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CIVIL WAR AND DEMOCRACY IN WEST AFRICA

Conflict Resolution, Elections and Justice in
Sierra Leone and Liberia

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Sierra Leone

All People's Congress (APC)
Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC)
Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)
Civil Defence Force (CDF)
Democratic Centre Party (DCP)
Interim National Election Commission (INEC)
Internal Security Unit (ISU)
Movement for Progress (MOP)
National Consultative Council (NCC)
National Election Watch (NEW)
National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC)
National Unity Party (NUP)
Peace and Liberation Party (PLP)
People's Democratic Party (PDP)
People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDc)
Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF)
Revolutionary United Front (RUF)
Revolutionary United Front Party (RUFp)
Sierra Leone Army (SLA)
Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS)
Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)

Sierra Leone Special Court (SLSC)
United Democratic Party (UDP)
United National People's Party (UNPP)
United Nations Mission for Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)

Liberia

Alliance for Peace and Democracy (APD)
American Colonization Society (ACS)
Coalition for the Transformation of Liberia (COTOL)
Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)
Congress for Democratic Change (CDC)
Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP)
Interim National Assembly (INA)
Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG)
Liberian Action Party (LAP)
Liberian Peace Council (LPC)
Liberian People's Party (LPP)
Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)
Liberty Party (LP)
Lofa Defence Force (LDF)
Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL)
National Committee for Elections Monitoring (NACEM)
National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL)
National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL)
 NPFL-Central Revolutionary Council (NPFL-CRC)
 Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL)
National Patriotic Party (NPP)
National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL)
People's Redemption Council (PRC)
Reformation Party (RP)
Special Election Commission (SECOM)
True Whig Party (TWP)
United Liberation Movement of Liberia (ULIMO)

ULIMO-K (Kromah)

ULIMO-J (Johnson)

United People's Party (UPP)

Unity Party (UP)

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Alliance de la Majorité Présidentielle (AMP)

Mouvement pour la Libération du Congo (MLC)

Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie (PPRD)

Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD)

Regroupement des Nationalistes Congolais (RENACO)

Angola

Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA)

União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA)

Mozambique

Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Frelimo)

Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (Renamo)

South Africa

African National Congress (ANC)

Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)

National Party (NP)

Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda

Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie et Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD-FDD)

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)

Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)

Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)

Côte d'Ivoire

Mouvement Patriotique du Grand Ouest (MPIGO)

Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix (MJP)

International and general terminology

ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group)

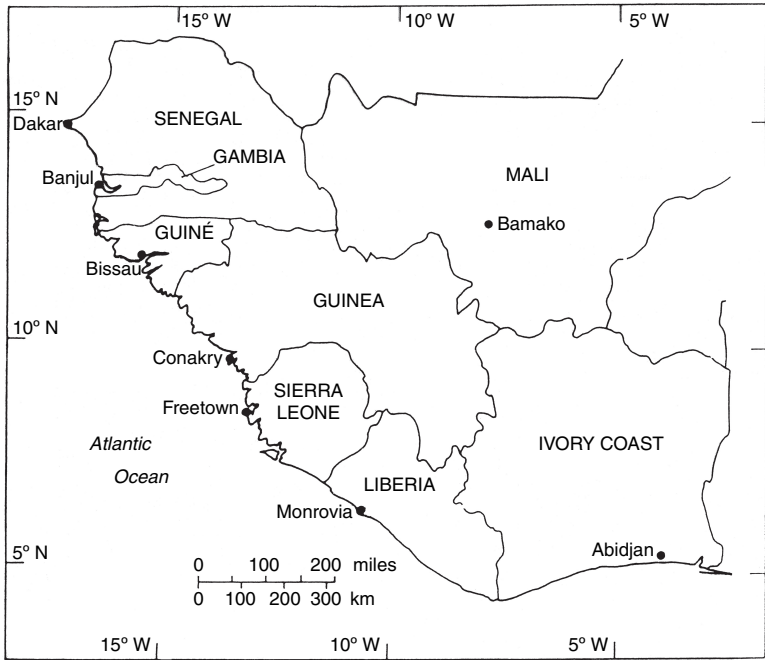
International Criminal Court (ICC)

