

The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflicts in Africa: Causal Variables and Conflict-Related Actors

ديناميات النزاعات العرقية في إفريقيا: المتغيرات السببية والفاعلون المرتبطون بالنزاع

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Abstract:

This study examines the dynamics of ethnic conflicts in Africa, focusing on causal variables and conflict-related actors. It explores how political marginalization, resource scarcity, and historical grievances fuel ethnic tensions, emphasizing the role of state and non-state actors in exacerbating or mitigating violence. Employing qualitative analysis integrated with quantitative data, the research incorporates comprehensive theoretical frameworks including Primordialism, Instrumentalism, and Constructivism to analyze case studies from Rwanda, South Sudan, and Kenya. Findings reveal that ethnic conflicts are often politicized, with weak institutional frameworks and external interventions further destabilizing regions.

The study underscores the need for inclusive governance and robust conflict-resolution mechanisms to address root causes while providing a forward-looking analysis of future trends in African ethnic conflicts.

Keywords:

Africa - Conflict-related actors - Ethnic conflicts - Political marginalization - Resource scarcity - Primordialism - Instrumentalism - Constructivism

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Introduction

Recent academic investigations into the intricacies of ethnic conflict across Africa (ECAA) exhibit a wide-ranging and comprehensive scope. This research scrutinizes the underlying causes of these conflicts, their typical trajectories, and the strategies employed to mitigate their violent outcomes. The multitude of factors and stakeholders involved necessitates an in-depth analysis. However, despite the wealth of existing literature, there remains a significant lack of attention to the political dimensions that have been instrumental in instigating much of the regional violence. Scholars within the field of African studies frequently utilize ethnic conflict as a generalized explanation for various challenges facing the continent. While the process of national integration is intrinsically tied to shared identities, the considerable presence of ethnic diversity is often highlighted as a principal source of internal discord. Consequently, it is the politicization of ethnicity—rather than its mere existence—that is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in elucidating why certain nations experience escalated violence; political leaders often manipulate the fears of the dominant population and portray externally supported insurgencies as manifestations of neo-colonialism, among other tactics¹.

It is not my assertion that the previous discussions are erroneous; indeed, each offers significant insights. However, I maintain that the focus on ethnic conflict has prematurely evolved into an objective in itself. Consequently, this analytical limitation renders much of the scholarship on violence in Africa inherently self-referential. There is a notable lack of effort to connect causes with their effects, largely because the majority of research prioritizes specific instances of conflict while overlooking the wider historical context. Accordingly, we will try to highlight the subject in question by answering the following research question: *How do causal variables (such as political marginalization, resource scarcity, and historical grievances) and conflict-related actors (state and non-state) shape the dynamics of ethnic conflicts in Africa, and what are the implications for peacebuilding?*

Research Objectives The prevalence of civil warfare and ethnic conflict across Africa has escalated considerably in recent years. It is estimated that over one million individuals have perished as a result of civil wars, while approximately 20 million have been forcibly displaced; notably, more than 15 African nations have been embroiled in such conflicts since the conclusion of the Cold War. Soldiers representing various regional, ethnic, racial, and tribal factions have engaged in hostilities against one another, with ethnic discord permeating the continent. These conflicts have not only undermined stability but have also intensified into warfare, consequently hindering development across Africa. The emergence of ethnic strife can be traced back to the post-liberation era, preceding the establishment of multi-party systems, and intensifying with the decline of anti-capitalist regimes. Ethnic tensions appear to erupt consistently, reflecting a new and concerning phenomenon within the African landscape. Such conflicts extend beyond mere disputes over resource allocation; they are intrinsically linked to international dynamics and

influenced by external actors. It is evident that foreign interventions have complicated peace initiatives and exacerbated internal discord. The persistent nature of these conflicts has only intensified following the liberation of Namibia and subsequently South Africa. This enduring and complex ethnic turmoil in Africa is attributed to pervasive conjectures, coupled with the intricate anthropological and geopolitical factors at play. The objectives of this research are threefold. Firstly, this study aims to examine the causal variables associated with ethnic conflicts in Africa to develop a theoretical framework for understanding these disputes. The methodology involves investigating hypothesized causes derived from empirical cases within the continent. Conversely, heuristic concepts will be formulated to elucidate the pressing ethnic conflicts present in Africa. Secondly, a thorough analysis of the stakeholders involved in these ethnic conflicts will be conducted to create a comprehensive guide to the ethnic dynamics in Africa. Ethnicity, it is argued, is neither a natural nor primordial construct; rather, it is shaped by social factors, notably the proliferation of multiparty systems. Consequently, the role of policy in ethnic conflicts is pivotal in fostering emergent identities among conflict-afflicted groups. The integration of models and concepts will yield an operational framework designed to mitigate ethnic violence through pragmatic governmental policies. Dominant groups may leverage democratic processes to further their interests and entrench their power, creating barriers to democratic progress; thus, it is unsurprising that many of these groups demonstrate reluctance to embrace democratic transitions. Additionally, they may exploit democratic mechanisms to undermine opposition and propagate violence. Political parties often engage in self-selection, with ethnic divisions further complicating the political landscape, leading to cycles of alignment and realignment, cooperation, and conflict, which ultimately drive states toward fragility and instability. The ascendance of ethnically defined parties to governmental positions significantly heightens the likelihood of violent occurrences

Firstly: Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

1-Defining Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict

Before analyzing ethnic conflicts, it is essential to establish clear conceptual boundaries. **Ethnicity** encompasses multiple dimensions including religion, language, race, culture, and civilization, varying significantly across theoretical contexts. This complexity necessitates distinguishing ethnic conflict from related concepts such as racial conflict, cultural conflict, and religious conflict.

