inter-state conflicts: These are conflicts between the governments and sometimes peoples of two different countries. These conflicts have been relatively few in Africa in spite of the problems caused by artificial borders inherited from colonialism and the lumping together of different nations to make up new countries at independence. Some inter-state conflicts have occurred mainly over disputed territories like the Chad-Libya conflict over the Aouzou strip. There was also the case of the Tanzania-Uganda war that toppled Idi Amin in Uganda. Others included the Kenya-Somali war (1963-1967), the Somali-Ethiopian conflict (1964-1978), the Egypt-Libya conflict (1977), the Eritrea-Ethiopia border conflict (1998-2000) and the 1994 Cameroon-Nigeria conflict over the disputed oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula.

3) Liberation conflicts: Liberation conflicts are those conflicts that involve entire nations or peoples who find themselves within the territorial boundaries of given countries by colonial and colonising arrangements. Often, these people waged war to liberate themselves when they were unable, through dialogue and the political process, to correct what Cohen (1995) termed the contradictions of colonial rule in some cases, and the failures of de-colonisation in others.

The people seeking to liberate themselves usually did not have any feelings of belonging and commitment and, consequently, were not concerned about sharing in the colonising country's power and resources. These conflicts arose, rather, from the aspirations of a people to assert their fundamental human right of self-determination, as contained in the UN Charter. A few cases of liberation conflicts in Africa include the Eritrean War of independence; the South Sudan war; the Namibian War of independence; and the Cassamance conflict in Senegal. These conflicts are similar to the Quebec Sovereignty Question in Canada and the Chechnya conflict in Russia.

In Africa, however, it is sometimes difficult to classify these conflicts from a purely western standpoint in regard to the concepts of 'nation' and 'state' in

international law. The point here, however, is that the people who seek to liberate themselves and their territory consider themselves as having been compelled by colonial forces to live with a different group, often with great incompatibilities as in the case of South Sudan and the others cited above. Some of these conflicts have been termed, albeit erroneously, as secessionist conflicts.

4) Civil rights conflicts: Civil rights conflicts arise mainly over issues of participation, distribution, and legitimacy in the politics and governance of nations (Lasswell 1936). In civil rights conflicts, a section of a country may wage a conflict because the people (or a group) consider the social framework as structured to exclude or marginalise them, and therefore seek to correct the situation. Unlike liberation conflicts discussed above, civil rights conflicts always occur within the same nation. To a very large extent, the stakes are participation and distribution at the centre. The issue in civil rights conflicts is to give the people a fair share of their country's power and resources, and thereby enhance their sense of belonging and commitment. Like the Civil Rights Movement in America, the people who wage civil rights struggles recognise that they too are part of a given country and only want to be recognised as such and to have the full right for a fair share. Some examples of civil rights conflicts in Africa are the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, the struggle for majority rule in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), the Tuareg uprising in Mali, where the group found itself virtually estranged from national life, and the Algerian Berbers fighting against the ruling Arab class. To a considerable extent, Burundi and Rwanda also have some ingredients of civil rights conflicts. In this conflict type, the stakes are mainly those about who is where, who gets what, how and when (Lasswell 1936). These conflicts have been the most widely known and studied of Africa's conflicts. This category of conflict may be best addressed by new political and economic institutions and good governance – for instance, 'power sharing through proportional representation and federal structures' (Cohen 1993:7).

Civil rights conflicts, when left unresolved, can escalate into civil wars as in Liberia, Somalia, Mozambique, Angola, Congo, Chad, Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire. On the basis of the considerations described above, certain conflicts occurring within the national boundaries of given 'nation-states' should not be seen simply as intra-national conflicts or classified too quickly as

'internal affairs of States'. This error has, very often, led to drastic consequences in Africa. The Eritrean Independence War was, until the country's independence in 1993, erroneously considered as an internal affair of Ethiopia just as the war in South Sudan was for long considered as Sudan's internal affair. The international community continues to make this error of judgment in the case of the Southern Cameroons Question (Annan 2000) and in considering the Western Sahara conflict not as a case of Moroccan irredentism against an indigenous desire for independence (Zunes and Mundy 2010:xxiii), but in considering the territory as part of Morocco.