International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

National Electoral Commission (NEC)

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

MAPS

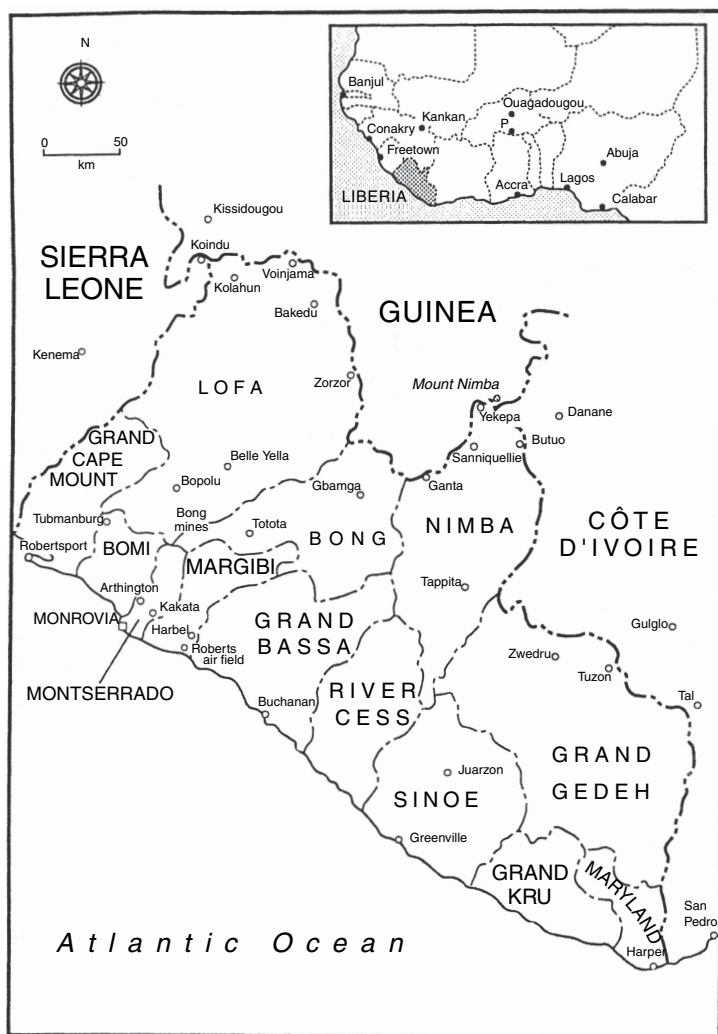


Map 1 West Africa: Mano River countries and environs





Map 3 Liberia with ethnic groups



Map 4 Liberia with county borders as of 1997



Map 5 Liberia with county borders as of 2005. (River Gee and Gbarpolu Counties have been carved out of the southern parts of Grand Gedeh and Lofa Counties)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Attempts at conflict resolution employing elections as the final arbiter have become increasingly common in post-Cold War Africa, as in the rest of the world. It would not be outlandish to assert that a peace process is now not considered cemented in place until elections have been conducted. Equally, the most crucial phase of the peace process is usually considered finished once the ballots have been counted. In contrast, the central endeavour of this book is to begin an explanation for the vastly differing outcomes of four post-conflict elections held in Sierra Leone or Liberia in the decade between 1996 and 2005. There were indeed considerable differences in candidates, particularly whether civilian or former military, and the capacity with which they were able to operate. There were then remarkable divergences in the results, the backgrounds of the winners and the margins of victory. However, the most important of the outcomes for this study, and for the people of Sierra Leone and Liberia, is a return to or the prevention of conflict. Again, these outcomes differ significantly. Further, the prevention of a return to conflict cannot simply be viewed in the form of short-term stability: it must also be seen in a progression from the political environment that led to the war, and hence in the probability of long-term peace. In other words, there is a marked difference between an election that leads to a hiatus in the conflict and one that delivers a dispensation less likely to return to civil war.