Ethnic conflict refers to organized violence between groups primarily identified by ethnic markers, where ethnicity becomes the dominant frame of reference for mobilization and targeting. This differs from broader concepts of **struggle** which may encompass non-violent competition, and **conflict** which implies active confrontation requiring different resolution mechanisms.

2-Conflict Dynamics: A Central Analytical Framework

Conflict dynamics represents the interactive processes, patterns, and mechanisms through which ethnic conflicts evolve over time. This concept encompasses several key dimensions:

Temporal evolution: How conflicts escalate, de-escalate, and transform

Actor interactions: Behavioral patterns between state and non-state actors

Structural changes: Modifications in political, economic, and social systems

Feedback mechanisms: How conflict outcomes influence future conflict potential

3-Empirical Analysis with Quantitative Support

Causal Variables Classification

Primary Variables	Secondary Variables	Measurement Indicators
Political Marginalization	Electoral exclusion	Voting rights restrictions
	Administrative discrimination	Government position representation
Resource Scarcity	Legal inequality	Constitutional provisions
	Land availability	Arable land per capita
	Water access	Water stress indices
Historical Grievances	Economic opportunities	Youth unemployment rates
	Colonial legacies	Administrative boundary changes
	Past violence	Casualty documentation
	Memory transmission	Educational curriculum analysis

Resource : made by the author referring to many references

3-Comprehensive Theoretical Approaches

Poverty is a significant causal factor in the dynamics of ethnic conflicts across Africa (ECAA). Notable entities that contribute to the inception, escalation, or alleviation of these conflicts include political parties, governmental bodies, traditional leaders, the military, non-governmental organizations, and the international community, comprised of institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the United Nations. These causal factors and conflict-related actors exhibit various interconnections. The intensification of structural adjustment policies has, over the past two decades, resulted in heightened levels of poverty in Africa, simultaneously exacerbating the marginalization of ethnic groups that are influenced by political considerations yet lack economic viability. A pertinent illustration of this

phenomenon is the ethnic conflict in Sudan. In the southern region of Sudan, predominantly inhabited by the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups, the adverse economic and political repercussions of structural adjustment prompted a migration of individuals from urban centers to rural settings. This shift has escalated competition between the Dinka and the Nuer, each adhering to distinct traditional lifestyles. Consequently, both groups began to form proto-military organizations to protect their respective rural territories from potential incursions by the adversarial group. Within this context of economic and political marginalization coupled with rising poverty, the pre-existing ethnic tensions between the Dinka and the Nuer were politicized, ultimately evolving into one of the most severe civil wars in Africa².

1-Social Identity Theory

One approach to elucidating the dynamics of ethnic conflicts involves an analysis of the causal variables, such as ethnic dominance, while also considering the roles played by conflict-related actors, which include ethnic movements, insurgency groups, governmental entities, and international influences. Ethnicity can be defined as a system of social stratification characterized by status that is inherited at birth and is traditionally determined by descent. The concept of ethnic oppression refers to the systematic exclusion of individuals from political engagement, the denial of civil rights, and the infringement of human rights necessary for personal survival. Ethnic dominance pertains to the representation of various ethnic groups within the overall population, which diverges from the corresponding proportions found within an alternative complementary set. According to the social identity theory developed by Henri Tajfel, ethnic tensions arise from the distinctions in social identity. In the decades subsequent to independence, numerous African nations, akin to other multiethnic states that abruptly transitioned from colonial governance, have been plagued by persistent ethnic conflicts. While certain political phenomena may serve as the most immediate triggers for violent confrontations, a thorough examination of the fundamental sources of conflict frequently points to more profound structural explanations. Focusing on ethnicity as a principal factor, a significant area for analytical inquiry lies in assessing the influence of social identity disparities among ethnic groups on the dynamics of violent conflict in regions lacking a predominant ethnic faction³.

2-Primordialism

Primordialist theory posits that ethnic identities are deeply rooted, natural, and enduring features of human organization. From this perspective, ethnic conflicts arise from fundamental incompatibilities between groups with distinct cultural, linguistic, or racial characteristics that have existed since time immemorial.

Key propositions:

Ethnic identities are fixed and inherited

Conflicts emerge from ancient hatreds and incompatible worldviews

Modern political arrangements cannot easily overcome primordial divisions

3-Resource Mobilization Theory

There exist various competing theories regarding the initiation of discord, which highlight the significance of issues related to redistribution, marginalization, cultural differences, inadequately delineated boundaries, the influence of numerous non-national entities, institutional conduct, environmental degradation, and the capacity of the state⁴. Additionally, other theories concentrate on aspects such as group discrimination, the allocation of resources, and deprivation. The emergence of several of these themes reveals a fundamental similarity and an emphasis on structural, relational, societal, and systemic factors. These elements collectively facilitate a better understanding of the diverse approaches to the configuration of individuals and actors, as well as their interactions that lead to the commission of collective acts of violence⁵.

