

**INTERROGATING THE SHIFTING THEORETICAL PARADIGMS OF
CONFLICTS IN AFRICA: THE ETHNIC AND RESOURCE REMITTANCE
THEORY OF CONFLICTS**

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Abstract

Africa unending conflicts reveal a tragic exposition of human tragedy. Historically speaking, Africa has been plagued by series of events, the adventurous voyages of European explorers to the tortuous era of trans Atlantic slavery, and the mindless partitioning in Berlin, to the cruelty of colonialism and the absurdity of her local rampaging elite, the continent has been a victim of its gift of nature, displayed by brutal predatory instinct of man. Indeed, an absolving and horrifying account of recurrent conflicts in Africa can be located in all these factors; yet, they have been given bolder attention and subjected to different theoretical explanations. The continuous outbursts of conflicts are immense and monumental, its impacts have led to the loss of about \$300b within the last three decades, and, it is unabated. How do we explain the great predators of history that have explored and exploited the continent? Could their actions be responsible to have laid the foundation of the present seeds of conflicts? In probing the phenomenon of conflicts, scholars have carefully researched and vigorously provided theoretical exposition of the compelling story of the various conflicts that have come to define Africa as a land of war. But, these theoretical paradigms are yet to fully comprehend the intrigues and dynamics of conflicts in Africa. The new theoretical paradigms are focusing more on the thesis of resources and remittances rather than the ethnic theorists may want us to believe. Perhaps, ethnic theoretical postulations in understudying the art and science of conflicts in Africa have largely ignore one timeless fact, the human vilest scramble for resources and the character of greed which produces grievances. Thus, this study explores the theoretical dimension to resource remittance, and argues forcefully that resource control, sharing and remittance theory can unlock the issues of conflicts in Africa. The study also intends to debunk the claim of ethnic theorists in explaining the issues of conflicts in Africa.

Key Words: Ethnicity, Resource Remittance, Conflicts, Civil Wars, Human Security.

Introduction

That 'Africa is a land of war' may not be an overstatement, at least, when viewed against the backdrops of recurring and unending conflicts ravaging and plundering the continent. Indeed, the need to stem the disturbing trend of conflicts in Africa has been one of the most central challenges of academic discourses in contemporary Africa (Egwu, 2006:406). This challenge has brought forth a wide range of theoretical postulations and efforts by scholars and students of peace and conflicts studies. There have emerged regional and international organizations, geared towards responding to the new facets of conflict in Africa. Situated within this context is the metamorphosis of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to African Union, with in all material particular, was poised to respond to emerging issues in global development and minimizes the threat to human development in which conflict and wars are major impediments .

Discourses on conflict in Africa have often been subsumed under the rubric of ethnicity. The ethnic theorists argue repeatedly that the roots of civil wars and armed conflicts are locatable in ethnic contestation, which has been further attached to identity politics (Nnoli, 1998:1-17, Kazah-Toure, 2001 1-5, Tshitereke, 2003: 7, Mamdani 2002: 22). Although this position seems to have been substantiated, to some extent, by recent spates of civil and armed conflicts that continually have ethnic colouration, yet, the ethnicity factor seems not only insufficient but also inadequate in accounting for all conflicts in Africa. At best, the theory of ethnicity as an explanation of conflict is akin to scratching the surface as different from digging or "unearthing the root". The basic argument here is that; at the base of conflicts in Africa is the resource (control/remittance) thesis. This thesis posits that most conflicts in post-cold war Africa are mostly resource-induced, and there is strong indication that behind the ethnic and nationalistic sloganeering lies the hidden greed for resource "curse" or cause. Collier and Bannor, 2003; Collier and Sambanis, 2005; Collier and Hoeffler, 2001, all showed the extent of resources-induced conflicts in Africa and other parts of the world. It points to the fact that resource remittance or control or sharing is central to the hitherto perceived ethnic conflicts that have ravaged Africa in the last five decades.

It is important to restate that the thrust of this paper is the need to shift emphasis of discourse on conflict in Africa from ethnicity theory to resource remittance theory. In other word, conflicts in post-cold war era are mainly induced by resources contestation and that its solution could only be meaningful within the democratization of resources based on equitable and just sharing formula with responsive governance.