In order to begin an explanation of the divergences between these elections, it is clearly necessary to explore the context and pertinent theoretical standpoints. First, changing international views and actions concerning conflict resolution can be revealed by an analysis of the responses to a sequence of crises in Africa and beyond. Second, an exploration of the area of political terrain relating to conflict in Africa can lead to an understanding of the dynamics and causes of civil war, and the imperatives which drive combatants who will often be involved in the elections subsequent to the conflict, or at least in the crucial peace-building stages prior to elections. Finally, an examination of theories of electoral democracy on the African continent, both in largely conflict-free and in post-conflict circumstances, exposes the obstacles in the path of elections which follow conflict.

Recent trends in international conflict resolution

After the end of the Cold War, international emphasis was broadly redirected towards the mediation of conflicts, rather than the provision of military and diplomatic backing to one side or the other in the conflict. Although this can no longer be stated with the same conviction, cases akin to Angola – where the Soviet Union and Cuba provided arms and troops to prop up the MPLA regime's heavy and prolonged conflict with the UNITA rebels, the latter supported primarily by the USA and South Africa – were less likely to reoccur in the post-Cold War political climate. Mediation and elections were indeed a major feature of 1990s Angola, South Africa, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Further afield, Nicaragua, Cambodia and Bosnia were other high-profile examples of this strategy. With the removal of Cold War tensions and the promotion of peace-seeking inclusive agendas, there may also have been a realisation that barely any African rebellions had been militarily put down since the 1950s Mau Mau uprising in colonial Kenya.

However, a growing proliferation of civil wars in Africa coincided with the post-9/11 'War on Terror', and severely tested this international agenda. While mediation and negotiation are, officially at least, still given prominence and seen as the aim of any international effort,

there are other acts being played out. International powers, such as the USA, Britain and France, have not discontinued their vested interests and political agendas in Africa. The recent finds of large quantities of oil off the west coast have undoubtedly influenced Western thinking on that region in the last few years. At the same time, regionally important actors, such as Zimbabwe, Uganda, Rwanda, Angola, Nigeria, Liberia and Burkina Faso, have had considerable political and economic interest in conflicts in other states, or have intervened on a large scale on behalf of one set of combatants. However, and of most importance here, international approaches to conflict in the new millennium appear to have once more been re-aligned.

The stated post-Cold War aims of international bodies and Western states have always been liberal, including the promotion of multi-party elections, civil society, free-market economics, privatisation and deregulation, good governance and by extension good relations with the West, and now the humanitarian responsibility to protect.¹ However, at this point, two observations must be made concerning this statement. First, if the stated aims have been largely constant, we can then move on to examine the changes in the ideological tools, relevant to this study, used to achieve those objectives. Setting aside the many other aspects of the liberal agenda, and looking at the broad approaches to post-Cold War conflict resolution in Africa and Asia, one can begin to map the changes from the predominantly realist inclusive or arbitrational early thinking – in terms of power-brokers in a predominantly internal conflict, as opposed to states in the international arena – to the more liberal-minded methods, associated with human rights and individual justice, employed in more recent times. This is not a clear linear relationship over time, from the early international attempts in Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique and Somalia through to the later efforts in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Côte d'Ivoire, but there has nonetheless been a detectable shift, albeit sometimes significantly deflected by pragmatic considerations, by the immediacy of other events or by the leading international actors involved. Second, it must be questioned to what degree stated aims match real intentions, and whether these aims and intentions have actually changed over time. In all this, a distinction must be made between aggressive

international incursions into states, such as in Iraq in 1991 and 2003 and Afghanistan in 2002, and interventions into states that are already suffering conflict to which the intervening body is not directly party. However, some broad comparisons of intent are inevitable.

During most of the 1990s, stress was placed on negotiation, a realist notion that survived the end of the Cold War. Cambodia, Mozambique, Angola, Sierra Leone and Liberia, until the late 1990s or the turn of the millennium, were all approached from the point of view of persuading all groups to the table: to include rather than to exclude. This method even survived the endless rounds of talks during the first Liberian war, despite denouncements from critics who noted that the inclusive nature of this approach served merely to increase the number of combatants clamouring for a seat at the table, and hence for a share of the spoils. As late as the 1999 Lomé Accord, many complained that the Sierra Leonean government was coerced into negotiating and signing by the US and UK. The intervention in Somalia in 1992 can be seen as one event that bucked this trend, but that case can be viewed as an anomaly in 1990s discourse.