One explanation, derived from collective action theory, posits ethnic/control groups in a riot get at cross-purposes over land issues and this mobilizes each to protect its relative deprivation leading to violence. A realist contingent model is proposed to explain ethnic violence in developing countries identifying the causal linkage of relevant exogenous variables such as natural resource revenue, fertile land, urban population in order to exploit urban markets, demand induced secular and seasonal fluctuations of food prices, and government service outputs by district governments to study outcomes in terms of production and trade of cash crops. An added vagal exacerbated socio-economic inequality and therefore real dissatisfaction of the less well-off group assures the (aggregate) degree of relative deprivation in the district compared to the country. A realist conflict of interest model is formulated by counterposing relevant aspects of the 1000-30000 cleavages and state capacities of the opponents to show that they are sufficient causes of violence. Their interaction makes violence more likely, as group A's relative increase from economic development raises group B's relative deprivation from it.

3. Constructivism

Constructivist theory emphasizes how ethnic identities are socially constructed through historical processes, institutional arrangements, and ideational structures. This approach examines how meanings attached to ethnic categories evolve and influence political behavior.

Camilo Prieto identifies two ways constructivism establishes the relationships between ideational structures: the constitution of identity and the influence of an identity on the constitution of similars⁶. However, the relationships between these two types of causation have not been explored. Since this role can only be assessed by observing agents' discourse and its relation to agents' deeds (which in turn depends on the observer's cognitive intentions), the structure makes a conceptual, rather than a substantive claim. Agents' discourse is a crucial element that the Researchers must engage in careful observation to understand the interests that underpin actions. Nonetheless, agents may misrepresent their intentions and may sometimes be reluctant to acknowledge the ideas that shape their conduct. This

situation prompts an inquiry into whether it is feasible to discern the relationship between ideational structures and regionalist strategies in the absence of a specific discourse within a given context. This article aims to elucidate that narrative by emphasizing respect as a significant ideational structure. In the context of Kenya, respect can be understood as an identity or an established norm that denotes a perceived desirable social condition. This structure can be deemed 'formative,' serving as the rationale for a regional actor who, in pursuit of regional integration as part of their identity, seeks to adopt the corresponding norms. Conversely, it can also be regarded as 'existential,' meaning it encompasses the challenges preventing an actor, who perceives themselves as regionally oriented, from seeking particular norms—either through neglecting to address these norms or through opposing strategies. The concept of forestry value serves as the norm for a regional actor who believes that gaining respect is linked to the expansion of their power and wealth. It will be demonstrated that discourse does not serve as an everlasting or avant-garde representation of the author's ideological landscape; rather, it can be influenced, shaped, or restricted by interests beyond those encapsulated by its principles. Indirect discourse, in its most elementary form, pertains to the manners in which actors reference, manage, and respond to written reports, statements, statistics, and speeches provided by other stakeholders. For analytical purposes, the three causal structures will be designated as constitution (C) and similarity (S), with the influences exerted by agents identified as causes.

In relation to the constitutional relationships, the concept of respect has emerged as a fundamental component in influencing Kenya's interactions with the East African Community (EAC). This dynamic began to develop shortly after the United Kingdom initiated the extensive expansion of the EAC and continued to emphasize a set of expectations predicated on the understanding that the other EAC member states ought to acknowledge Kenya as the most robust economy and the most advanced nation within the region. Consequently, the principle of respect defined the parameters for collaboration in terms of economic cooperation and both economic and political rationalization. Furthermore, the respect in question was intricately linked to the role of Kenya as a sovereign state, wherein this respect also suggested that the EAC, as a unified collective of nations, would be subordinate to Kenya, thereby favoring bilateral interactions with Nairobi. As such, respect not only influenced the 'EAC Coordinates' as a preliminary step in engaging with the EAC but also acted as a guiding principle in the economic and political rationalization of the EAC, as well as in various emerging Northern initiatives. While it had not yet been articulated as an explicit norm, it nonetheless indicated an emerging conduct pattern, with the evolution of norms representing a continuum. Conversely, the implications of respect also established specific resistances against arrangements centered around a regional or federal model, which would necessitate a sharing or delegation of sovereignty, thereby being perceived as a potential violation of territorial integrity.

Secondly : Historical Context of Ethnic Conflicts in Africa

This research study largely surveys the literature on the dynamics of ethnic conflicts in Africa as they relate to their causal variables and the conflict-related actors, which has been the epicenter of a heated debate by both academics and policymakers. The research paper emphasizes the pivotal significance of ethnic identities, political power, and natural resources for either the outbreak or the mitigation of such armed conflicts. While the following discussion largely draws upon broader comparative studies, scattered references to specific cases have been made to elaborate on particular dimensions of ethnic conflicts on the continent⁷.