Conceptualizing and Interrogating Ethnic and Resource Remittance Theory of Conflicts in Contemporary African States

In a comparative research study centering on the question of the causes of ethnic conflict, Okwudiba Nnoli (1998: 1) asked two pertinent questions: why is ethnic identity responsible for severe conflicts in Africa? And what are the causes, dynamics and consequence of ethnic conflicts? But a question arises: can all conflicts in Africa be explained through ethnic/identity contestation theory? The analysis of this poser is in what follows. But we need to clear the conceptual undergrowth inherent in this paper. These are the concepts of ethnic group and remittance.

Ethnic group refers to either a group of people sharing distinctive cultural traits in society or a social group or category of the population set apart and united by common ties of race, language, nationality, or culture. Specifically, ethnic groups are united by language, culture and historical origin (Nnoli, 1998: 11). They also have a social identity that rest upon cultural specific practices and a unique set of symbol and cosmology; they have a firm belief in common origin and shared culture and values (IDEA, 2000:91).

Resource remittance refers to a process of distributing the wealth or proceeds of natural resources among the nationalities that constitute the state. Resources remittance centers on issues of common wealth and its distribution (PEFS, 2004:1). In a state with an unjust system of distribution, politics of exclusion, social injustice, deprivation, human rights violation, oppression, intimidation and domination, the issue of resource remittance would always constitute a volatile contestation. The likelihood for the constituting groups to demand for equitable accommodation, distribution of power and resources; and the

struggle to bring about changes in the oppressive system by redressing power imbalances would always be at the fore of their politics.

In contemporary Africa state, ethnic politics and resources sharing or its contestation politics is closely related. In states where the institutions and structures of governance are weak and soft, to the point where access to public goods are exclusively structured on ethnic lines, the tension, struggle and conflict that may emerge is very likely to follow ethnic lines. Thus, unfair distribution of resources in an ethnically or heterogeneous state could promote friction and instability.

Collier and Hoeffler (2004) argue that that economic viability appears to be the predominant systematic explanation of rebellion and that grievances, such as inequality, political rights, ethnic polarization, and religious factionalisation explains, though weakly, the origins of civil conflict (Eltigani and Ateem, 2007: 6) Ali et al (2002) also points out a range of economic, political, ethno-cultural-religious and external factors that both trigger civil wars and increase their duration. Using models of the overall prevalence of civil wars in 161 countries for the period 1960-1999 Elbadawi and Sambanis (2000) concluded that the relatively higher prevalence of war in Africa is not due to the ethno-linguistic fragmentation of its countries, but rather to high levels of poverty, failed political institutions, and economic dependence on natural resources.

With the benefit of the foregoing analysis, it is evident that ethnicity could only be a factor in furtherance of war initiated by contestation or struggle over power and resources. Resource control only assume ethnic dimension when conflict burst out as evident in Nigeria where political exclusion and economic dislocation of minority groups has assumed contestation along ethnic lines etc. Thus, it is economic factors and contestation over resources that create ethnic conflicts. In essence therefore, at the base of ethnic conflicts is struggles or contestation over resources that later diffused and garnered ethno-nationalistic impulses.

Even though Collier (Collier 2007:42) counseled against obsession with history in explaining conflict in Africa, yet, we cannot stop from going for historical analysis for the main reason that the problem of resource remittance is directly associated with the nature of formation and operation of a states in Africa. For example, the faulty formation of the Nigerian state has been responsible for the rent-seeking character of the elite; thereby making politics and scramble for oil resources contentious and volatile. The scramble for oil resources is driven by primordial ethnic and self-center interest, often cemented by greed; resulting in grievance and ending in conflicts (Ayodele 2004: 67). In similar vein, the contestation for power to determine who gets and doesn't get (the allocation and distribution of the resource) has assumed frightening dimensions, which invariably adversely affected the socio-economic and political development of the minority groups, especially the Niger Delta region. From this perspective, it is pertinent to say, that the entrenched culture of greed and zero-sum contestation for power can be used to explain the issue of resources remittance and its attendant conflicts. The continued marginalization of the Niger Delta minorities in the power and resource equation has opened up a Pandora box of conflicts in the area. The centrality of resource remittance to continued minority ethnic conflicts in the Niger Delta was forcefully enunciated in the lamentations of Ken Saro-Wiwa in the following words:

Over the past thirty-two years Ogoni has offered Nigeria an estimated US thirty billion dollars and received NOTHING in return, except a blighted country-side, and atmosphere full of carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons, a land in which wildlife is unknown, a land of polluted streams and cereals, of rivers without fish; a land which is, in every sense of the term, an ecological disaster (Ken Saro Wiwa 2004:74).

