

# Colonial and Contemporary Typifications: Defining the Conflicts in the Great Lakes Region (GLR) of Africa

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**Abstract**—The Great Lakes Region (GLR) of Africa has been typified by numerous conflicts over the period stretching from independence to date. However, the independent period up to 1980s seemed to have had some semblance. This study sought to evaluate the conflicts' typifications over this time period while at the same time categorizing them to bring clarity to understanding of conflicts. Again, the question of whether these conflicts are colonial or contemporary is again a concern that this study attempts to expose. Indeed, it is clearer that several conflict theorists are ever in dilemma about the linkage of the GLR conflicts thus a constant divide in opinion within this period. As the study digs into the causes of conflicts in the GLR, it is found that these causes are multi-dimensional thus include; Laxity and neglect causes, System failure causes, Economic-led and power-led causes, Racial conflicts, and Ideological conflict/bipolarism in the world politics. This therefore indicates that the solutions to the conflicts should follow the cause and effect approach.

**Keywords**— Great Lakes Region/ GLR/ Conflicts/ Causes of conflicts/ Types of conflicts/ Africa/ African conflicts/ Africa independence conflicts.

## I. AFRICAN CONFLICTS: COLONIAL OR CONTEMPORARY?

The nature of GLR conflicts converge around several theories surrounding the movements of early Europeans adventures in Africa, colonialism and its logic, imperialism, and later on African leadership and their involvement. “Most of the GLR conflicts to a major extent have a bearing to the colonialism period. How and why the West invaded Africa, divided the continent, plundered the wealth, their administration in general, and the diversified interests which extend to date. The phase of failing states in the region initially began with European exercise of war on stable and organized tribes like the Maasai” (Hughes: 2006).

Not only can colonialism be construed as a cause theory to African conflicts but their methods of introducing their administrative culture to the continents already existing ones. “But the grafting of foreign models onto African cultures and neglect of African traditions led to neither peace nor stability. Since independence, almost all the states in the region have experienced political violence, including assassinations, massacres, coups, and coup attempts, revolts, insurgencies, and civil wars” (Magstadt: 1998).

“The GLR conflicts borrow from past history at the same time from contemporary history. Both internal and external causes have led to these conflicts. Issues of ethnicity, competition for scarce resources whose distributions remain a

problem to date, political incitement, and external influence have dictated the genesis of these wars. External influence has featured due to industrialized countries interest for trade and minerals” an interviewee Minister of Kenya government stated.

In Douglas 2003, “After the end to the first civil war a number of government and international agencies became directly involved in the economic development of Sudan. The repeated intervention of the US in rescheduling the repayment of the Sudan’s debts enabled a succession of Sudanese government to survive the economic crises of the 1980s. Dependence on the political backing of the US and IMF, and increased reliance on the liquidity provided by the international Islamist financial institutions, redirected the governments accountability away from its domestic constituency and towards its external backers”. Whatever the broader political and military objectives of the parties to the current conflict, the civil war has been fought on the ground as a resource war.

According to Hughes (2006) in his book serialization Moving the Maasai, British Administrator John Ainsworth suggested a remedy in 1899: “after a time when our military forces are more organized and our administration is more extended we shall be more able to edge in these nomad tribes and by degrees make it impossible for them to wonder about without our permission, we could then clearly define the Maasai-lands and see the limits were kept...”.

No wonder, the 1904 Maasai Agreement which promised the Maa people these territories so long as they shall exist was revoked, and they were moved to reserves at gunpoint. This has remained a source of conflict to date. The Maasai conflict with the British in early 1900s is an example of similar battles in Africa which reflected earlier designs of conflicts by the imperialists in search of resources and dominance over the natives. They (colonialists) developed policies of dominance (subjugation) and eventually they abrogated the existing treaties. As was evidenced in the colonialists (British) dealings with the Maasai through un honoured treaties, Western dominant states such as Britain, France, Germany and later USA have since used Regionalism as a process of empire building against Statism right from colonialism and this limits small nations of their self determination and territorial control.

Conflicts in Africa can be linked to colonial imperialism. Imperialism has got a long history. “Imperialism is the highest

stage of capitalism.” In the late 1800s, nearly all of Africa was divided among major countries of Europe. The division was neither peaceful at Berlin Conference nor among the to be colonized states of Africa. The disagreements were later to be inherited by the African independent states which led to disharmony in most post- independent era” (In Lenin: 1970).