Treating the turn of the millennium as a fulcrum, one can detect the balance beginning to change. In Africa, the abject failure of the 1999 Lomé Accord and the hostage-taking of UN soldiers the following year inside Sierra Leone, led the British prime minister, Tony Blair, to send what was first announced as a force to protect expatriates. After skirmishes with the West Side Boys and Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels, the intervention developed into an extension of the Labour government's flagging 'ethical foreign policy' and more importantly, a deliberate attempt to remove the RUF from contention. In Angola, the UNITA rebels came under wide-ranging sanctions from 1998, their political offices were closed down and their leader, Jonas Savimbi, was branded a war criminal. Outside Africa, and in the aftermath of 9/11, US and UK military intervention reached new heights. The rediscovered and radical notion of regime change imposed from outside has been introduced, and put into effect in both Afghanistan and Iraq.²

The International Criminal Court (ICC) was constituted in 1998, ratified by a 60th state in 2002 and undertook its first case in 2006.

The Yugoslav and Rwandan tribunals began earlier, in the mid-1990s, but gained momentum through the first decade of the twenty-first century with several high-profile cases and a greater number of so far lower-profile convictions. Between 2002 and 2009, the hybrid international/national Sierra Leone Special Court (SLSC) tried and convicted eight former combatant leaders, and in 2003 indicted Liberia's incumbent president, Charles Taylor. Once Taylor was in exile, with a Nigerian assurance of safety, the US Congress effectively placed a bounty of US\$2 million on his head, and the USA exerted considerable and eventually successful diplomatic pressure first on Nigeria, then on both Liberia and Nigeria, for his extradition to the SLSC and ultimately The Hague, where he is now on trial. David Crane, former SLSC Chief Prosecutor, declared that 'this is the next generation of war-crimes tribunals'.³ Hybrid courts are now underway in many locations, most recently concerning Cambodia and Lebanon. Pointedly, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stated, in August 2004, that we should 'reject any amnesty for genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity... and ensure that no such amnesty previously granted is a bar to prosecution before any UN-created or assisted court'.⁴ Impunity, then, became the number-one enemy. From entirely different perspectives, Geoffrey Robertson asserted 'a millennial shift from appeasement to justice', while Adam Branch claimed an 'international law fundamentalism' to be now at work.⁵

In tandem with this change, a new tendency emerging from the liberal focus on human rights and humanitarian intervention has been identified: the effective and routine criminalisation of all involved in violent change. Writing about the new international focus on linkages between development and security, Mark Duffield asserts that 'the condemnation of all violent conduct by liberal peace means that the leaders of violent conflicts are automatically problematised'. This, he says, 'is regardless of whether they are guilty of war crimes, which many are, or defending themselves from dispossession or exploitation, which some may be'.⁶ Meanwhile, members of the elite who led countries in a downward spiral to war and who queue up to join new administrations are not vilified or sent to court, but seen as part of the solution. Those who were involved in the root causes of the war may

often be favoured over those who precipitated the conflict, ostensibly at least, to right some of the wrongs. In addition, imposing guilt on one or a few people risks avoiding many other causal factors for war crimes.⁷ Further still, there has been the added problem, for interlocutors with the rebels, of guilt by association. As a result of the 'terrorist organisation' lists drawn up by governments and the UN, mediators face being labelled as terrorist sympathisers or even prosecution.⁸ Despite the championing of violent insurgency, in places as diverse as South Africa, Uganda and Nicaragua, from various quarters during the Cold War, 'liberal peace has questioned violent conflict as a legitimate vehicle for social change'.⁹