Echoing the opinion is DSP Alameiyeseigha who argues thus:

Since 1958, when export of crude oil began in commercial quantities, Nigeria has realized well over ₦20 trillion as proceeds, yet in spite of this staggering figure, the Niger Delta area remains wretched. (Alameiyeseigha 2004:7).

The above expressions captured succinctly the core issue on the causes of conflicts in resource endowed area of the Niger Delta area. The Nigerian federalism in recent times

has been witnessing resurging ethnic nationalism, this is as a result of various contentious national questions that border on the feelings and aspirations of some groups who feel that the federation cannot provide the required platform of inclusion (Egwu 2003: 23). This has necessitated the demands for political restructuring, call for convocation of sovereign national conference and at the extreme secessionist agitation by groups that feel alienated. Indeed, the adoption of federalism as a political arrangement to cater for the heterogeneous and pluralistic nature of the Nigerian state would naturally be the best political strategic, at least from the pluralistic perspective but, the federation in practice have failed to offer platform of safety and allay the fears of the minority ethnic groups. The minorities of the Niger Delta have been subjected to different abuses from political marginalization to faulty resource distribution and environmental degradation. The region remains a pawn in the chessboard of elite manipulation and their predatory impulses. The federation is aptly described by Suberu (2002:10) as “hyper-centralized” and “a shell” insensitive to minority feelings and aspirations.

Resource Remittance and Limits of Ethnic Theorizing as Causes of Conflicts in Africa: Empirical Cases

Two classical cases of ethnic war have emerged in Africa which has erroneously made people to regard every war as ethnic-induced. Burundi and Rwanda war were classic in character and content. Rutake and Gahama (1998: 79) observe that it was erroneous to classify it as purely ethnic war as the political situation was characterized by intrigue, clientelism, nepotism and ethnicism. Kazah-Toure (2000: 4) finds similarity between the two warring Hutu and Tutsi as they share some historical identities. The Rwanda conflict was similar to the German extermination of the Jews as Hutu and Tutsi, the conflict claimed over seven hundred thousand lives with majority of them non combatant civilian (Kaufmann, 2007: 471). The case of Somalia defies ethnic theorist explanation. Somali is known to be relatively homogenous with a strongly cohesive cultural tradition, a common language, a common religion and a shared history of nationalism. Somalia today is a failed and collapsed state in the real sense of it (Rotberg, 2007: 451). Even though the conflicts is not essentially on resource conflict, it is not on ethnic either.

In Africa, there are many cases of resource based conflict that has assumed an ethnic coloration (see table 1). The Nigerian internal conflict represents one of those cases. While ethnic theorists have argued that the Biafra succession crisis of the late 60s and early 70s assumed ethnic dimension. Ken Saro Wiwa put a damning answer to its causes when he sincerely laid it to “oil war” (Saro-Wiwa 1995:68). Oil was the cause of major crisis in Nigeria at least, the renewed militancy in the Niger Delta might have been provoked by genuine grievances of exclusion and underdevelopment, the underlining factor has been contest for control of oil.

The Sierra Leone and Angola conflict also toed this line of argument. Angola’s two mineral resources, offshore oil and alluvial diamonds in the interior, have goaded both the MPLA government and UNITA rebels to engage in a protracted conflict for decades. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, the diversity of resources and their geographical spread have led to the development of warlords and a highly fragmented conflict between a weak government and numerous armed groups controlling resources in the interior. The case of “conflict diamond” which the United Nation’s General Assembly recognized as crucial factor in prolonging brutal wars in parts of Africa, and underscored that illegitimate diamonds contribute to underdevelopment and fuel brutal conflict in the continent. In Angola and Sierra Leone, conflict diamonds continue to fund the rebel groups; this necessitated the Kimberly Process which certifies legitimate diamond and outlaw conflict (Collier:2007 : 8)

