

ZONES OF CONFLICT IN AFRICA

Theories and Cases

Edited by
George Klay Kleh, Jr.
and Ida Rousseau Mukenge

PRÄGER

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Contents

Preface

vii

Part I: Background

1	Introduction <i>Ida Rousseau Mukenge</i>	3
2	Theories of Conflict and Conflict Resolution <i>George Klay Kieh, Jr.</i>	9
3	The Context of Civil Conflict in Africa <i>George Klay Kieh, Jr.</i>	21
4	Civil Conflicts in Africa: Patterns and Trends <i>George Klay Kieh, Jr.</i>	35

Part II: Case Studies

5	Civil Conflicts and Conflict Management in the Great Lakes Region of Africa <i>Musfiky Mwanasali</i>	53
6	Understanding the Liberian Civil War <i>Augustine Konneh</i>	73
7	Military Rule and Sociopolitical Crises in Nigeria <i>Pita Ogaba Agbese</i>	91

8	The Somali Civil War <i>George Klay Kieh, Jr.</i>	123
9	Democratic Consolidation and Civil Conflict in Zambia <i>Julius Ihonybere</i>	139
	Selected Bibliography	163
	Index	169
	About the Contributors	173

Preface

The idea for this book was conceived about four years ago, following a conference on Conflict and Conflict Resolution in Africa organized by the Morehouse Center for International Studies. The conference was funded by a seed grant from the Rockefeller Foundation awarded to Emory University, Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College, Morris Brown College, and Spelman College. The central purpose of the grant was to stimulate interest in African studies through conferences, lectures, research, seminars, and teaching. Since then, the original plan has undergone changes: Some areas have been deleted, while others have been added. The changes were dictated by the ever-fluctuating dynamics of the “Zones of Conflict in Africa.” Among the additions are the chapters entitled “Theories of Conflict and Conflict Resolution,” “The Context of Civil Conflicts in Africa” “Civil Conflicts in Africa: Patterns and Trends,” and “Conflict and Conflict Management in the Great Lakes Region of Africa.”

Clearly, conflict is an inevitable mainstay of human societies and their interactions. Nevertheless, conflicts vary in their form and impact, as well as in other characteristics. Thus, a distinction can be drawn between routine and non-routine conflicts. The former revolve around ordinary disagreements that are inherent in daily human interactions. Significantly, such conflicts are not deleterious to the body politic and its people. Conversely, non-routine conflicts are those that have a more serious, adverse, and at times catastrophic impact on the peace and stability of the polity and its citizens. This book is concerned with the latter category of civil conflict.

Various institutions and individuals have contributed to this book. First, we would like to express our gratitude to the Rockefeller Foundation for providing

the seed grant that made most of the research for this book possible. In addition, we are grateful to Morehouse College for providing logistical support. Special thanks go to Ms. Livoria Hill, former Administrative Assistant at the Morehouse Center for International Studies, for providing administrative assistance. We would like to thank Dr. Edna Bay and Dr. Kristin Mann for providing encouragement and serving as liaisons with the Rockefeller Foundation. We appreciate the support, encouragement, and patience of Michael Hermann, Politics and Legal Studies Editor at Greenwood Publishing Group. Last but not least, we are grateful to the contributors to the project and the book. Without their hard work, this book would not have been possible.

PART I BACKGROUND

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1 Introduction

Ida Rousseau Mukenge

OVERVIEW

This book addresses the pervasive question of civil conflict in Africa. By civil conflict, we mean disagreement between domestic actors—government and private groups—over issues that may be economic, political, social, cultural, or any combination of these. Starting from this basic conceptual framework, the contributors analyze cases of civil conflict in Africa that have profound ramifications for peace and stability. The research represented in these case studies offers insights for prevention and management, increasing our understanding of the nature of divided societies in Africa but with implications for other parts of the world.

Conflict must be understood as potentially endemic in all political systems. There is clearly a direct connection between the escalation of civil conflict, the retardation of socioeconomic development, and the exacerbation of human misery. While the cases presented here are specific to Africa, they speak to a more generalized phenomenon; likewise, prevention or resolution of conflict in the African context may suggest conflict prevention and/or resolution in other contexts. For example, in the past, ethnicity and ethnic conflicts have been conceptualized as “tribal” and viewed as peculiarities of the African context. Recent ethnic pogroms in Eastern Europe and Central Asia as well as Africa, however, have generated a special literature that looks at the manifestations of ethnicity as a global phenomenon that is not limited to Africa and is not necessarily confined to state boundaries.