It is paramount to note that the work of agents, however, paved way for imperial tendencies in Africa. Historically, it is known that missionaries were among the first European people to come into Africa and make a lot of explorations. The work of people such as Dr. David Livingstone who combined several activities creates high need to study early imperialism through missionaries and their possible link to later conflicts in Africa. “The missionary inspired by the passions to liberate the native from slavery, was followed by the trader and the adventurer in search of gold and gain.” (Griffiths: 1958). For Griffiths, missionary and political conquest for economic well being was made complimentary.

Dr. David Livingstone said, “I beg to direct your attention to Africa. I know that in a few years I shall be cut off in that country which is now open; do not let it be shut again. I go back to Africa to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity; do you carry out the work that I begun?” (Griffiths 1958). These statements were made to the British government with implications of what colonial states and agents stood for; Christianity, Commerce, and Civilization (The trio Cs) which were the entry points of imperialism in Africa (Gelfand: 1957).

“Early European penetration by travelers in transit and resident missionaries was part of the process of European intervention that culminated in the subsequent political occupation of the regions. The European partition of Africa was, therefore, a logical outcome of the efforts made earlier by explorers and missionaries to “open up” African continent for commerce, Christianity, and European political control.” (Mlahagwa 1992).

The history of the genesis of the problems of the GLR traces its roots in the colonization past of Africa, just like other parts of Africa which have been quite unstable for most of the four decades of independence and more. In the book by Cammack and Turdoff (1993) p.286 “the history of the third world is to a large extent the history of its incorporation into a global economy dominated by the Western Europe, the United States, and Japan. In their colonies, the imperial powers imposed taxes, deprived indigenous farmers of land, and sought to stimulate new needs by introducing consumer goods, all in effort to raise revenues and force commercial farming and export – oriented production”. This was mainly for their (imperialists) benefits. The problem of labour and raw material greed by these powers is clearly depicted.

“Wounds dried little pools, caked with black- brown earth; wounds with torn edges frilled with black gangrene... is it possible that a few rich men: a small class of men, have persuaded a million poor men to attack, and attempt to destroy another million men as poor as they? So that the rich may be richer still? Behind the army stand the militarists, behind the militarists stand finance capital and the capitalist brothers in blood; companions in crime. What do these enemies of the

human race look like? ... they are honoured. They call themselves, and are called, gentlemen. What a travesty of a name! Gentlemen! They are the pillars of the state, of the church, of society. They support private and public charity out of the excess of their wealth. They endow institutions. In their private lives they are kind and considerate. They obey the law, their law, the law of property. But there is one sign by which these gentle gunmen can be realized. Threaten a reduction in the profit of their money and the beast in them will awaken like a snarl. They become as ruthless as savages, brutal as mad men, remorseless executioners. Such men as these must perish if the human race is to continue. There can be no permanent peace in the world while they live. Such an organization of human society as permits them to exist must be abolished. These men make the wounds. (Norman Bethune 1969).

As was evidenced throughout the world, the cold war period divided the world apart in lines of capitalism against communism whether by choice or by force. “The young states of Africa found themselves players in either of the camps. Armed conflicts have become routine in the G.L.R of Africa. Affected countries include Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, DRC, Somalia and others within the framework ‘friends’ of the Great Lakes Region and vast parts of Africa – Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Eritrea” (IC/GLR: 2005).

The problems of Africa in general are the same. As in the book African Americas and U.S policy, in May 30th 1879, France wrote a letter to the Liberian secretary of state of the French desire that Liberia become a dependency of France, this notion was repeated in a speech by victor Hugo. “Africa (was) the common property of the European nations, to be appropriated for European purpose with or without the consent of its inhabitants, who, according to another authority, are only lazy, palavering savages. In making their allotments of this big farm (the editorial continued), of course not the slightest regard will be paid to such insignificant obstacles as Ashantees and Zulus, notwithstanding the reminder which a recent magnificent funnel should furnish to the French nation”. (Skinner: 1992 p. 98).

