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Conflicts in the Horn: Socio-economic and Political Dimensions

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Abstract

It is widely noted that prevalence of conflicts, mal-governance, poverty, marginalization of indigenous peoples, exclusion of women and gross violation of human rights characterize today's Horn of Africa. The root cause of these socio-economic and political predicaments goes back to the days when the transformation of the African indigenous state to the so-called modern state had to be designed by colonial powers. For decades now, since the advent of decolonization, these problems have been used to be put in different boxes separate from each other. This paper, however, contends that these issues are inter-related and should be treated as one package when analyzed. The particular features of the process of formation of the “modern state” in Africa bred many civil wars and conflicts than civil societies¹, thereupon paving the way for the vicious poverty-conflict-poverty nexus. The ramifications of conflict include its social dimensions that affected almost every member of the society, but women, children and elderly in the main. Conflicts in the Horn have their political dimensions as well through which the role of regional and international forces must also be examined.

¹ Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999: ix

I. Background to the problem

Africa in general and the Horn countries in particular are the scene of multi-façade conflicts that incapacitated the social, economic and political development dreams of the people. Conflicts in the Horn are rampant, destructive and often deadly. The conflicts may take the form of ethnic, religious or regional currents, yet at the center of the conflict is the state that failed to secure the management of the causes of conflicts. The state in the Horn and more so in Africa, as an instrument of governance and an “institution by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good”², by-and-large, has failed to accomplish the aspirations of the common people. More mind boggling, one can as well observe a collapsed state in the Horn, as in the case of Somalia.

Why are many African states, most notably these in the Horn, continuously overtaken by conflicts and characterized by failure? Despite remedies prescribed by internationally renowned experts and institutions for the last five decades in this regard, isn't it a fact that the problem of the Horn counties is growing from bad to worse? Shouldn't one look deeply into what constitutes as a systemic problem of the nature of the African state in general and the Horn in particular? To examine the issues raised by these questions, one needs to look into, not just to the symptoms or immediate causes of the conflicts, but rather go back in history and investigate the root causes of the retardation of the African state that had once evolved and made empowering headway for centuries, at least until the 15th century which is the beginning of the disruption of hitherto uninterrupted evolution of the African state.

Historical relics of early civilization and existing realities demonstrate that the kingdoms of Mali, Ghana, Songhai, Benin, Zimbabwe, Egypt, Aksum, Kaffa, Sidama (Ennarya), Addal to mention but a few, the origin of whose empires ranging from the 1st to the 5th century AD, had remarkable civilizations in trade, agriculture, architecture, art, music and literature that paralleled any advanced empire at the time. By way of comparative demonstration, the Persian prophet Mani (216-276 AD) wrote: “There are four great kingdoms on earth: the first is the kingdom of Babylon and Persia; the second is the kingdom of Rome; the third is the kingdom of Axumites; the fourth is the kingdom of the Chinese”³.

² Kaufmann, Kraay and Zoido-Lobaton, no. 2195 and no. 2196

³ In Kobishchanov, 1979: 59

The African civilizations reached their peaks in between the 9th and 14th centuries when, for instance, “the Ibo [of Nigeria] were manufacturing brass and bronze items ever since the 9th century A.D., if not earlier.”⁴ Take for instance the Aksumite Empire that lies at the heart of the Horn of Africa which is now known as Ethiopia: its founding goes back to the 1st century AD, though other studies suggest much earlier than that.⁵ During this times, it has developed literary works using the *Geez* alphabet which is still in use in the churches, the calendar known as *Awde Awarh* (also still in use), trade across the Red Sea and Indian Ocean through the ports Adulis and Zeila, magnificent architect of giant obelisks and long tunnels still standing erect (the genius of how they were built and erected at that early time of human development yet an issue of controversies to contemporary historians). “The architectural achievements attest to the level of skill reached by Ethiopians as well as the capacity of the state to mobilize labor on a huge scale.”⁶ In the food production sector as well, Rodney elaborates:

“Centuries before the contact with Europeans, the overwhelming dominant activity in Africa was agriculture ... advanced methods were used in some areas, such as terracing, crop rotation, green manuring, mixed farming and regulated swamp farming... It was on the basis of the iron tools that new skills were elaborated in agriculture as well as in other spheres of economic activities”⁷.

The *Kibra Nagast* (power of the sovereign), Ethiopia’s national epic and the *Fetha Nagast* (justice of the sovereign), which were composed by Nubride Yesak of Aksum in the 14th century during the reign of Amde Tsion depict the nature of system of governance of the Ethiopian state.⁸ It was indeed an established state that mobilized societies and resources to achieve the level of development that placed her as one of the advanced few.