An exploration of historical circumstances is essential to explaining the con-

text of civil conflict in Africa. Each of the contributors to this volume introduces the relevant history of the situation in question. As the contributors pursue the catalysts of civil conflict in Africa through the case studies, they also seek to balance the internal factors with the external ones that are beyond the control of national leaders. This collection represents a step toward comprehensive and integrated research on civil conflict in Africa.¹

PART I: BACKGROUND

Part I consists of three chapters that set the background for the book: theoretical, contextual, and empirical. In chapter 2, George Klay Kieh, Jr., tackles the dual task of explaining conflict for research and for policy applications. He reviews the theoretical literature to examine three principal frameworks used to explain conflict. The *primordial theory* highlights ethnic cleavages. Previously used to explain African conflict alone, it has found recent utility in European and Asian cases. The *class theory* is rooted in classical Marxist analysis. It tends to focus on conflict between subordinate and superordinate groups defined by their control of scarce economic resources and collateral political power. The *eclectic theory* is a composite that seeks to bring out the complexity of contemporary civil conflict. This theory recognizes that civil conflict is rarely over a single issue.

Next, Kieh examines three types of theories of conflict resolution. *Peacemaking theories* involve negotiation and mediation as major processes. The success of these processes depends on both material (money, weapons, manpower) and relational (interpersonal skills, allies, goodwill) resources that may not always be readily available or equitably distributed among the concerned parties. *Peacekeeping* takes several forms: The most common is traditional peacekeeping with military force where a neutral international actor intervenes to prevent the outbreak of war, while peace observation requires a cease-fire that is monitored by neutral observers. *Humanitarian assistance theory* focuses on the provision of essentials by a third party for the innocent victims of conflict. *Peace enforcement* relies on the third party's actual coercion of compliance from all parties to the conflict. Kieh concludes chapter 2 with recommendations for refining the existing theories to make them more useful for contemporary situations.

The context within which civil conflict takes place in Africa is also the context within which peace is pursued. In chapter 3, Kieh describes the general context of civil conflict in Africa. It is beset with multiple, complex, exogenous, and endogenous forces. Some of those forces include ethnic exclusion and favoritism during the colonial period; postcolonial domination of key government sectors by select groups; one-party governments after independence; military takeovers, coups, counter-coups, and consequent unstable governments; government domination of the public sphere with little or no private sector development; and the subordination of economic development to the acquisition and maintenance of political power. When the state dominates the public sphere of civil society,

competition for power and scarce resources takes place in the political arena. The private sector is also attenuated in the postcolonial era, and therefore left out of much of the competition characteristic of free society. This further magnifies the importance of the political arena. Thus, obstacles to democracy may emanate from the persistence of practices that date to colonial times, rather than from the absence of democratic institutions as such.

Each situation of civil conflict is unique; there is rarely the same configuration or even the same combination of forces, but the overall effects exhibit common patterns. Patterns and trends are the subject of Kieh's chapter 4. Civil conflict in some form is a phenomenon that can neither be ignored nor avoided in any discussion of modern Africa. Its most obvious manifestations have been seen in the recent, and unresolved as of this writing, violent clashes in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), none of which is a self-contained instance of a discrete conflict situation. These situations involve crosscutting ethnic alliances compounded by political alliances. Thus, fallout from Liberia is felt in Sierra Leone; from Rwanda/Burundi in DRC; and from DRC in Uganda, Namibia, Zambia, and Angola. There is also fallout from situations in Somalia, Sudan, and Kenya that on initial examination may seem unrelated.

Ethnic, religious, and regional differences often overlap, creating multiple layers of cleavage. These multiple layers explain the apparent pervasiveness of ethnicity as discussed by Augustine Konneh in chapter 6 on Liberia. Military rule can also be a proxy for ethnic dominance. Pita Ogaba Agbese in chapter 7 and Kieh in chapter 8 discuss the complexities of this factor in Nigeria and Somalia respectively. Julius Ihonvbere's chapter 9 on Zambia addresses the challenges that ethnic issues pose to democratic consolidation and pluralistic governance. Ethnicity as a source of conflict is also exacerbated by other aspects such as those associated with social and psychological factors. As Musifiky Mwanasali explains in chapter 5 on the Great Lakes region of Africa, dehumanization, or demonization in its extreme form, is often used to justify acts against "them" that otherwise would not be possible. The case studies that constitute Part II demonstrate these patterns and trends. They also raise questions that push the reader beyond ethnicity for explanations.