These conflicts of the GLR began as commercial wars with their devastating effects to economic performance in East African region since 1882. This period marked the arrival of European colonialists. “Then came the British, first in the person of a representative of the British East Africa company, Fredrick Lugard, then military engagements in which British suzerainty was established. The British established a protectorate in the region (rather than a colony), the British signing agreements there with local tribal chieftains, offering them autonomy under British protection.” (<http://landow.stg.brown.edu>). British, Belgian, and French colonialists used wars as a method and tactic to access national resources in East Africa (EA) and the entire Africa at large. Following the trend of conflicts in the GLR of Africa and its related problems such as one of sovereigns and sovereignty created by western dominancy one may wonder whether Statism is loosing grip to Regionalism. Will the states of Africa especially survive in both power and obligation?

The research tries to find out in a nutshell the chronological events on Great Lakes Region conflicts by digging out their nature with data from different authors. It is interesting to learn especially some of the causes of conflicts contained herein and the generalization that the researcher has given to the causes. The Great Lakes Region is a region in Africa which is traversed by major lakes and rivers. The perception of the Great Lakes Region (GLR) may be many. The fourth perception takes the region to mean, "...the same as the Interlacustrine (the region bounded by Lakes Victoria, Kyoga, Albert, Edward, and Tanganyika www.encyclopaediabritannicaeb.com) Region. This is a historical region which constitutes the area between and around Lakes Victoria, Tangayika, Kioga, Kivu, Edward and Albert. It, therefore, includes Burundi Western parts of Kenya, North Western Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and Eastern parts of the DRC.

## II. CAUSES OF CONFLICTS IN THE GLR

The causes of conflicts in the Great Lakes Region are diverse though they share some commonalities. For the purpose of this research they (the causes) can be classified as;

- Laxity and Neglect causes
- System failure causes
- Economic led and power led causes

Some causes may overlap the categorization put forth here because of their nature but at least none will miss this classification.

### *Laxity and neglect causes*

Less frequent in international fora, even those of the United Nations whose principle objective was to be to spare the world of the scourge of war, is the phenomenon of international politico-military convulsions a priority. "Geneva has been busy talking about controlling strategic wars and disarmament while these discussions hesitantly take place in its UN system, but these do not seem to focus seriously on the flow of conventional weapons into Africa and the rest of the third world. Both the UN and the superpowers in Geneva, as well as the allied summits seem to be busy thinking of avoiding a WW III, as if war is "war" only when it involves Northern Hemisphere countries generally and directly" (Currey 1989).

### *System failure causes*

Amoeba type political system existing in Africa: "These, like an amoeba, are small, internally fluid, constantly changing. However, unlike amoeba, when they change, establishing a new balance of stable relations becomes difficult. To be fluid and changing and yet brittle at the same time sounds impossible, but impossible things happen in our system. To this extent we call them Bwegege political systems because in the attempt to establish a new balance, breaking is a real possibility" (Roker 1962) This condition of fluidity and the exclusive search for a new balance provides fertile ground for disagreements to develop into creative conflicts. It is evidenced in a situation where political leaders respect nobody and honour no pledges; "economic actors act without regard for the social good; professionals forget their oaths as soon as they have uttered the final words of the same; armies define

those who finance their barracks and pay for their uniforms and their weapons as objects for manipulation, even slaughter. Governments are not governments of countries or nations, but of partialities serving particular interests." Ake 1969. Thus it creates a scenario where there exists to be party governments, sectarian government, and armies whose loyalty seem to be confused in such conditions.

*Ineptitude in the management of Diversity*: "one finds it difficult to accept and live with another person, another idea; another group (tribe, party, region). Those who win in political competition or struggles find it difficult to see that the other side has any contribution to make and therefore has any claim to authority" (Mujaju 1987; Riker: 1968). This leads to a serious deficiency in managing differences. It leads to believing that differences can be shouted down; cultural diversity is frowned upon; and wholism is pursued to the exclusion of peculiarities. Mujaju further says; "open hostilities among tribes, among religions, among political parties can arise from the sheer fact that one's own peculiarities are not appreciated. Minor irritations become the beginning of national disasters. This is particularly so in modern circumstances when the world is more aware... the times we live in thus add to the difficulties of reducing internal hostilities unless serious thinking takes place on our part".