5) Annexationist conflicts: Annexationist conflicts arise when one nation annexes another nation in part or wholly, or where two nations lock horns over interests that belong to neither of them from the point of view of history and international law. This class of conflict is a curious one, and there are not many examples on the African continent currently. Two cases, however, stand out prominently. These are the Western Sahara conflict involving Morocco and the British Southern Cameroons restoration of independence and sovereignty conflict in post-colonial Cameroon Republic. In both cases, Morocco and Cameroon Republic went beyond their borders to annex and 'colonially occupy' Western Sahara in 1975 and British Southern Cameroons in 1961 respectively, contrary to the UN Charter, the UN General Assembly Resolution 1514(XV) on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (United Nations General Assembly 1960), and the African Union Constitutive Act in its Article 4. Both the Western Sahara situation and the British Southern Cameroons' case are examples of conflict caused by backdoor deals of colonial powers that effectively sold out the fundamental right of the people of those nations to determine their own destiny (McGovern 2010:xiii). Annexationist conflicts are similar to liberation conflicts because the nations so annexed and colonially occupied (often with the connivance of colonial forces) seek to liberate themselves and their territory. In spite of the condemnation of colonialism, in spite of the breach of international law, and in spite of the incompatibility theory of plural states espoused by Woodrow Wilson in 1919 (Esthus 1991) and other scholars including Walzer, Kantowicz and Higham (1982), Furnival (1986)

and Smith (1986), the world community does not only orphan these conflicts (Crocker, Hampson and Aall 2005), but considers them, albeit erroneously, as secessionist conflicts.

The conflict between the Federal Republic of Nigeria and La République du Cameroun over the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula in the Gulf of Guinea is annexationist in type because the Bakassi Peninsula is said to belong neither to the Federal Republic of Nigeria nor to La République du Cameroun. The following facts on the conflict are contained in The London Communiqué of June 1995 (Southern Cameroons National Council 1995):

> The Southern Cameroons was administered jointly with the Federation of Nigeria from 1919 to 1958 and during this period, all the survey maps which were prepared by the Federal Ministry of Lands & Surveys in Lagos recognised the Bakassi Peninsula as being an integral part of Southern Cameroonian territory. The 1961 unification of the Southern Cameroons and La République du Cameroun gave rise to the Federal Republic of Cameroon, which did share a maritime border with Nigeria, with the Bakassi Peninsula becoming part of the Federal Republic of Cameroon ... Following the dissolution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon in 1972 and the effective secession of La République du Cameroun from the union in 1984 and the symmetrical return of the Southern Cameroons to the status of a UN Trust Territory, that [sic] La République du Cameroun ceased to share a maritime boundary with the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The westernmost maritime boundary of La République du Cameroun is at the estuary of the Mungo River. At the same time, the people of Southern Cameroons consider that the present occupation of the Bakassi Peninsula by the Nigerian Army, though provoked by the hostile behaviour of gendarmes from La République du Cameroun, is entirely illegal. Consequently, the case which has been filed at the International Court of Justice against the Federal Republic of Nigeria by La République du Cameroun, and which is based on the presumption that it is the successor state to the defunct Federal Republic of Cameroun, has no foundation in International Law because La République du Cameroun has no locus standi in the Bakassi Peninsula ...

This excerpt exposes some of the contradictions of colonialism and the process of de-colonisation which were always in keeping with the colonial culture of constructing non-Europeans as subhuman. Colonial administration did not only treat colonial subjects as too far behind to govern themselves (Thomas 1994:152), but this consideration probably caused the colonial masters to treat colonised people as objects whom they pushed around as they knew how – as evidenced by this case of British Southern Cameroons. The curious nature of this kind of conflict is that the disputed territory belongs to neither of the warring parties in the conflict. Whereas in the Western Sahara Conflict, Algeria fought against Morocco alongside the indigenous Polissario Front, the Bakassi Peninsula belongs to neither of the two nations that claim the territory. This conflict is erroneously referred to as a border conflict between the Federal Republic of Nigeria and La République du Cameroun whereas from a historico-legal standpoint, the two neighbours did not share a common border anywhere near the disputed Bakassi Peninsula at independence in 1960.[1]