Earlier and exceptional examples of criminalisation can be found in the US hunt for General Aideed in Somalia and the steadily increased pressure on Savimbi, but a pattern has only asserted itself in the new millennium. Virtually all post-Cold War rebel movements have been internationally vilified by the time of the peace-leading-to-elections deal, but the manner in which they were individually treated has changed enormously. Earlier deals between international bodies and rebels led to such events as the UN Trust Fund for the otherwise pilloried Renamo in Mozambique, the ubiquity of amnesties, and the absence anywhere of any ideas of post-conflict justice. South Africa in the mid-1990s was largely left to its own devices and set up the non-punitive Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). By the time of the 2002 Sierra Leonean elections, however, such ideas had been supplanted, on the part of often self-appointed arbiters, by a desire to isolate, judge or eliminate those considered to be responsible. The 'terrorist organisation' lists have included such significant movements as the Maoist rebels in Nepal and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. Interestingly, the sidelining of the UN, from the British unilateral intervention in Sierra Leone and the subsequent SLSC through to the USA-UK invasion of Iraq, has accompanied the liberalisation of international approaches to conflict.

Another important product of the liberal-justice approach has been the internalising of all responsibility for the causes of the war. Those who could be referred to as the secondary stakeholders to the violence, i.e. 'the suppliers, facilitators and cultural sustainers of inhumanity',

and those responsible for the impoverishing world-trade order and neo-colonial structures, are largely absolved.¹⁰ The theoretical discourse of conflict and the practical general criminalisation of combatants, for example, have placed all the blame for African civil wars on faults in African society and politics, and have marginalised arguments which would give some weight to international conditions and stresses. More directly, there is no suggestion that anyone from, for instance, the French administration that supported Rwanda's regime before the genocide will ever be arraigned in front of that tribunal, or that American officials involved with the Saddam Hussein government in the 1980s might be brought before an Iraqi war-crimes court. All ICC arrest warrants have so far been for Africans.

Some of the recent developments might suggest that we are seeing a return to *realpolitik*. Coalition governments, including most combatant entities, were installed in Liberia and the DRC, and in Burundi rebels took power through the ballot box. Another viewpoint could be that the liberal agenda continues unabated, particularly when looking at the cases of Taylor, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, where unprecedented talks stalled over the issue of ICC indictments, and Sudan. The shortcomings of the liberal agenda are, however, becoming clearer. UNITA has shuttled between outlaw status and indispensability over the past 20 years. Tellingly, this agenda has not been allowed much rein in Liberia, the DRC, Burundi and Côte d'Ivoire in the 2000s, due to the necessary presence of rebel groups and former governments in the political settlement, although the Liberian TRC has recommended prosecution for crimes against humanity, and the ICC is now active. Trials have not been set up in Israel/Palestine or Northern Ireland, and treaties protecting US citizens from prosecution have been forced on many smaller nations. It can still be said, however, that externally provoked negotiation has been to some extent supplanted by externally imposed justice. Where this has happened, the associated risks inherent in what is effectively an attempt to depoliticise conflict have sometimes undermined the credibility of political negotiations or of the peace itself.

After examining the changes in international ideological tools used to attain liberal aims, a second briefer issue concerns whether the

stated aims match the real ones. It may be questioned as to whether liberal aims have indeed superseded the realist state-interest model of Cold War relations.¹¹ In intervention terms, the overriding aims of the USA in Iraq in 1991 may not have been the liberation of Kuwait but instead related to the political and economic importance of oil, and the US desire, in the face of a threatening alternative regional hegemon, to demonstrate its military and political capability to the Middle East and the wider world.¹² In an early African example, an examination of the UN Congo operation in 1960 concluded that the peacekeeping force intervened in Congolese domestic politics, and was partial towards US interests.¹³ More recently, similar deductions have been made for the Somali intervention in 1992, and motives other than those stated, such as the reaffirmation of influence in francophone Africa, were noted for the French intervention in Rwanda in 1994. However, although there are many covert reasons for international intervention, this book concentrates on the overt rationale and methodology, which it is argued have the broader and more lasting effect on conflict in Africa.