Table 1: States with Recent Cases of Civil/Ethnic/Resource Based-Conflicts in Africa

| No | Countries | Nature of Conflicts | Major Causes | Status of the Conflicts | Characters/Parties |
|-----------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| 1 | Angola | Civil war | Resources and powers struggle | Hot Peace and Post-conflict Reconciliation | Internal and External Involvement (Western Countries) |
| 2 | Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) | Civil /Ethnic | Resources, poor sharing, dictatorship | On going peace process. (Partly resolve) | Internal and External Involvement (Rwanda, Zimbabwe) |
| 3 | Burundi | Civil/Ethnic | Power sharing and ethnic inequality and injustices | Partly resolved | Internal and external involvement (Rwanda) |
| 4 | Sierra Leone | Intra-state and civil | Resources and political contestation | Partly resolved | Intra State and external (Liberia) |
| 5 | Rwanda | Ethnic/civil | Political/power and inequality | Hot peace partially resolved | Internal and external involvement. (DRC) |
| 6 | Nigeria | Intra-State /Multi ethnic conflict | Resources/political marginalization | Management through internal mechanism | Internal /Recurring |
| 7 | Cote D'Ivoire | Intra state and ethnic | Power sharing/political factor | Partly resolved | Internal |
| 8 | Liberia | Civil war | Political/resources contestation | Partly resolved but hot peace | Internal and External involvement (Libya) |
| 9 | Somalia | Civil war | Political and poor governance | On-going | Collapsed and Failed state |
| 10 | Eritrea (Ethiopia) | Interstate | Territorial and Resources | Territorial and Resources Based and Recurring | |
| 11 | Ethiopia (Eritrea) | Inter state | Territorial and Resource- based | Same as above | |
| 12 | Zimbabwe | Intra-state | Political/power contest | On-going | Internal |
| 13 | Sudan | Civil/Ethnic | Resources/political marginalization | On-going | Internal |
| 14 | Uganda | Civil war | Political power contestation | On-going | Internal |
| 15 | Chad | Civil war | Political power | On-going | Internal |

| | | | | | |
|----|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|------------------------|----------|
| | | | contestation | | |
| 16 | Niger | Civil war | Political power contestation | On-going | Internal |
| 17 | Congo Brazzaville | Civil war | Political power contestation | Recurring and On-going | Internal |
| 18 | Morocco | Territorial war | Political Independence | Recurring | Internal |

Source: compiled by the author based on recent global reports on area of conflicts by Human Security Report.

Sometimes the contest on resource control could also follow the pattern of the usual emotional propaganda of identity politics. Disgruntled elite who find themselves out of the matrix of power calculation and feel highly dissatisfied could whip up identity related issues that would invoke passion for conflict. Disgruntled elite masking and championing rebel groups always aim at gaining access to natural resource and sell concessions to mineral rights in anticipation of subsequent control of the territory. The prolonged viability of UNITA in Angola and the RUF in Sierra Leone; the violent gangs of the Nigerian Delta; and the successful rebellions of Laurent Kabila in Zaire and of Denis Sassou-Nguesso in Congo Brazzaville, were all assisted by one or the other of these

Sudan: Conflict in Darfur Region

The conflict in Darfur, Sudan has again put the continent on the spot in world conflict. Much has been written on the conflict in Darfur following the eruption of the war in 2003, and various explanations were given on the causes of the conflict. Most of these explanations, however, confused between two types of conflicts, namely, “tribal” or “grassroots” conflicts and the current conflict, which is different in nature as well as in its dynamics. Many researchers have also portrayed the current conflict in Darfur region as an ethnic conflict between Africans and Arabs (O’Fahey, 2004). However, a number of reasons cast serious doubts on the validity of this view. Firstly, historically different ethnic groups in Darfur used to live peacefully and, ethnicity has only recently become a factor in tribal conflicts in the area (Eltigani and Ateem, 2007).

This ethnicization of tribal conflicts in Darfur region is a recent phenomenon (Seisi and Ateem, 2007). O’Fahy (2004) pointed out that ethnicization of the conflict has grown ever more rapidly since the coming to power by military coup in 1989 of the National Islamic Front (NIF) regime which is not only Islamist but also Arab-centric (ibid). While ecological degradation, movements of nomadic groups, overgrazing, competition for natural resources and ethnicity fanned the flames of conflicts and disputes between nomads and farmers in the region, the idea that these factors are the main causes of the present conflict in Darfur is misleading. Accordingly, Eltigani and Ateem, 2007 contends that grievances resulting from economic and political marginalization are major causes of the current conflict in Darfur. He argues that explaining the current conflict in Darfur in terms of competition for natural resources and ethnicity or in terms of rebel economic opportunity devoid of the grievances resulting from long-term marginalization of the region is flawed and confusing. In doing so, a strictly political and socio-economic problem is downsized and mischaracterized as a local resource-based ethnic conflict. This, without doubt, detracts from the ability to address the root causes of the conflict. In this respect, as part of the government’s persistent efforts to thwart political solutions to the conflict, which entails power and wealth sharing. The Government of Sudan has constantly maintained the view that the crisis in Darfur is an accumulation of ethnic disputes between the Arab and indigenous African population of the region over resources, mainly land and water. The regional and the international community have been misguided by such characterization of the conflict and therefore their response to the horrendous humanitarian situation was late. This position may be right but there is also a tactical admission on the issue of resources as fuelling the conflict.