In the case of British Cameroons, the nationalists consider that part of the strategy and the hidden agenda of ensuring the annexation of the British Southern Cameroons was, from the very beginning, a ploy of the United Kingdom and Western colonial powers to dispense with the territory. Considering the annexation and colonial occupation of British Cameroons as a colonial conspiracy masterminded by Britain and the West within the Cold War context to deprive the territory of its independence, British Southern Cameroons nationalists notified La République du Cameroun, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the International Court of Justice and the United Nations that the Bakassi Peninsula belongs to British Southern Cameroons.[2]

6) Political transition conflicts: Mainly within states, political transition conflicts arose in many African countries out of rising tensions resulting from a stalemated transition to the democratisation of political life in the 1990s. This phenomenon is described by Cohen (1996:6) as 'blocked political systems

1 East Timor formerly in Indonesia, and Tibet in China appear to belong to this conflict category.

2 See interpleader to the ICJ in the 1994 Bakassi Peninsula Case between the Federal Republic of Nigeria and La République du Cameroun.

that can no longer resolve individual or group differences through nonviolent procedures'. The case in Africa has been the transition to participatory democracy. Although the democratisation process has experienced some success in a few countries such as Benin and Botswana, and recently Ghana, South Africa, and Tanzania, the examples of many other African countries, including Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Central African Republic and Côte d'Ivoire, are far from inspiring any hope for the future of democratic rule. The Zimbabwe political transition since independence and the Kenyan conflict arising from the last election and complicated by the charges of the Prime Minister and his Deputy by the International Criminal Court are other examples of political transition conflicts. In some of the cases mentioned above, violent conflict came about by the annulment of a free and fair democratic process and, in others, serious internal political violence began after what the people saw as flaws occasioned by heavily rigged elections, winners seeking to exclude some actors or whole sections of the country, or incumbents being unwilling to submit to the will of the people as expressed through the ballot box. In some other cases, these conflicts have not yet led to severe violence mainly because the situations were greatly repressed. However, Cohen (1996:6) cautioned that there is 'great threat of severe violence in the near future' in this area. What appears clear from the difficulty experienced in the political transitions in many of these countries is that the governance record is very akin to the colonial style of governance inherited in the respective countries. The leadership only replicated the colonial leadership style which was for all practical purposes military rule since it was structured mainly in authoritarian terms. Two decades and more after the democratic struggles started in the 1990s, these countries continue to be ruled by Presidential decree in spite of the existence of 'democratic parliaments' and plans to introduce 'Senatorial' processes. In the case of one of these 'new African democracies', the Senators were elected only by Councillors whose term of office had long elapsed. It was also curious in Cameroon to note that 30 of the 100 members of the Senate of the country were appointed by the President. These kinds of governance manoeuvres in a post-colonial situation remain consistent with the inherited tradition of political power and dominance of the colonial administration. As Thomas (1994:4) pointed out, modernity itself

can be understood as a colonialist project in the special sense that both the societies internal to Western nations, and those they possessed, administered and reformed elsewhere, were understood as objects to be surveyed, regulated and sanitised.

After cataloguing and categorising the different conflict types in post-independence Africa, it may now be appropriate to highlight the debate on conflict resolution and conflict management, consider the main intervention agencies and examine the different approaches employed to deal with the different conflicts.

Conflict resolution or conflict management?

Stephen Ryan (1990:50) has asserted that too often conflict resolution is used as a cover-all term that fails to face up to the different processes involved in the reduction or elimination of violence. This statement seems to be very evident of the African conflict situation especially when scholars and practitioners alike refer to the handling of conflict in Africa. It is necessary to explore the main features of conflict resolution and conflict management, two approaches in conflict scholarship, in order to better understand and assess the motivations and actions of intervening agencies or actors. The first major difference between the two approaches concerns the desire or not to raise the fundamental issues that divide the parties to a conflict. Proponents of the resolution approach favour the raising of fundamental issues because they believe that conflict can be resolved. As Mitchell (1989:9) pointed out, not merely will disruptive conflict behaviour cease and hostile attitudes and perceptions at least be ameliorated, but the ultimate source of conflict (that is, the situation of goal incompatibility) will also be removed so that no unsatisfied goals remain to plague the future.