PART II: CASE STUDIES

Consistent with the conceptual and methodological orientations set forth in Part I, Musifiky Mwanasali in chapter 5 begins his analysis of the African Great Lakes situations with historical background to the civil conflict that seems to have infected this region. He highlights the sociocultural, political, and economic factors leading up to the current crises in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This chapter examines the manifestations of both internal and external forces as they contribute to the chronic instability and violence that have overburdened humanitarian initiatives in this

part of the world. Mwanasali completes his analysis with an assessment of the conflict management efforts and the prospects for the future of this region. He addresses political instability and modes of governance, focusing on issues related to systematic efforts to engender participation and definitions of citizenship. One may also generalize from the concluding remarks to other countries in Africa, at least as a warning, if not as a prediction.

Augustine Konneh's chapter on the Liberian civil war challenges us to look beyond popular political wisdom disseminated through the Western press. Such notions, however, are not limited to the media. Western scholarship typically overemphasizes the "tribal" factor in African civil wars and downplays the role of the state in creating the structural conditions that lead to such violent outbreaks. Konneh uses the war in Liberia to argue for consideration of a "multiplicity of interrelated factors" that cause civil conflict. The historical overview of Liberia sets aside long-held notions about intergroup relations, especially between Settler and non-Settler citizens, and about the role of foreign capital. The list of direct causes of the conflict includes economic stagnation, nepotism, student/labor unrest, the activities of political opposition groups, society opening up to the hinterland, absolute economic decline, and excessive spending on the Organization for African Unity (OAU) summit. Along with an account of the April 12, 1980, coup and its aftermath, Konneh reviews the role of ethnic identity in the Liberian civil conflict. His use of political economy to launch the analysis of ethnicity corrects many common misperceptions that place ethnic alliances over all others. This analysis demonstrates how economic activities, religious practices, and outside forces can exacerbate hostilities around ethnic politics. The chapter concludes with a statement of the challenges facing Liberia and an inventory of goals for democracy. These political, social, and economic challenges and goals are typical of the Liberian case but are not limited to it, as other chapters in this volume confirm.

Pita Ogaba Agbese's "Military Rule and Sociopolitical Crises in Nigeria," chapter 7, begins with a critique of Nigeria's most recent military governments. He attributes Nigeria's economic and political crises directly to the "decades of corruption and maladministration" that have characterized the military regimes. Professor Agbese notes that rather than bringing order and stability, military governments can exacerbate other problems of civil conflict in addition to harming the military institution itself. When the military is politicized, it leads to polarization within the military. As the number of roles the military appropriates for itself increases, and politics become more militarized, a culture of violence is created. This hinders the process of democratization because the use of force is too easily resorted to where dialogue and negotiation could otherwise be used. Why and how did the military in Nigeria disengage from politics? Agbese advances an analysis of the 1993 turnover by Babangida and its impact on the country. Among the explanations considered are the following: that the military takeover was temporary; and that it had accomplished its goals of bringing nonpoliticized stability, cleaning up the government, and reducing the role of

the wealthy in government. He goes on to examine factors such as prodemocracy groups, ethnicity, and regionalism; ideological factors; special interest groups' concerns about unmasking corruption; and grassroots support, as they figured in the course of events surrounding the 1993 presidential elections. Agbese ends chapter 7 with a prospectus for solving Nigeria's political impasse and assuring a sound foundation for democracy. His concluding remarks suggest that a major step in this direction is the focus on a "concrete political and economic agenda," rather than just "removing the president from power."

George Kieh scrutinizes the question of primordial ethnic hostilities again in chapter 8, "The Somali Civil War." His critique of the international community's response to the crisis in Somalia accentuates the inadequacy of ethnic analyses alone for explaining the war. Kieh's central argument is that "the Somali civil war must be situated within the broader context of social formations and the attendant relations of production and distribution." From this perspective he undertakes a threefold task: (1) to delineate the political, economic, and social forces behind the civil war; (2) to assess the impact of existing efforts to resolve the conflict; and (3) to identify some essential steps toward conflict resolution in this case. In order to understand the factors that brought on the civil war, one must also understand the historical context. This Kieh accomplishes with a concise account of the precolonial and postcolonial relations on the Somali peninsula involving Somali clans, the Arabs, various European powers, and Ethiopia. The United States of America and the Soviet Union among others figure in the 1969 military coup-generated regime of Siad Barre and Somalia's consequent crises of underdevelopment. Kieh's analysis of the civil war reaffirms Agbese's observations on the serious limitations and handicapping force of military regimes. Also, Kieh demonstrates the futility of the attempts to resolve conflict and restore order that were sidetracked by actions in response to outside vested interests, rather than those of Somalia itself. Kieh's prescriptions for resolution and rebuilding, like those of the other writers, involve local, national, and international efforts.