The assault of the Islamic forces backed by the Ottoman Empire in 1527-1543, followed by the British attack in mid 1880s and finally the intermittent invasion of colonial Italy beginning in the 1890s not only weakened but also crippled typical evolution of the Ethiopian state. The other African kingdoms were also condemned to face the onslaught of other colonial invaders, the French, the Germans, the Portuguese and the Spaniards. The indigenous states were uprooted to perish, and in some cases reformed to reflect the colonial hegemonic order which is prevalent in today’s Africa. The traditional power structure which was based on people who paid allegiance to the sovereign state had also to be supplanted by a power structure that was based on territory, finally carved out by the ‘geometric ruler’ that was sharpened in the November 1884 Berlin conference and the gun, thereby permanently dividing societies that constituted one

⁴ Rodney, 1989: 56

⁵ Belai Giday, 1983 Ethiopian Calendar (E.C.), a Julian one that is 7 years and 4months ‘behind’ the Gregorian, Hansberry, 1981, Henze, 2001

⁶ Ibid: 59

⁷ Ibid: 48

⁸ Belai Giday, 1983, Hansberry, 1981, Henze, 2001

homogenous community. As Ungar rightly put it "...it created new entities out of unrelated territories and tribes - a convenience for the colonists, a source of future trouble for the Africans themselves".⁹ A state alien to the society in every sense of (cultural, social, economic and political) interaction, basically to satisfy the allurements of colonialism, was imposed and societies, civil or political, could not have the slightest say on what was to follow. This is why now in many parts of Africa we are left with deformed and disabled states that could not independently formulate policies based on the aspiration of their people and could only survive at the mercy of the neocolonial entrepreneurs who give primacy to their national interests.

The clash of values, cultures and system of governances have divided the African elite into two broad categories: the traditionalist who maintained the indigenous values and system of governance on the one hand and the so-called 'modernist' who is keen to emulate the intruders on the other hand. This dichotomy, with all the pitfalls on either side, has continued to persist to this day and is one source of contradiction that has racked the African state from within.

II. Disabled State

Conflicts in Africa are largely related to the process of the formation of the principal institution of governance that created what is conventionally known as a "modern state" but which is basically authoritarian in its dispensation of power and functions. It is unequivocally understood that the colonial state was brutal, dehumanizing and engaged in plunder not only of material resources but also of human beings. In the wake of 'independence', the African state stepped in the shoes of the colonial state trying to imitate the functions of its predecessor. That has however created a huge mismatch between what is historically imperative as a form of state and conversely what was introduced as the 'state' in the modern setting. In this sense, the new African 'state' as a continuum to its colonial counterpart, is a complete negation of the prevailing tradition of governance. Prior to colonization, as was referred earlier, there had been numerous traditional systems and institutions of governance in the continent with varying degree of social and political organizations. From Aksum in the east to Mali in the west and from Egypt in the north to Zimbabwe and Zulu in the south, Africa has well established systems of governance that maintained their peaceful evolution. As Rodney expounded:

These described above should be sufficient to establish that Africa in the 15th century was not just a jumble of different 'tribes'. There was a pattern and there was a historical movement. Societies such as feudal Ethiopia and Egypt were at the furthest point of the process of evolutionary development. Zimbabwe and Bachwezi states were also clearly on the ascendant ...¹⁰.

⁹ Ungar, 1989: 43

¹⁰ Ibid: 80

It is worth noting at this juncture that there were rare contacts with the outside world, the exception being few systems of governance that were, at one time or another and for various ulterior motives, in contact with Arab traders and the Ottoman Empire such as Timbuktu (Mali), Ethiopia, and so on. The rest seem to be indigenous states and predominantly traditional with little or no contact with the rest of the world.

The very function of the modern state (without going into the essence of the modern state at this stage) was introduced by the colonial state. The colonial state imposed a form of state that is not only new and discontinuous in character but also alien to the predominantly traditional society which was non-territorial with demarcated boundaries in the colonial order. That is to say, in ancient and medieval Africa where ever people consented to an authority, the state would stretch its influence – matching medieval Europe of roughly 1100-1500. (By the time the colonial state was introduced initially, there most probably were no workers/proletarians as there were no factories, mines, and so on.) In essence, the colonial state constitutes a mismatch to what was viable and well-disposed to African societies.