Despite the shift in international thinking, a large part of the perceived solution to conflict, and a feature that is intended to put a cap on the conflict-resolution process, continues to be the multi-party election, organised in order to determine who will occupy the central seat of power in a resurrected state. This is despite the problems and expense encountered. Outside Africa, the difficulties in Cambodia and the de facto separation of Serb-led and Croat/Muslim-led Bosnia can be ranked against the relative stability of post-war Nicaragua and El Salvador. In Africa, conflicts requiring resolution unhappily continue to emerge. Alongside the four cases in this study, there have been relatively recent post-conflict elections in Guinea-Bissau, DRC and Burundi, which have at least provided temporary respite. The Ivorian conflict finally came to its electoral watershed, after six postponements of the polls following the 2005 peace deal, in late 2010. At the time of writing, it is unclear what outcome will emerge, but a close election has already delivered a contested outcome with two candidates claiming victory and the exertion of considerable outside pressure for the incumbent to step down.

However, even with today's tighter budgets and the mixed results, there is never any hesitation in looking for enough funds to stage the election. The involvement in internal peace processes of Western and other African governments has, indeed, remained high. The sheer scale of international interventions in conflict zones has been staggering. In the early post-Cold War era, Mozambique enjoyed large quantities of funding for its first post-conflict elections, and the whole process was effectively run by the UN. At the same time, the approach of international bodies and foreign governments was, ostensibly at least, to provide their 'good offices' in order that the country might solve its own problems. Even where the UN provided the infrastructure and resources, the political decisions remained with the national participants, and often with ex-combatants. Now, however, international interventions are increasingly conducted at the micro-level, where political decisions, such as the imposition of trials, are effectively made outside the country. Importantly, although post-Cold War modifications have had considerable ramifications on the candidates, results and outcomes of elections, and the Iraq war has in turn reinvigorated questions about intervention and sovereignty, the value of post-conflict elections *per se* has not been and is still not widely questioned.

Imperatives and trajectories in African conflict

The two parts of the domestic terrain with which this book is concerned are conflict and elections. To begin to explain the consequences of post-conflict elections, there is a need for some understanding of the causes of African civil conflicts and the characteristics of African combatants. The debate concerning civil wars in Africa is particularly splintered.

Much has been made of the recent purported transition from an old to a new style of warfare. During the 1980s, but particularly during the 1990s and into the new century, the emergence of wars and warriors with new rationales and methods has been frequently elaborated. In this apparently new style of war, gone are the conflicts primarily waged between states with a monopoly on the means of violence, or between states and organised groups with overtly political motives.¹⁴ The state

is now, in many wars, just one of the actors, and not necessarily the strongest. In what have been called 'new wars', low-intensity conflicts and privatised, informal, predatory or post-modern wars, other actors have included splintering rebel groups, factionalised national armies, ethnically based militias, 'sobels' (soldiers by day, rebels by night), private armies, security firms and foreign-mercenary outfits.¹⁵ Attributed reasons for conflict now extend far beyond the political, although, at the very least, a thin political rationale is still touted by the vast majority of combatants. Instead, motivations – particularly as with the passing of the Cold war era there is no longer support from the USA or Soviet Union – are now more often found in ethnic cleansing, looting, mining or trade, or a mixture of two or more of these imperatives. War is seen as returning to a pre-Westphalian format and even as an end in itself.¹⁶ The results of recent civil conflicts in Africa have certainly been catastrophic in terms of the misery of the civilian population, many of who have become targets for the combatants. In this section, the changes in the way conflict has been viewed are tracked, and a framework within which to view recent African civil wars, which separates the causes from the precipitants of such conflicts, is proposed.