*Psychological (institutional) pathology*: as in Berridge 1987: "Not losing face, protecting one's ego, viewing oneself as beyond question because of unjustifiable confidence, sheer arrogance these are psychological traits. Far too many countries have suffered when they have been led by leader and governments whose actions can be described in these terms. Africa had leaders who would rather destroy their parties, their armies and even their countries than have themselves lose power even when this leads to bleeding the nation and suffering people. People have not yet required the modesty to accept failure and voluntarily give their countries chance to try someone else." This results in forceful removal of leaders through coup de tat like we have seen in the former Zaire (DRC) and others. "Our political systems have faulty roofs where the external storms continue to leak long after the storms have subsided. Entry through the legitimate doors continues to take place, but damage is more possible through the leakages. (Currey 1989).

*Structural variable (Institutional)*: Looking at Africa generally, what we see is a dire absence of strong checks on the executive leader. Power is strongly concentrated at the center; one man at the top will normally have the free will to make and unmake anybody in the land. Ministers, permanent secretaries, judges in the judiciary, local council leaders and bosses of security, all are subject to the whims of the central authority. There are no checks and balances among the various institutions of the state, since institutional autonomy is viewed with suspicion.

*Walterstein (1966) notes*: "that even the one party state, degenerates in to no party state, and what appears as the one party is a lifeless shell, with no political control, frequently even as a vehicle of central command since the security and administrative agencies are used to circumvent the party. This situation means that any other voice of advice of criticism, any

expression of demand or reservation becomes irregular. Society becomes like a volcano in which internal pressure builds up to corruption, because of the structural and institutional arrangements of our states”.

Kamukama (1997) adds to system failure causes as “meanwhile as peace talks went ahead, Kigali kept on issuing conflicting signals on its commitment to the would be outcome of those talks... more and more Rwanda troops were deployed along the boarder and the shelling of the Uganda side with artillery units based in Rwanda killed a number of Ugandan civilians”. Mazrui (1995) “internal conflicts fall into several distinct categories.

Primary political violence occurs in disputes about the boundaries of the political community, and takes place between groups who do not fully accept each other as citizens of the same polity. Secessionist civil wars are in this case primary their objective is to redraw the boundaries of the political community. The Nigerian civil war over Biafra, that took place between 1967 and 1970, and the first Sudanese civil war (1955-1972) were primary in this sense. So too was the American civil war of the 1860s... secondary political violence occurs when citizens are in disagreement about the goals of the political community without necessarily seeking to redraw boundaries... tertiary political violence is caused by the wider environment of the political community both in the ecological sense of the environment and the external factors precipitating internal tension”.

#### *Economic-led and power-led causes*

Most of the economic and power led causes are meant to impoverish and punish the perceived enemies and their supporters. To a large extent they include;

*Poverty*: “Our countries are gripped by this condition. We may note the ruthless search for accumulation or regarding public offices as a license for building up personal economic power and holding society to ransom. People live their lives and do things if there should be no moral inhibitions. In the case of post independence Uganda; these attributes have their manifestations. No wonder that in a space of 20 years our country has had 3 civil wars. Poverty of this kind can be a true burden, exacerbating internal tensions.” (Wilson 1983).

“The contemporary world of which our states are part is a much smaller world, neatly linked by strongly inter-locking economic, political and military forces which find our leaky roofs useful to their goals. Imperialism of various types, so keen to control sea routes, to maintain spheres of influence, is quite at ease with this condition, so of will seek to protect and expand the opportunity (Nweke: 1985; Mazrui: 1980).

*Economic conflicts*: “Throughout the late 1900s the US government put increasing pressure on the Sudan, motivated in part by Sudan’s open support for Islamist terrorists’ organization, but also in response to strong domestic Christian and anti-slavery lobbies. The development of the Sudan’s oil brought about a change in international opinion by 2000, with EU (France and Germany particularly, but with UK following) increasingly critical of US hostility as their own interest in Sudan oil grew” (Johnson: 2003, p.142).