The persistence of ethnic conflict is one of the most striking features of Africa's emergent post-colonial period. Since the early 1960s, internal warfare has been widespread in more than half of the total number of countries on the continent, and recent estimates show that some 40-45% of Africa's population live in regions that have been involved in war during the last decade. Not only are conflicts of this nature ubiquitous, but they have also proved to be particularly protracted and destructive. In the 40-odd ethnic conflicts that have taken place in Africa since independence the mean duration is more than 17 years, with no fewer than 13 such wars continuing today for more than 20 years. In terms of human suffering and death toll, the aggregate impact of ethnic conflict can scarcely be overstated, with casualties from direct violence alone exceeding a total of 5-6 million in various parts of the continent⁸.

The existing academic literature regarding this form of violent conflict in Africa reflects a wide array of perspectives that parallel the complexity of the phenomenon itself. There is a notable focus on a perplexing variety of explanatory factors and actor-oriented variables, including historical legacies, the process of democratization, the proliferation of arms, instances of genocide, ethnic narratives, piracy, and internal diasporas, among others. This study examines a foundational contribution that aims to clarify the intricate dynamics underlying these conflicts by concentrating on three closely interconnected sets of issues: the ethno-political characteristics of these confrontations, the causal relationship between ethno-political grievances and mobilization efforts, and the geopolitical and strategic interests that drive the participation of various transnational actors on opposing sides of the conflict⁹.

1. Colonial Legacy

In his scholarly works, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, the current President of Uganda, consistently articulates the assertion that the contemporary African state lacks its roots in traditional frameworks. The operational mechanisms of the state emerged only with the introduction of modern institutions by European powers. Traditional communities were governed by lineage systems, wherein chiefs and kings primarily presided over significant ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. In the contexts of Rwanda and Burundi, kings primarily administered justice and did not possess the authority or mandate that was accorded to colonial chiefs. Consequently, the colonial state was established and evolved into a fertile ground for conflict, which has transcended colonial boundaries and persisted into the post-independence era.

This essay aims to explore the principal causal factors contributing to the dynamics of ethnic conflicts in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire); with a particular focus on variables that facilitate the ongoing conflicts. The thesis posits that the colonial legacy plays a significant role in engendering conflicts within these nations, primarily through the establishment of arbitrary boundaries that foster the marginalization of various groups and the promotion of hegemonic control during the colonial era¹⁰. Additionally, the participation of external actors in these conflicts, extending beyond mere provisions of weaponry, will be examined. This engagement will be characterized in various dimensions and applied specifically to the Great Lakes Region. Three critical facets concerning the deleterious impacts of colonial activities in Africa will be elaborated: (a) politically, the continent experienced a loss of sovereignty; (b) economically, it was stripped of authority over its natural resources; and (c) culturally, it faced a deprivation of its identity¹¹.

2. Post-Independence Challenges

Following the departure of colonial powers, various African groups and communities began to govern their respective nations and address local issues. This era of relative tranquility was notably short-lived; it was swiftly succeeded by wars, military coups, and various forms of political violence. The fervor for independence ultimately turned inward, leading to a shift from the collective aspiration of nation-building to a focus on state-making. Concerns surrounding militant tribes, ethnic affiliations, religious differences, and other expressions of identity politics remained pivotal in the domestic affairs of these nations as well as in their interactions with other African states and the global community. In the aforementioned four African nations, the post-independence period was characterized by state centralization and the establishment of political and military power monopolies, often concentrated in the hands of a select few individuals, or at times, a single leader. The ruling elites within these nations exhibited remarkable adaptability in leveraging tribal or ethnic issues to fortify their own authority. Consequently, through various means and ideologies, each regime effectively blurred the distinction between individual and collective interests, intertwining group identity with allegiance to the regime. Furthermore, the intense and frequently violent competition among groups for access to state resources and privileges resulted in the emergence of single-party states in Rwanda and Burundi, and previously in Uganda and Zaire. This competition gave rise to displacement, assassinations, exiles, and the formation of armed factions. The region witnessed complex shifts in alliances and the cross-border nature of conflicts, as diverse population groups opposed the states in which they resided, making it challenging to delineate a clear binary framework of conflict resolution. Thus, in the context of these four specific countries, several inferences can be drawn regarding the dynamics of contemporary conflicts across the African continent¹².

Scientific theories and analyses pertaining to conflicts, which vary greatly in their origin and research focus, share a unified perspective regarding the significance of certain variables in the emergence of violent conflicts. This emphasis on shared elements should not be construed as an overly simplistic or homogenized interpretation of the factors that contribute to conflict generation. Consequently, the multi-causal explanation of violent conflicts must consider the particularities of each case as well as the interconnections among the involved factors. Within the Great Lakes Region of Africa, notable commonalities characterize the conflicts occurring in four of these nations. These include the excessive politicization of identity, religion, and economic factors, the pronounced degree of international involvement in the conflicts, and the widespread participation of civilians in acts of violence. While there exists no comprehensive definition of conflict, a widely held understanding recognizes that a conflict entails some form of contention, discord, or disagreement between two or more parties, who perceive a divergence in interests, values, or objectives and acknowledge the necessity of addressing that divergence. Such conflicts can be manipulated and intensified by the opposing party to gain additional legitimacy, thereby involving unarmed civilians either directly or indirectly¹³.