The idea that these wars are actually new, however, is highly contentious. The notion that old wars were mostly dominated by geopolitical, ideological and collective goals, and that a substantial shift can be seen at the end of the Cold War, is open to question. Stathis Kalyvas argues that 'the end of the Cold War seems to have caused the demise of the conceptual categories used to interpret civil wars rather than a decline in the ideological motivations of civil wars at the mass level'.¹⁷ In motivational terms, large-scale looting, criminal activities and coercion have been recurring elements of most civil wars. In less recent conflicts typically viewed as ideological, looting was evident in the Russian and Chinese Revolutions and the Indonesian anti-colonial rebellion; and coercion widespread by leftist rebels in Latin America and the Vietcong in Vietnam. There was extreme violence in the Russian and Spanish civil wars and the consistent use of child soldiers in 'old ideological' conflicts such as in Afghanistan and Peru and in the form of young Red Guards during the Chinese Cultural Revolution.¹⁸

At the same time, in both new and old scenarios, voluntary motivations for joining movements have always been heavily influenced by local considerations. Although there are cases, such as the anti-colonial war against the occupying Portuguese in Guinea-Bissau in the 1960s and 1970s – which has been held up as an impressive example of controlled nationalist rebellion, under the astute leadership of Amílcar Cabral – and some victorious leaderships such as those in Russia and China, who went on systematically to implement their ideologies once in power, the distinction between new and old civil conflicts does not emerge with any clarity.¹⁹ Even Cabral noted that people do not fight purely for ideas, but for material benefits for themselves and their children, and struggled with commanders turning into ‘petty despots’.²⁰ The demise of the notion of ‘peasant wars’, which was in common use in the Cold War era and suggested a popular struggle against oppression, is equally interesting. If the reason for the current unpopularity of the term is that the level of violence towards the peasantry has increased, then this may only be a reflection of the ever more desperate struggles of peasants to obtain a viable livelihood.²¹ Probably the greatest change in conflict after the end of the Cold War has merely concerned sources of funding for states and insurgents.²² Avenues other than Cold War support, such as diamonds or oil or looting, must now be found.

One version of the ‘new war’ argument emphasises the importance of identity politics, in contrast to the geopolitical or ideological goals of earlier wars.²³ In tandem with the primacy given to identity in new wars, the strategic goal of these wars is often put forward as ‘population expulsion through various means’.²⁴ From an African-conflict perspective, selective population expulsion does not seem to be very important. It is certainly true that many African civilians are relegated to numbers on refugee and displaced registers, but their journey to this destination has rarely been caused by deliberate acts of ethnic cleansing. Rwanda and Burundi may be exceptions, although the huge pressure on land is clearly another crucial factor, and the question as to why conflict occurs now after centuries of peaceful coexistence is not addressed by a purely ethnic explanation to the conflict.²⁵ Liberia certainly had an ethnic rationale in both civil wars, but this logic was one

of many, and arguably became less important as the war continued. In many African conflicts, although ethnicity plays a part, the notion of emptying an area of a certain ethnic group does not often apply; it is more the case that an area would be emptied of everyone. If ethnicity is such a ready tool for mobilisation, then some African rebels have proved remarkably poor in using their 'ethnic capital'.²⁶

Another element of this analysis involves the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism. Mary Kaldor argues that 'though the new wars appear to be between different linguistic, religious or tribal groups, they can also be presented as wars in which those who represent particularistic identity politics cooperate in suppressing the values of civility and multiculturalism'.²⁷ This distinction does not sit easily in African affairs. Many African conflicts are not primarily based on ethnicity or religion, and conversely, civic nationalism of some sort has often existed in states with rich and open ethnic divergence. Kaldor's conclusions concerning the identity-politics basis for recent wars sit alongside her comments on the economic bases of violence. In Bosnia, she notes that 'the motivation of the paramilitary groups', who committed the worst atrocities, 'seems to have been largely economic, although there were clearly nationalist fanatics amongst them'. She quotes an estimate that 'around 80% of the paramilitaries were common criminals and 20% were fanatical nationalists', and states that 'the latter did not last long (fanaticism is bad for business)'.²⁸ This state of affairs would align more neatly with those who have concluded that it is greed which has driven recent conflicts.