Proponents of the management approach, on the other hand, believe that attempts to resolve conflicts are unrealistic, so rather than dealing with basic issues, attention should be concentrated on ameliorating the symptoms of the conflict, and in this way reducing suffering (Ryan 1990:102). Scholars of the resolution approach argue that the unsolvable nature of a particular conflict is more apparent than real. They maintain that it may be incorrect to view conflicts

in zero-sum or win/lose terms, and that positive sum or win/win outcomes may be possible if we base our thinking on different assumptions. John Burton (1979; 1984; 1987; 1990), for example, calls for the adoption of a human needs approach, arguing for a paradigm shift in how we analyse conflicts. For Burton, most conflicts arise because one or more groups are denied their basic human needs as advanced by Galtung (2004), Doyal and Gough (1991) and others.

The second major difference between the two approaches relates to the chances of obtaining a self-sustaining settlement or outcome. Light (1984:151) claimed that conflict resolution offers a more viable outcome to conflict, because it converts the conflict into a shared problem, setting up a process in which both sides participate equally in finding solutions which are acceptable to both and which, therefore, are self-sustaining. Those who advance the management approach argue rather that given the lack of a community of interest, the most that can be hoped for is the suppression or perhaps the elimination of overt violence. One wonders whether the latter view is not the basis for all the peace-keeping forces prescribed for conflicts in Africa over the decades.

The third main difference concerns the role of the third party in responding to violence. Many proponents of the resolution approach tend not to believe in enforced settlements, a process upheld by proponents of the management school. In the resolution approach, the consent and contentment of the parties to a conflict are central. The solution to the conflict in this approach ought not to be imposed from outside. In this case, the third party plays a vital role, but only to the extent that the third party facilitates the interaction process. Edward de Bono (1985:76) popularised much of the thinking on how this can be done. As he put it:

> In a conflict situation the two parties are unable to stand outside their own perceptions. In order to move from the argument to the design mode there is a need for a third party. The third party is not a go-between, negotiator or mediator. The third party acts as a mirror, an overview, a provider of provocation and creativity and a director of thinking.

While Burton (1979:120) on his part suggested that enforced settlement is not resolution of conflict, Groom (1986:86) also favoured the resolution of a conflict

above a settlement, arguing that resolution is not a settlement imposed by a victor or a powerful third party, but rather a new set of relationships freely and knowledgeably arrived at by the parties themselves.

This situation is different from the management of conflict viewpoint. Ryan (1990:105) has pointed out that even the term management implies a certain amount of arm-twisting, and to do this effectively power is required. The belief, according to Ryan, that basic issues cannot be resolved logically encourages the assumption that the natural state of affairs between the parties is conflict and that a third force is needed to ensure an acceptable degree of order and stability. This will have to take the form of a coercive intervention, sometimes by military or paramilitary forces; sometimes through economic measures. A review of conflict intervention in Africa over the decades reveals that conflict resolution in Africa has rather been about conflict management since it has focused mainly on a certain amount of arm-twisting and coercive intervention with military and para-military forces. Zartman (2000:2) has indicated that the United Nations Security Council deployed nine peace-keeping missions to Africa in the 1990s alone.

The point in this analysis is that proponents of the management approach favour coercive interventions and are less scrupulous in seeking the consent of all the parties. Ryan (1990:106) cited the example of the London Conference of 1959 which resulted in the independence of Cyprus to illustrate the point that in the management approach the third parties may try and impose a solution by working behind the backs or above the heads of one or more of the main contenders. He explained that Archbishop Makarios was forced by Britain and Greece to accept conditions he did not approve. In Africa, the idea of conflict resolution has been colonial in design and implementation in that the solutions are more often coercively imposed on the weaker parties. While former colonial powers have been largely involved in the former colonies, as in the recent case of the French military intervention in Mali, conflict management in the continent's violent conflicts by former colonial powers has been coercive. Like the Cyprus situation, there are conflict cases in Africa in which powerful third parties have also worked behind the backs or above the heads of some contenders. In these situations, the focus has been on the use of power at the disposal of former