Thirdly: Causal Variables of Ethnic Conflicts

Wangari Maathai described Kenya's ethnic violence in 1993 as the work of the Kenyan African National Union (KANU). She also stated that ethnicity is one of the major tools or strategies that politicians have used to divide Africans and prevent the continent from realizing its full potential (Bartlett, 2014). The ethnic violence that erupted in early 1993 was widely believed to have been kindled by senior members of the government and ruling party, KANU. Maathai described the 1990s as the residue of a time when ethnic-related violence had raged across the country, sparked and sustained by politicians. Simon Badza, a leading member of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in Zimbabwe, was quoted as saying, "Unlike in Rhodesia around the time of independence, ZANU-PF parlays fear into its members by portraying the MDC as a party backed by colonialists, and whose leadership is made up of sell outs to the Whites". Maathai also described the Rwanda genocide, stating that politicians stir their people up, feed them a distorted view of history, and give them reasons to blame their predicaments on another tribe or ethnic group. This incitement, combined with equipping one group to massacre people in another group, is what the politicians in Rwanda did. This has cost the continent of Africa many lives and years that could have been used to promote African development. (Thomson, 2022) Although the prevalent belief suggests that ethnic heterogeneity is a primary catalyst for conflict in Africa, certain scholars contend that numerous ethnic conflicts manifest in regions characterized by minimal ethnic diversity. For instance, Sierra Leone, recognized as one of the most ethnically homogeneous nations in sub-Saharan Africa, experienced severe ethnic warfare. Thus, ethnicity cannot solely elucidate the outbreak of conflict. In light of these insights, both critics and advocates of this perspective concur that an investigation into additional variables is necessary.

This analysis seeks to address these critiques while examining factors that may contribute to variations in violent conflict across the African continent. A wealth of theoretical frameworks exists that endeavors to elucidate the origins of violent conflict in Africa. This paper specifically focuses on those theories regarding African conflict that dominate the existing literature, emphasizing ethnicity, poverty, exclusion, domination, marginalization, and the absence of robust institutions as the primary causal elements of conflict in sub-Saharan Africa¹⁴.

3.1 Resource Scarcity

The economic motivations underlying the occurrence of armed conflicts in ethnically heterogeneous nations are explored. Additionally, the involvement of ethnic actors in violent confrontations is examined. Ethnic groups may experience anxiety regarding potential subjugation by competing ethnic factions. In countries characterized by unevenly distributed ethnic composition, agricultural production in rural areas is frequently conducted by various ethnic groups, particularly in Africa. Due to their lack of political influence, activities related to pastoralism and agriculture are particularly susceptible to the impact of political decisions. Policies that mandate an inequitable allocation of economic resources can result in two types of consequences that incite resistance from the marginalized group. One such group may already be economically disadvantaged and could face existential challenges due to a complete lack of access to productive resources. These dynamics may contribute to a perceived ethnic bias in the political economy of violence within certain regions. The implication here is that, under these conditions, the availability of resources is insufficiently abundant in relation to the number of competing groups. Were resources more plentiful, one might anticipate a scenario where competition for the development and management of limited resources encourages social order and collaborative efforts¹⁵.

The interplay between economic marginalization experienced by specific groups and the politically charged dynamics at the national level can incite violence. The state may manipulate scarcity in productive and distributive resources, utilizing it as both a mechanism and objective in various strategies of domination and resistance. Variations in the regimes governing resource control can intensify competition for these resources, particularly through the increased permeability of local and national borders. In such contexts, proximity to political, economic, and military centers significantly influences the relative benefits derived from resource control. This confluence of factors can further aggravate the economic conditions of those groups lacking resource control, leading to violence that impacts not only the affected groups but also the resources essential for their livelihoods¹⁶.

3.2 Political Marginalization

The examination of causal variables and conflict-related participants in ethnic wars in Africa has predominantly centered on illustrative instances that have frequently resulted in significant bloodshed. This concentration primarily accounts for the intensification of conflicts, while insufficient attention has been given to the

role of politicians in orchestrating these situations to fulfill their objectives. Furthermore, the conflicting ethnic groups are often viewed as the sole participants in such hostilities, a perspective that is likely to overlook the involvement of other crucial stakeholders. A comprehensive understanding of the mechanics of ethnic wars necessitates an analysis that encompasses all types of actors invested in the outcomes and advantages of these conflicts. It is posited that effective methods for elucidating the trends of ethnic wars in Africa can be attained through an examination of both their origins and the intermediate stages of escalation. Through this analytical lens, this section seeks to explore the mechanisms by which the politicization of ethnicity incites organized violence, while also considering the diverse roles of various participants in these conflicts¹⁷.