The final case study in this volume is Julius Ihonvbere's "Democratic Consolidation and Civil Conflict in Zambia." He begins his study of Zambia by taking a closer look at both past and present pro-democracy forces in other locations on the continent. Armed with a conceptual framework for arguing the distinction between *political liberalization* and *democratization*, Ihonvbere first traces the origins of the *new* liberalization and the crisis of democratic consolidation in Africa. The challenges to consolidation and democratization that he cites echo those of Konneh, Kieh, Agbese, and Mwanasali. He gives special attention to some fractured relations, elite-mass, urban-rural, and among various religious, regional, and ethnic groups that militate against collective action by the people. Ihonvbere describes the complex ethnic element, compounded by religious considerations, various types of patronage, and the rising expectations of citizens. The case of Zambia since Frederick Chiluba presents an opportunity to take a more clinical look at rebuilding processes and how internal and external

forces contribute to failed democratic consolidation. It is fitting to conclude Part II of this volume with Ihonvbere's list of conditions for conflict management in Zambia, which he calls "a typical example of the challenge, even failure, of the liberal democratic enterprise." He reminds us of the need for fundamental changes in the actions of government, citizens, and the world community.

NOTE

1. See, for example, Eghosa E. Osaghae, "Conflict Research in Africa," *International Journal of World Peace* 16 (December 1999): 53–72.

2 Theories of Conflict and Conflict Resolution

George Klay Kieh, Jr.

INTRODUCTION

The precipitous increase in the incidence of civil conflicts has occasioned two major interrelated challenges for academics, policymakers, and citizens at large. The first challenge is the daunting task of deciphering the complex milieu of conflict precipitants. In other words, a major task involves making the determination, to paraphrase Ted Robert Gurr, as to “Why [People] Rebel.”¹

The second conundrum concerns both the development and the application of modalities for resolving conflict. The issue is what model or models are appropriate for resolving civil conflicts?

Against this background, this chapter will examine some of the major theoretical frameworks that are used in the scholarly literature to explain both the root causes and the peaceful resolution of civil conflicts. These theoretical frameworks are employed in the various case studies.

THEORIES ON THE ROOTS OF CIVIL CONFLICTS

Drawing from the scholarly literature, three major theoretical frameworks on the causes of civil conflicts can be identified: the primordial, class, and eclectic theories.

The Primordial Theory

The centerpiece of the theory is primordialism and its associated loyalties and ties. Clifford Geertz provides an excellent description of these ties:

By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the “givens”...of social existence; immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language...and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering coerciveness in and of themselves.²

Based on this premise, the theory has several characteristics. Primordial groups—clan, sub-clan, ethnic group, racial group—are the principal actors in a polity, around which cultural, economic, political, and social life is organized. Accordingly, collective action by each primordial group, including perceptions, beliefs, and expectations, is structured by ethnocultural peculiarities. Also, within the inter-primordial relational architecture there are hegemonic and subaltern groups. The former controls the levers of political and/or economic power.

The hegemonic and subordinate primordial groups have their respective agendas, which may run the gamut from a desire for political power to an interest in acquiring and retaining sizable shares of the available material resources. In the pursuance of primordially based agendas, alliances may be formed between the hegemonic group and a subordinate group or groups, and among various subordinate groups in their efforts to extract concessions from the hegemonic group.

Primordially based civil conflicts may be precipitated by various factors either singularly or collectively. For example, according to Juha Auvinen, conflict may result if the hegemonic group excludes the subordinate ones from economic and political opportunities.³ This may assume the form of monopolization of access to cabinet posts and top positions in the military and in parastatal enterprises by the hegemonic primordial group, to the exclusion of the subordinate groups.⁴ In turn, this may generate discontent among the subaltern groups directed at the sources of deprivation and entitlement failure.⁵

Another source of primordial conflict is the manipulation of differences by an external power or powers. For example, during the Cold War, many of the ethnic conflicts in the former European colonies of Asia and Africa were triggered by the superpowers pitting one ethnic group against another.

Also, ethnic conflicts may be generated by social and political change or an identity crisis propelled by the historical and political transformation of nations.⁶ The cases of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union are noteworthy.

Furthermore, ethnic diversity is a major precipitant of civil conflict, especially in developing societies. David Krymkoski and Raymond Hall argue that ethnic conflict in Africa stems in part from the legacy of European colonialism, which tended to combine, and thus enlarge, indigenous political and social territorial units, and to centralize resources, power, status, and privilege in the administrative center.⁷ In many cases, these arrangements forced or strongly influenced diverse ethnic groups to enter into new social and political relationships that contravened traditional patterns.⁸