colonial states to impose whatever solution was in the interest of the intervening powerful third-parties (Webb, Koutrakou and Walters 1996; Skjelsbaek and Fermann 1996). Skjelsbaek and Fermann indicated that even in the mediations undertaken under the auspices of the UN, the actor in international relations supposedly with claims to impartiality and neutrality, these vested interest considerations seem to be in play always. One typical example is the treatment John Ngu Foncha and the Southern Cameroons received from the United Kingdom, the United Nations, France and La République du Cameroun in 1961 (Munzu 1995:1). With the foregoing discussion on intervention approaches in African conflicts, one may want to inquire about the nature of the history of intervention in African conflicts.

Intervention actors and approaches

Intervention agencies or actors

A review of intervention efforts in African conflicts in the last two or three decades of the 20th century brings out two main trends in regard to the main actors or agencies and the intervention approaches involved. The first trend shows that the main actors intervening in African conflicts were almost entirely from outside of Africa. These were individuals, countries, groups of countries, institutions and organisations. As Herman Cohen pointed out, until 1993 Africa was almost totally dependent on outside entities for conflict management (1996:2). Some of these outside entities or actors included former colonial masters, international organisations and foreign powers like the United Nations, the European Community, and the United States of America; as well as regional efforts like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in West Africa, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Desertification (IGADD)[3] in East Africa, and a number of non-governmental actors such as former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Julius Nyerere. The second strong idea that emerges from intervention literature is the increasing emphasis on conflict management rather than resolution as the intervention approach in Africa.

3 In 1996 the name of this Organisation was changed to Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

Conflicts in the different sub-regions of Africa

From the examples provided earlier, one can affirm that the conflict management approach has been the dominant approach in African conflicts. Examples taken from the different sub-regions of Africa are illustrative. In East Africa, the war in South Sudan, the collapse of the State in Somalia, and the conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi, the situation in Ethiopia as well as the wars in former Zaire, are significant examples of protracted conflicts. These conflicts were only addressed superficially, their intensity notwithstanding. In spite of all the urgency concerning the conflict in Burundi, the focus was mainly on diplomatic interventions by several agencies and actors. These interventions ended up with the establishment of War Crime Tribunals with none of the actors giving any consideration for the need to address the deep concerns of the parties in the conflict. The tribunals seem to have been intended for punishing individuals chosen for destruction by the powerful stakeholders rather than for unearthing the causes of conflict that remain deeply rooted in the respective societies. It is difficult to imagine how the War Crimes Tribunal in Rwanda helped to bring justice to the situation bred, for instance, by colonialism and the de-colonisation process in Burundi and Rwanda. The case was not different in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

In the case of the intractable fratricidal war in South Sudan, intervention was mainly intermittent from 1990 and undertaken by the Djibouti-based IGADD/IGAD. In spite of the colonial basis of this conflict, it was difficult for many years to state any willingness on the part of the agencies to seek a lasting solution by addressing the profound causes of conflict. Cohen (1996:4) summed it all when he affirmed that East Africa in general was a sub-region where neither the African Unity (AU) nor the international community had been able to advance conflict management significantly beyond humanitarian intervention.

In West Africa, ECOWAS has, since 1990, been involved in peace-keeping operations. The conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone were two situations in which ECOWAS sent in troops with financial and material support from the international community, notably the United States (Cohen 1996). In spite of

the huge cost of the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone in terms of human lives and material, the peace-keeping interventions focused mainly on achieving what these actors termed 'peace and stability' (Cohen 1996:6).