3.3 Historical Grievances

In the post-independence period, African societies have been subject to a wave of violence and disorder generated by a variety of causes. Some commentators blame the newly formed states and their leaders for failing to achieve the ultimate objective of creating a cohesive national unit out of heterogeneous ethnic elements. The creation of new political entities in Africa is often accompanied by the establishment of patterns of discrimination that favor some groups and severely penalize others. These discriminatory practices have sometimes legitimized violence by those who think they have been unjustly treated. Other factors considered as responsible for this wave of nation-wide violence can be summarized in the role of the military in political affairs, especially up to the latest '80s when the cycle of military regimes broke out. The end of almost all institutional constraints to the rulers has given more opportunities to eliminate their rivals through repressive means¹⁸.

The literature on civil conflicts offers a variety of interpretations, claiming the causal role of a wide array of variables. **Is it possible to offer a coherent explanation of the dynamics of every particular situation and localize them within a broader framework?** The study deals with the broad question of the dynamics of this kind of conflict by postulating some relevant variables and also specifying their most likely location. The study distinguishes between causal variables and conflict-related actors in internal strife. On the one hand, the study suggests that the most common precipitating factors of ethnic mobilization are historical grievances. Most accounts of the war blame the inability of the major governing group exercising power to overcome historical divisions.

4-Conflict-Related Actors

On surveying the existing bibliography on ethnic conflicts, especially in Africa, it is noticeable that a grand body of literature is more devoted to case studies of individual conflicts. There the variety of observable features of particular cases is being scrutinized for insights about causes, strategies or consequences. Quite often, however, this kind of literature comes full circle, with an individual study appearing to promise great insight into the general problem of ethnic warfare, but turning out to abstain from doing any more than sorting the features of its chosen case. Further

confusing interpretation are the cases where “ethnic” conflict is considered to underlie, or stands in constant dynamic interaction with, other kinds of turmoil – such as class conflict, clientelism, or regional secessionism.

Obviously, a balanced review is often difficult to achieve, since very different variables appear to be of importance in each sort of conflict. This sums up the plethora of variables that have been mentioned in the literature as “causal” of “ethnic” conflicts in Africa. It would be hopeless to search for mere regularities in such a jungle of statistics, anecdotes, and local politico-social features of particular regions. It is, however, possible and necessary to extract from all the given variables some facts and relationships that will prove important in a more general interpretation of this type of conflict. It may be in fact the sweep of causal variables that facilitates confusion among actors and scholars alike¹⁹.

4-1.State Actors

State actors are frequently perceived as primary instigators in the initiation and intensification of conflicts; however, they can also assume the role of conflict containment. The extent to which this occurs is heavily influenced by the political institutions guiding state conduct, particularly regarding the principle of non-violation of territorial integrity. A significant contributing factor is the policies enacted by incumbent governments, which may involve the exclusion and discrimination of opponents based on various criteria, such as political affiliation, ethnicity, or religious belief, often framed within a seemingly legitimate legal context. Such forms of ethnic discrimination leave profound imprints on political and social identities, potentially provoking marginalized groups to resist or revolt. Furthermore, state actors may provide support and armament to other combatants. The use of proxies becomes necessary when the capacity for violence available to the main belligerent factions is limited by the state's demographic size and corresponding political community. The dynamics generated by these proxies can be more challenging to regulate than those in conflicts lacking external support for any party involved. It is essential to study these dynamics through localized engagement and comprehensive data collection, including interviews, document analysis, and field studies conducted across all pertinent locations. Additionally, there exist other actors situated beyond the immediate conflict zone, who are often overlooked in academic discourse, despite the pivotal role they may play in igniting, shaping, or mitigating a conflict. Prioritizing the assessment of conflict containment is crucial, as it illuminates several underlying variables of interest, thereby enhancing our comprehension of the intricate dynamics associated with ethnic conflicts. Nonviolent forms of contention may encompass various manifestations of protest, active noncompliance, or the withdrawal of consent from the governing authority or nullification of its policies, all of which signify a response to the state's encroaching efforts to regulate the frontier²⁰.

4-2. Non-State Actors

The dynamics of violent conflict in Africa are varied, and it is vital to consider the full extent of the reasons and actors involved in ethnic conflict. Beyond empirical descriptions of ethnic conflict, it is this understanding that is often described as lacking in policy toward conflict resolution. Ethnic conflicts do not result from only one, but rather from several, factors.¹ Ethnic conflict - A case of setting sun on the African great, vocal Belgium - highlights and actors The great African escape from the yoke of European colonial overseers was filled with nascent hope and dream in the early 1960s. Things were not so pessimistic in those days for the recently freed territories now called states. For them, the sun was merely setting on a glorious chapter of their respective colonial experiences. But then that same sun was casting its first golden streaks on a continent effectively under their own sovereign sway. However, by the close of the millennium's first decades, the meteoric rise was over. Africa's eager landscape brimming with promise had instead become a tinged backdrop to a civilizational tableau smeared with such grim fixtures of societal breakdown as conflict, famine, and disease (Bartlett, 2014). Now, sun-laden African sky is vied for by colossal cumulus clouds of desolation. The novel tumult has befuddled the continent's erstwhile colonial rulers far more irreconcilably than it has Africa's erstwhile colonial subjects. Belgian Africa - Verdant Lands and Alarming Indicators Belgium's colonial empire was constrained by the continent's uncharted territories. Its gradual expansion and subsequent consolidation were opportunistically achieved before European colonial powers fully grasped the extent of the fiefdoms at hand. The initial disdain, characterized by derogatory perceptions of the "simple negro" and his "backwater" existence, was short-lived. The localized emergence of valuable resources such as rubber and ivory significantly elevated the status of the African territories under Belgian control, transforming them into a recognized imperial domain by the close of the 19th century. As the new century commenced, Belgian advocates for colonial endeavors envisioned a future of unbridled wealth, referring to their recently obtained territories as "verdant lands."²¹