“The view that international conflicts is fundamentally rooted in economics and in particular in the needs of advanced

capitalist economics has been influenced in the twentieth century (Neo-Marxist though). The essence of the theory is that, because of “unequal exchange” capitalism in a monopoly state produces a surplus of goods and capital which must find foreign outlets if a declining rate of profit at home is to be prevented.” Berridge 1987. Both the World wars are to be explained in these terms, as is the cold war, the Vietnam war, the simmering tension between the US and Western Europe and the US and Japan and so on. Berridge continues to assert that, “advanced capitalism was responsible for international tension and war as well as for all major domestic evils in order to make it the more reprehensible in the eyes of the Russian proletariat. For example; oil had a clear bearing on Anglo American rivalry in the Middle East in the 1940s and 1950s, Franco American tensions in the 1940 attributed to the growth of US investment in Europe and the reserve currency status of the dollar”. It is notable that political tension during this period has normally been associated with competition over valuable. Raw materials and energy source, and with fear of foreign control of important industries. This is because outlets of goods and capital lost in one place may either be regained or compensated for elsewhere.

In the book *The Root Causes of Sudan’s Civil Wars* p.145, “Development in Sudan is not politically neutral. The conflict over what type of ‘development’ is to be implemented, and who will control and benefit from the country’s resources, is not just confined to the assets of the South. This is why the war has moved out of the south into those areas where assets transfer – especially in land – has been most marked. Following a pattern first began during the Turco-Egyptian transformation of the Sudan’s economy in the 19th century.” The book highlights some of the fundamental issues regarding African conflicts targeting of the countries resources by major international actors (Johnson: 2003).

#### *Ideological conflict:*

It is reasonably certain that ideology was one of the major factors which led president Truman to resist the extension of soviet power beyond eastern Europe, the ‘occasion’ of the cold war. As a result, it was viewed as a major threat to the political and economic ideas of which the US sees itself as the main champion of Liberation: representative democracy and the free market as in Berridge *ibid*.

#### *Racial conflict:*

In the 1960’s with the emergence of many new states in Black Africa and the growing attention given to the issue of apartheid in South Africa, it become fashionable to emphasize the factor of race in international conflict. “The “non whites” (of course to make a correction – no white or black human beings have ever existed **except** the brown and dark people) were held to be fired by fresh memories of while domination, disillusionment with the economies of independence and disgust at western support for south Africa and Israel; while the “whites” were said to feel contempt for the shambles to which many new states were soon reduced, and anger at their ingratitude, as a result, some, such a Ronald Segal, even claimed that the struggle between “whites” and ‘non-whites’ was already “the major preoccupation of mankind” (Ronald Segal 1967). South Africa itself was not an exception but a

microcosm of the racial conflict endemic in the world as a whole; it was the frontline of the 'race war'

It is evident that militarization is the prime move of the US led 'globalization of poverty'. Chomsky and Herman sum it up in Akankwasa (2000), "Human rights tend to stand in the way of the satisfactory pursuit of US economic interests and they have accordingly been brushed aside; systematically US economic interest in the third world has dictated a policy of containing revolution, preserving an open door for US investment; and assuming favorable conditions of investments".

Ravinder Joshi (1996) observes; "...overt political, diplomatic, and military assistance to the Habyarimana government made it intransigent convinced that its military superiority would enable it to deal with the internal political conflict. It was precisely French support which made Habyarimana disregard and keep rejecting all the peace Accords he himself had signed". Mazrui (1995) "the end of the cold war eliminated one of the factors which prolonged many African civil wars. Super power rivalry used to encourage internecine African brutalities instead of sponsoring peaceful reconciliation. Now the big powers are trying to pressurize UNITA and the MPLA, for example to reach genuine peace accords. A few years ago the same external powers were arming UNITA and the MPLA to the teeth to continue their fratricide against each other".

"The human cost of the war has been immense, though no reliable figures exist to tabulate that cost, after nearly two decades of fighting, issues of relief and rehabilitation have become entangled with the related issues of war aims and the peace process. The relief efforts in the Sudan has become a contested example in current debates concerning the efficacy of humanitarian issue? ...is relief a political rather than humanitarian issue? Do relief programs shorten or prolong conflict? Can a focus on the technicalities of relief lead to a secure peace? Johnson *ibid.* "One way of looking at international conflicts is to assume that all states want maximum power relative to other states. Conflict then becomes a universal condition among states, and they fight about power, status, and alliances in the international system, economic competition is the most persuasive form of conflict in the international relations because economic transactions are pervasive. Every sale made and every deal reached across international borders entails a resolution of conflicting interests" (Goldstein: 2001).