The above submission invalidates the ethnic dimension as the causes of the current conflict in Darfur region; they are rooted in the structural inequality between the center of the country and the 'peripheral' areas, something that has been kept out of the limelight by many of the researchers who looked into the root causes of the conflict. To be more precise, it is rather the dynamics between the domination of the central elites, political and economic marginalization of the periphery that are the main culprits in the current conflict in Darfur.

Greed from Outside: The External Connection and the Second Tier- Scramble for Africa Resources

Not all the wars in Africa are fuelled and funded internally; there are external collaborators who always support rebel movements because of accruable economic consideration. This is what could be referred to as greed from outside Africa. When Kabila said with mere \$10,000 one can rent a crowd of disgruntled youth as soldiers (Collier 2007:21); it underlines the external sources of conflict which can be viewed from two perspectives: funding and arming of rebel. Historically, the ideological interest in the cold war era always polarized the nationalist movements. For instance, Savimbi was the an agent of American right-wing, conservative politicians and the CIA and he was supported to oust President Eduardo Dos Santos his leftist Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) who was equally backed by Cuba and some communist nation. Likewise Mobutu who was a powerful pro-Western figure supported by the United States, fearful that Zaire's resources would fall into the hands of the Soviet Union.

There is obvious connection between the conflict and foreign interests engaged in the exploitation of natural resources. All foreign governments involved in the conflict have used their political alliances with internal actors on all sides of the conflict to legitimize the systematic illegal exploitation of the DRC resources. Natural resource exploitation has become a key factor in determining military deployment, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence.

Concluding Remarks

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The study has focused on the ethnic and resource related theories of conflicts in Africa. It is important to note that the thrust or central issue in this study is that ethnic conflicts and resources conflicts are interrelated and interwoven. Even though it appear that outburst of conflicts in Africa always take an ethnic line notwithstanding the reasons for it outburst. The study followed the line of Collier and Hoeffler that economic factors or contestation over resources have been at the fore of most conflicts that assumed ethnic coloration.

This has also been demonstrated by rebel leaders whose primary interests lie not only on liberating his people but rather on controlling the resources available to the region. While they also posit that resource-based or endowed countries with poor structure of governance are most prone to conflict than countries without resources. They have also concluded that there is a correlation between poverty and conflict as poverty ridden countries would always be prone to conflict. In spite of the conflicts that has given Africa a bad name, the Burundi and Rwanda conflict could be said to be really fought along ethnic lines. The rest are contestation over resources or power and poor governance.

But from whatever angle one chooses to look at African conflict, one need to critically offer strategies that could minimize the incidence of conflicts in Africa. In this study it is established that poor countries fight over the issue of resources which later assumed ethnic lines. The need to redirect the process of resources extraction, allocation and distributions is imperative. How could this be done? These are options:

Ethnic and resource-based conflict can be managed through democratization of resource remittance and political reforms democratization, economic reform and reconstruction, are not possible. After security, important policy priorities should be building effective, accountable, and inclusive governance institutions, institutionalizing democracy at the national and local levels through free, fair, participatory, and inclusive elections.

Emphasizing and strengthening the legitimacy of the state that borders on proper checks and balances in the political system. Respect of the Constitution, ability of the Parliament and the judiciary to check on the executive, devolution of powers and ability of regional authorities (if any) to counterbalance central power... How inclusive is the political/administrative power? There must be equality of ethnic and religious representativeness of the government, equality of access to political activity, participative decision-making, fair recruitment in the administration and other public institution.

Respect for rule of law as an ideology of development, independence and effectiveness of the judiciary, equality of all citizens before the law, effective possibility to undertake

legal action against state decisions, enforcement of legal decisions Ability of major identity groups to mix together to reduce frequency of outbursts of racial/religious violence, perpetuation of negative stereotypes or mutual suspicions by collective memory and culture, and establishment and effectiveness of reconciliation mechanisms. Existence and effectiveness of mechanisms arbitrating between conflicting parties (wisemen, elders, ombudsmen), political manipulation of ethnic/identity differences, existence of regional fora for conflict prevention/resolution.

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