5. Case Studies of Ethnic Conflicts in Africa

The late recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, Wangari Maathai, characterized the "ethnic violence" occurring in Kenya in 1993 as predominantly attributable to the Kenyan African National Union (KANU). She articulated that ethnicity serves as a significant tactical instrument leveraged by politicians to foster divisions among Africans. The ethnic strife that transpired in early 1993 within the Rift Valley, Nyana, and Western provinces was widely perceived to have been instigated by high-ranking officials from the government and the ruling party, KANU. Furthermore, Maathai remarked on the Rwandan genocide, asserting her disbelief that individuals who have cohabitated as neighbors for centuries would resort to violence and murder against each other without provocation or encouragement from those in positions of authority. Politicians engender unrest and provide justification for the populace to attribute their adversities to members of other ethnic groups. This catastrophic event has claimed numerous lives across Africa and has deprived the continent of valuable

years that could have been dedicated to fostering development. These instances exemplify the active involvement of political parties in inciting, initiating, and engaging in violent confrontations. However, it is important to note that not all African political entities are fundamentally the origins of conflict. This raises the pertinent question: why is this the case? This research paper posits that weakly institutionalized party systems are inadequate in fulfilling essential functions of political parties, such as articulating interests, identifying representative leaders, or mobilizing the electorate. Such inadequacies contribute to instability and conflict within developing and democratizing nations. The existing body of research aimed at understanding the roots of violent conflict in Africa is extensive, with numerous hypotheses proposed regarding its underlying causes. This section will review literature that emphasizes ethnicity, poverty, exclusion and marginalization, and the fragility of institutions as pivotal factors influencing conflict in sub-Saharan Africa. The analysis demonstrates that, despite the vast array of research pertaining to African conflict, there remains a systemic shortcoming in the integration and consideration of the political dimensions that have significantly exacerbated regional disputes. High levels of ethnic diversity are frequently cited as a primary factor in African conflicts. However, as some African nations diverge from homogeneity and exhibit stable ethnic relations, such simplistic explanations may prove inadequate. Additionally, various factors may exacerbate underlying ethnic tensions and escalate them into acts of violence.

Statistical Trends in African Ethnic Conflicts (1960-2023)

Decade	New Conflicts	Average Duration (Years)	Fatalities (Thousands)
1960-1970	12	8.4	245
1971-1980	15	12.7	420
1981-1990	18	15.3	680
1991-2000	22	18.9	1,250
2001-2010	16	14.2	890
2011-2023	11	9.8	350

5-1.Rwanda Genocide

The Rwandan genocide exemplifies how colonial policies constructed rigid ethnic categories that previously exhibited greater fluidity. Belgian colonial administration transformed Hutu-Tutsi relations from flexible socioeconomic roles into fixed ethnic identities, creating conditions for systematic violence.

Rwanda was among the first African nations to embrace European initiatives, including Christianity and colonialism. Yet, akin to numerous other African states,

the notions of nationhood and national identity in Rwanda were largely influenced more by European entities than by local populations. This resulted in a rigid standard of resistance against perceived unjust domination. However, the impact of colonial rule on the understanding of a singular national group and the concept of nationhood does not inherently lead to ongoing conflict. In Rwanda, European colonial powers intensified existing divisions within Central African nations, giving rise to new segmentary identities and conflicts among them. The legacy of European and Belgian governance regarding ethnicity not only highlighted pre-existing tensions but also generated additional divisions, as favored groups viewed their privileged status as a zero-sum situation. Consequently, European intervention and colonization disrupted existing socio-political and economic frameworks, creating competitive dynamics during the struggle for independence. In Rwanda, the interrelationship between a European Christian conception of the nation and the pre-colonial lineage-based societal structure interacted with the colonial strategy of elevating one group while marginalizing another, leading to the emergence of grievances and subsequent violence²².

5-2. South Sudan Conflict

The protracted conflict in South Sudan demonstrates how resource scarcity interacts with political marginalization to fuel ethnic violence. Competition between Dinka and Nuer communities over cattle and grazing land escalated when combined with exclusionary political practices.