A second version of the new-war thesis does indeed conceptualise recent civil conflicts in terms of the distinction between greed and grievance as driving factors. Here again, the change from grievance-based to greed-based wars is often, but not always, observed around the end of the Cold War.²⁹ These economic models of war are based on the theory of rational choice, where individuals face a calculation of risk versus material pay-off, or even between producing and appropriating – in other words a choice defined by profitability.³⁰ Conversely, any rebellion based on collective action against injustice is destined to suffer and founder on the problems of free riders and time-consistency or non-instant gratification.³¹

The conclusion here is that the main rationale for war does not centre on the discourse of 'group grievances beneath which inter-group hatred lurks'. Instead, economic agendas are seen to be 'central to understanding why civil wars start'.³² The demarcation of greed and grievance, however, has particular difficulties. Specifically in Paul Collier's statistical models, for instance, he proxies both a low 'amount of education in society' and the presence of 'lootable' resources with greed.³³ First, for example in Sierra Leone, the collapse of the previously lauded education system had much to do with the outbreak of violence. However, then to assume that those who chose or were persuaded, as opposed to those who were forced, to take up arms did not have a grievance against the incumbent government or local administration may be an assumption too far. Equally, the presence of resources does not necessarily indicate a reason to start fighting. The statistics may well highlight a prolongation of wars due to lootable resources, but this hardly explains the causes.³⁴ Why, indeed, are underlying economic conditions associated with a greed-based rather than grievance-based approach to conflict?³⁵ However, more importantly and on a more general level, one can take a number of these proxies and note that they could be credited to either camp; some actually are. Moreover, the motivations of looting and grievance are surely inextricably intertwined, and the search for 'universal law-like causalities' of conflict becomes more misleading than informative.³⁶

This is certainly not to say that there are no glaring economic motives driving rebel movements, particularly in Africa. The predatory nature of some rebel and government armed forces is well documented. It is plausible that recent and current African civil wars appear to be on the whole more economically motivated than in the past, because the African state and its military arm have become significantly weaker. The need then to create organised, disciplined and durable rebel forces becomes less necessary in order to propagate the war.³⁷ Equally, some of the less disciplined African rebels have emerged in areas, such as rural Liberia, where traditions of statehood are not well established.³⁸ It is, though, the assumption that the wars usually start primarily from the motives of greed that is questionable. If this were the case, we would surely have witnessed at least one rebel leader retiring with

the loot after a year or so, instead of risking all in a push to the capital, notwithstanding the appropriative actions of the leaders of several rebel groups once ensconced in government. Crucially, placing greed as the main causal factor relegates grievance or resistance to local or national oppression in all its forms to a minor role in conflicts, a hazardous supposition if one is considering how to resolve or prevent conflict and, in particular, to address its underlying causes.

Caution, though, must be observed when endeavouring to credit new warriors with an ideological approach similar to that purported by leaders in old conflicts. Paul Richards was not entirely convincing in his assertions of an egalitarian ideological agenda for the RUF in Sierra Leone.³⁹ He later clarified his point in his description of the RUF as a kind of accidental sect underpinned by practical egalitarianism, as opposed to the nepotism and birth order of Sierra Leonean society, and by messianic authority.⁴⁰ Importantly, although the political left and right may have virtually disappeared from conflict rhetoric, the prominence of other rallying calls – such as religious idioms, local cultural practices and marginalisation to mobilise people, tools that have always been used alongside more recognisable universalistic appeals – does not necessarily indicate a lack of ideology, but instead reflects perhaps a shift in global political terms.⁴¹ For example, amongst other perceptions, Renamo was sometimes seen as fighting for Mozambique's traditional and religious rural society, and UNITA in Angola as the champion of 'African' as opposed to Creole values.⁴² The idea, though, of 'social bandits', who redistribute and avenge, but refrain from predation of their own people is only partially applicable in such cases.⁴³

The brutality of recent conflicts has also been presented as something new, and has been put forward to support all the above arguments. In terms of its newness, however, it hardly needs to be said that civil wars have always been particularly cruel. However, recent violence against civilians has been explained as the result of deep-seated ethnic hatred, unchecked mercenary activity, anger generated by the gap between haves and have-nots, or the actions and leadership of a type of deranged rebel despot peculiar to Africa. There have indeed been a disproportionate number of traumatic conflicts in Africa. Rejecting