Intervention by individual external powers

As stated earlier, former colonial powers have been involved in the efforts to address conflicts in Africa. Some of these efforts undertaken in the 1990s included negotiations between Angola's factions coordinated by the Portuguese in 1990-1992; the mediation efforts of the Italians in the civil war in Mozambique during 1991-1993; and the efforts of the United States with regard to Ethiopia in 1990-1991 and Somalia in 1992-1993. The United States, within the framework of the African Conflict Resolution Act of 1994, engaged with the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in an effort to get the Organisation's conflict management mechanism off the ground. French intervention in post-colonial African conflicts came mainly under the umbrella of the European Union. France and Britain also sponsored a number of conferences in 1994-1995 in some African capitals to facilitate dialogue on the development of consensus on conflict management policy along specific lines, including inter alia the development of conflict management approaches tailored to African circumstances under African leadership. France also provided funding through the Paris-based multilateral Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation (ACCT) for launching a West African 'Observatory' or watchdog based in Dakar, Senegal, to focus on 1) prevention and settlement of conflicts and 2) democratic transition in West Africa. France also supported the development of an inventory of available military assets in West Africa for an eventual AU and/or a sub-regional peace-keeping contingent (Cohen 1996:5). France also intervened militarily in some of her former colonies such as Côte d'Ivoire (2003 and 2010), Chad (2008), Mali (2013) or in the Central African Republic, the claim being to achieve what became known as 'peace and stability' rather than to resolve the respective conflicts by proceeding with both sides participating equally in finding solutions acceptable to both and, therefore, self-sustaining.

International organisations

The international organisations involved in African conflicts are mainly the UN and the OAU/AU. The UN, for instance, has intervened in African conflicts since independence as in the case of Congo Leopoldville or Kinshasa. In the last two decades of the 20th century, the UN intervened in Mozambique's Civil War; the Angolan Civil War; the Namibian Independence Conflict; Western Sahara, and the Rwandan genocide of April to July 1994. The bulk of these interventions were in the form of peace-keeping. The report of a former Secretary-General of the UN on this subject is pertinent to this analysis. In his annual report on peace-keeping to the General Assembly, Boutros Ghali noted his exploration of the possibility of building up a stockpile of military equipment in Africa (mostly leftovers from terminated UN peace-keeping operations) for use on short notice by African contingents (Cohen 1996:6). This remark by the UN Secretary-General illustrated the superficial approach employed by the world body in regard to conflicts in Africa.

The OAU on its part was, until 1990, virtually non-responsive to African conflicts because of its sacrosanct doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. William J. Foltz and I. William Zartman, two experts on the work of the Organisation, viewed the non-intervention situation and shared their views with regard to OAU's non-intervention. While Zartman (1984:41) considered that there is no OAU in matters of African conflict; there are only members and their interests come first, Foltz (1991:349) viewed the OAU as most conservative having six of the seven principles enumerated in Article III of its Charter designed to serve in part or in whole to protect the autonomy of member states from interference or coercion by other members or by the Organisation as a whole. In keeping with the instructions from African Heads of State and Governments, the OAU conflict management mechanism tried to intervene in conflicts such as the one in the Republic of the Congo in 1993 following the 1992 democratic election problems, and the conflict in Burundi after the assassination of a President in October 1993 was followed by instability and massive violence. Such OAU intervention has not been different from the examples of the UN. Like the UN, the OAU has mainly emphasised the conflict

management approach consisting of peace-keeping forces to reduce or eliminate violence rather than the desire to address the fundamental issues which divide the parties to the conflict. Stationing peace-keeping forces as in the Central African Republic (1996), Sudan (2004-2006, related to the Darfur conflict) or in Somalia (2007) can only be a temporary measure rather than a 'conflict resolution' approach. Whatever the case, OAU intervention through peace-keeping has been seriously bogged down by three fundamental principles: namely, non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, territorial integrity, and inviolability of the boundaries inherited from colonisation (Cohen 1996:2-3). In addition to these fundamental problems of principle, other problems continue to be a challenge to AU peace-keeping missions. Some of these obstacles include inadequate trained troops, funding, and political willpower among AU nations to effectively intervene in all of Africa's conflicts. From a conflict resolution standpoint, the critique by Feldman (2008:267) that 'without strong AU military forces capable of providing effective interventions, many African conflicts will either remain unresolved or depend on forces outside the continent to attempt to impose a non-African solution on them' is misplaced because military forces do not 'resolve conflict'; they only succeed in some cases to reduce the violence. Conflict resolution is more than making or keeping peace.