### III. STUDY DERIVATIVES (FINDINGS)

Different responses showed different interesting findings. A Kenyan respondent who participated in the Somali National Reconciliation talks states, "resource accessibility is a major reason for Somalis conflicts given that it is a desert country and the many clans are not ready to at times tolerate each other". A respondent who has been a long serving Under Secretary and former Provincial Administrator says that, "the issue of clanism and ethnic belongingness has made many African people especially when instigated by leaders to disregard their own neighbours whom they have lived and

worked with to cause tremendous losses in lives, a very pathetic cancer in Africa".

Explaining GLR conflicts, a Kenyan Minister respondent however sums these conflicts as linked to the cold war and greed of some leaders. "To a major scale the conflicts in the GLR cannot be discussed without highlighting the role of the bipolarism in the world politics pitying USA and her allies on one hand to those of the communist sympathizers led by the then USSR. Indeed some of our leaders have just brought conflicts by failure to embrace democratic governance which requires competition for political offices periodically"

One of the District Commissioners from the North Eastern Province part of Kenya neighbouring Somali responded that "for the period Kenya has taken a relaxed stance on Somali issues, the direct and spillover effects of Somali wars to the Province subsided; therefore caution should be taken by the state handling Somali problems whether they are for good reasons".

Another respondent, a First Secretary with one of the East African countries attached to Kenya in response to causes of conflict in the GLR alluded to the fact that, "the pattern of economic causes to conflict reflect earlier patterns ushered in by the colonialists through partition of Africa". She continued to say that "the causes motivated by demand for developed world's industries have brought tension and conflicts on African soil pushed by who should access and control the opportunities and resources. These causes have succeeded due to development of local allies who on the contrary have local opposition". According to the researcher, the multi-dimensional nature of conflicts as highlighted by Mbote 2005 therefore requires multi-dimensional approach in the conflicts resolution. This require a proper understanding of possible causes and applying viable methods by any approach.

From the cross - sectional interview carried out, most of the respondents agree that the rank of causes of conflicts in the GLR from the highest possible cause to the least possible cause is; noted that a diversion of causality as the sole explanatory principle of events is imperative so that association between events can be carried out. Employment of correlation of coefficient would give credence to a category beyond causation.

From interviewees and the literature review, conflicts in the GLR have caused enormous losses which require long lasting solutions. Moreover these conflicts have been a source of social injustice that must always be solved by whichever approach; Statism or Regionalism. It is imperative, the researcher observes from Douglas 2003 on nature of conflicts that an anti- humanistic interest is often projected in African problems by the 'bigger' states (the Western powers) who prefer their own interests than any option at any cost. The interest for example in Sudan after the first civil war was a means to an end for the financiers of their economic development.

To the researchers, laxity and neglect causes to wars in Africa looks a fashionable way of dealing with third world conflicts. Instead of UN conferences about Africa discussing strategic controls and resolve to stop supplying certain armoury to some quarters to stop conflicts, they are busy

talking about nonexisting and non- foreseeable world war III as observed by Currey 1989. This neglect supports Skinner 1992 who highlighted European- sentiment considering Africans as lazy and palavering savages whose problems are too insignificant for attention. In fact, this cause supports many pro- colonialism theories about African conflicts. The interviewees tend to suggest that the causes of conflicts follow the order; less democratic space and poor constitutions, ethnicity, inequalities in resource allocation, politicians' actions, and external influence that is from the highest rank to the least ranked cause.

It is in the researcher's opinion that system failure causes of conflicts as captured in (Roker 1962; Ake 1969; Mujaju 1987; Currey 1989; and Walterstein 1966) pinpoint African leaders as victims of the rampant continental conflicts. How? The existence of loose integrations in states as opposed to one big community (state) are under their ability to change, they attach no meaning to oaths of offices, they perpetuate exclusion tendencies, abhor egocentrism, failure to spearhead institutions because of fears of being checked. This has extended to misused military who turn their arsenal against the population where they disguisedly belong leaving antagonists dining and sleeping in palaces.

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