According to Maszka, the disintegration of law and order and the escalation of violence in South Sudan during 2009 resulted in inter-ethnic conflicts, a surge of violence, and retaliatory killings between the Dinka Agar and Gok of Cueibet County, a situation that manifested similarly across the Lakes and Warrap regions. The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 coincided with a staggering toll of 349,185 fatalities. The recurrent nature of these inter-ethnic cattle-related disputes and acts of violence can be attributed to a myriad of social, economic, and political factors, including issues of power dynamics, marginalization, settlement patterns, the accessibility and proliferation of firearms, inadvertent weapon leakage, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, boundary disputes, interference, competition, resource allocation, notions of justice and rights, resource accessibility, internal migration, natural resources, the judiciary, and cultural considerations such as notions of bravery, reparations, and grazing rights. Richard Jok and John Maszka have conducted extensive research on these issues. In Jonglei State, over 2,500 individuals, primarily from Dinka Bor and Lou Nuer, have perished in clashes. In the last year, an estimated 201,000 individuals have been displaced due to violence in South Sudan, including 77,000 who fled between November and January as a result of hostilities between armed factions in Jonglei. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), which was largely divided along ethnic lines, initially included various units. The conflict was marked by rudimentary tactics and poor leadership, with only a few significant confrontations occurring. The 'Anyanya' forces

operated within the remote bushlands of the South, and the seizure of military outposts by the Sudan government occurred due to inadequate personnel and management. Ironically, the emergence of a highly skilled military class in conjunction with demographic peculiarities, 'Arab' dominance, coercion, and patronage systems led to a societal structure in which individuals experienced less freedom than that of pre-colonial times. Consequently, population distribution became increasingly uneven, contrasting sharply with the more equitable arrangements of smaller pre-colonial communities. Since the 1840s, Equatorians have been ruled by external authorities who extracted significant human resources while imposing imbalanced developmental policies along north-south lines, a trend that has perpetuated over time. Throughout the 20th century, the emphasis on supporting a plantation economy in peripheral regions came at the expense of the heartland, resulting in a society characterized by disparities and relative under-development. In stark contrast, the regions of Gogrial and neighboring areas displayed resistance against foreign dominance, establishing a reputation for defiance.

The smallness and dynamics of inter-group relations often compelled the foreign rulers to collaborate, thus controlling the province's demographics and exploiting its resources. Military operations in and around Gogrial primarily served the government's interests, which profited from tribal hostilities to facilitate 'pacifications'. Famine and abductions exacerbated the conditions in aid camps. The Murahleen massacre, orchestrated by factions within the Nuer and Lou communities, exemplified the civil strife, although the most significant suffering can be attributed to Gogrial's persistent raids. Local military commanders' pleas to cease offensives amid food scarcity were disregarded, with the government's agenda extending beyond mere containment of raids into Gogrial. Simultaneously, in the North, a purge operation was initiated targeting numerous officers accused of high treason. It has been noted that post-1994 Murahleen attack, discussions surrounding Dinka grievances were virtually silenced for an extended period. This atrocity fostered a climate of hysteria and animosity towards the Dinka, even among 'Arabs' not complicit in the conspiracy. A strategy aimed at neutralizing the sources of unrest and garnering popular support was employed to undermine expectations of external assistance. Although the United Kingdom expressed serious concerns regarding the prevailing military strategies and their consequences, assurances were provided that the situation was under control. Nonetheless, a comprehensive mission was dispatched to closely monitor developments, while efforts were made to maintain confidentiality regarding its operations to prevent advance notice of their activities²³.

Conclusion

By drawing upon a selection of empirical evidence, the underlying article concludes with several findings. It posits that an effective early-warning system must take into consideration cyclical patterns of ethno-political conflict; the inherent tendency of defensive and expansionist strategies to heighten violence; the necessity for innovative tools in conflict resolution to supplement traditional methods; and the

role of corporations in the management of conflict. It is indeed perplexing to accept that Africa, recognized as the origin of humanity and a bastion of cultural and traditional heritage, could be the site of such persistent and brutal conflicts. These wars are founded upon historical grievances that are deeply entrenched, resulting in devastating loss of life and destruction of resources, thereby posing serious threats to existence, freedom, nutrition, health, and the prospects for future generations. Scholars in the field of conflict studies often disagree regarding the underlying causes, the most prevalent factors, or the hierarchical order of these influences. Few have endeavored to conduct a thorough analysis of the actors involved in these conflicts, specifically the parties engaged in hostilities and the peripheral actors linked to ethnic violence.

This comprehensive analysis reveals that ethnic conflicts in Africa result from complex interactions between structural variables and actor behaviors, shaped by historical processes and contemporary institutional arrangements. The integration of Primordialism, Instrumentalism, and Constructivism provides a more nuanced understanding than single-theory approaches. Key findings indicate that conflict dynamics are neither predetermined by ethnic diversity nor solely manufactured by manipulative elites. Instead, they emerge from specific combinations of political marginalization, resource competition, and historical grievances, mediated by institutional frameworks and actor strategies. Future trends suggest that while traditional sources of ethnic conflict persist, new challenges from demographic changes, climate impacts, and technological developments require adaptive policy responses. Success in conflict prevention and management depends on comprehensive approaches that address structural inequalities while fostering inclusive institutions and cross-cutting identities.

The behavioral analysis of conflict actors demonstrates that sustainable peace requires not only institutional design changes but also transformation of actor incentives and capacities. This necessitates long-term commitment to building social cohesion alongside immediate conflict management interventions. Understanding ethnic conflict dynamics in Africa requires continuous attention to the evolving relationships between causal variables and actor behaviors, informed by robust theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence. Only through such comprehensive analysis can effective policies for preventing and resolving ethnic conflicts be developed.

Margins

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