The international community

One can safely state that the international community was, toward the end of the 20th century, responsive to the African conflict situation if one considers the number of seminars and conferences organised around the theme of conflict management in Africa as a reliable indicator. The general tendency was for donor governments to support capacity-building in the continent to deal with its conflicts. Apart from the US, the leaders of this conflict management support were France and Britain – Western governments with colonial, economic and political stakes and the longest history of military-to-military relations in the continent (Cohen 1996:4). From the foregoing, it is evident that 'conflict resolution' in Africa has been colonial in some form whether it was designed and implemented by individuals, countries, groups of countries, institutions or organisations.

Conclusion

This article set out to engage the colonial factor in conflict and conflict resolution in Africa and to revisit the colonial dominance in Africa's post-coloniality. It argued that numerous conflicts in post-colonial Africa have their roots in colonialism and the failure of the de-colonisation process, and also that the effort to resolve African conflicts may not have been very successful (Zartman 2000:3) because of the colonial considerations of intervening powers and organisations and the approach in use. The article claims that the realities of Africa's colonial past that are very determinant on the continent's post-colonial situation are profoundly important not only for scholars of African conflicts, but also for practitioners who intervene in search of solutions. Attempts to resolve any of the conflicts must consequently not continue to ignore these underlying causes. Efforts to 'manage' the conflicts are not likely to produce lasting resolution as shown by the recurrent stalemated nature of Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Western Sahara, and British Southern Cameroons among many others. The 'new institutions and good governance' recipe advocated by some practitioners, is a limited prescription.

The typology of African conflicts highlighted in the article could surely be greatly enriched by a careful exploration of the various conflict types viewed from the perspective of the different issues in contention. Conflicts in each category will only be satisfactorily resolved when they are addressed in relation to their specific root causes. The point at issue is that there are different types of conflicts in Africa. Consequently, each conflict needs to be analysed on its own merits and addressed as a specific case rather than using the strait-jacket peace-keeping approach in every conflict as has been the case for decades. Whether the emphasis is in 1) forced assimilation, 2) repression, whereby armies have been imposed on conflicting parties, 3) avoidance to frustrate the aspirations of seemingly less powerful or less organised parties, or 4) suppression of overt physical violence, the interventions have been coercive, and coercive interventions are only impositions of the powerful. From the standpoint of this article, these different options externally imposed, usually by working behind

the backs or above the heads of one or more of the parties involved in conflict, have had colonial underpinnings, such as arrangements without the consent and cooperation of the parties or of some of them.

While the consensus on intervention in African conflicts has mainly favoured the conflict management approach along the specific lines of power and military force through peace-keeping in different conflict locations, the language used also appeared to be colonially cavalier as in the concept known as 'the development of conflict management approaches tailored to African circumstances …'. Although conflict situations are always specific, attempts to resolve the different conflicts ought to be about the desire to raise and address the fundamental issues that divide the parties to a conflict rather than the simple desire to reduce or eliminate violence as has been the case.

The foregoing are some of the complex and deep-rooted concerns which must be addressed in conflict resolution efforts in Africa. It will be difficult for the conflict resolution community to see its way around these concerns without a renewed openness to address Africa's colonial past. If the conflict resolution community is to have any chance of reaching durable outcomes to the conflicts in Africa, it has to look beyond the narrow assumptions on which it has usually operated. The policy of the blind eye is just as inadequate as imposing an army of occupation on a given people or nation in conflict, as has been the case in several conflicts in Africa. Equally, the AU idea to set up an African Peace Keeping Force as outlined by the UN-organised Millennium Summit in September 2000 can only produce colonial-style repressive measures rather than provide durable outcomes to Africa's conflicts. By envisaging peace-keeping forces in the 21st century, the AU leadership may be making the error of keeping Africa in the colonial mindset while the rest of the world advances in the democratic respect of dialogue and human and people's rights in the resolution of conflicts. The question remains whether there is the political will at the African Union, the United Nations, and among former colonial powers to move beyond the colonial-style desire to merely suppress or perhaps eliminate overt violence.

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