The African ‘modern state’ as a continuum of the colonial state also constitutes a mismatch to the predominantly traditional society. Colonization had not transferred the majority of the population into modern social classes such as bourgeois, middle class and workers although colonization reigned for an average period of 70 years.¹¹ Ethiopia, which resisted invasions vehemently, was not colonized in the strict sense of term and had been traditional through and through even when Mussolini’s Italy invaded it in 1935. “The essence of the resistance was to safeguard the independence, religious values and cultural identity of Ethiopia, all taking inspiration from the domain of the past as heritage.”¹² This discontinuity has also impacted on conflict resolution mechanisms and methods as the ‘modern state’ replaced the traditional institutions of conflict resolution.

The other level of mismatch is the one between the aspirations of the people and the un-freedom and repression that prevailed. African governance that came in the wake of independence from colonization needed to be a negation of the colonization that dehumanized the African person and denigrated its social organizations. That by definition required the African state to uphold freedom and democracy to salvage the human person. On the contrary, the African ‘state’ without exception turned out to be a continuity of the colonial state respectively and became as authoritarian as its predecessor. In this respect, the African ‘state’ took off with what Rene Dumont called “a false start”¹³. As we shall see below, authoritarian rule caused many of the conflicts in the continent.

The third level of mismatch is prosperity and well-being as the aspirations of the populace in the wake of the end of colonization and the continued prevalence of poverty and ‘under-

¹¹ *Ibid*: 224

¹² Aregawi Berhe, 2003: 112-113

¹³ Rene Dumont, 1966

development' as a result of official government policy. Colonization not only dehumanized the African population, it also brought massive poverty as a result of inhuman exploitation as in the case of King Leopold's rubber plantations in Congo (see Adam Hochschild' King Leopold's Ghosts, 1988), through forced and unpaid labor. The *raison d'être* of the new African state should have been the undoing of poverty. On the contrary, the Africa elite miserably failed to end poverty and 'under-development'. It resorted to amassing wealth for itself, massive corruption and self-aggrandizement. It used the institutions of governance as the principal vehicle for accumulating wealth for its own sake. As a result, it turned the sphere of political power into a sphere of intense competition enticing the envious top brass of the military to resort to incessant coups d'état.

It goes without saying that, the African 'state' has so far ruled without a civil society as symbiotic to it. That cost the continent a great deal since the authoritarian 'state' ruled without being accountable to anyone internally. On the contrary, it has been more accountable to the ex-colonial powers and donors who also dictate its policies, and thus unable to serve its society. (We will return to this when we discuss the role of international forces.)

III. Conflict, Poverty and Exclusion

In Africa in general and the Horn in particular, poverty and exclusion bred conflict, and conflict in turn exacerbated and expanded the dimensions of exclusion and poverty. Poverty as a function of mal-governance, un-freedom and exclusion reigned in the sub-continent as these factors simultaneously prevented the emergence of civil society. Absence of civil society closed the avenue for policy advocacy and social reforms and gave way to violent conflicts as a means of achieving real or imagined ends. In some countries such as Ethiopia and Eritrea, the political power that "grew out of the barrel of the gun" after overthrowing a military dictatorship reinstated another form of dictatorship, the political society turning its gun against the nascent "civil society". The result is more poverty and famine; hence, prevalence of the poverty-conflict-poverty nexus.

We can construct an axiom here; the more the prevalence of poverty, the more the propensity to conflict. More poverty indicates the multifarious need for enhancing the capabilities of communities to mitigate social, economic and political exclusion. In such cases, there exist "layers of poverty", so to speak. As the need to mitigate these problems is enormous, the capability to do so constitutes a big dilemma. In Africa, only a handful few resorted to let communities participate relatively freely. The overwhelming majority opted for considering the 'state' as the only guide and vanguard and consequently sidelined society as to be led by the nose. Some, such as the current government in Ethiopia, went even further to 'rationalize' this

exclusion in ill-conceived political clichés that pass by the name of “revolutionary democracy”¹⁴ of a vanguard party. At the end of the day however, the regime that came to power in 1991 promising to do away with poverty and famine once and for all ended up in 2009 in presiding over a situation where 6.2 million are affected by famine and around 20 million are exposed to starvation if massive food relief is not arriving soon. This disaster is a consequence of severe political exclusion (lack of freedom for communities to represent their views and desires, lack of freedom for ‘civil society’ actors to conduct policy advocacy work and pressurize the government to change its inapt policies, lack of freedom for political organizations to popularize their policies and even win elections to advance them, etc...), economic exclusion (rigid government policy on land ownership that doesn’t warrant security of tenure and that doesn’t consider the livestock wealth of the pastoral community as national wealth) and social exclusion. When such exclusionary policy persists (for two decades as in the case of Ethiopia), they breed violence as communities see no light at the end of the tunnel and have to react to change the dismal circumstances.

IV. Conflicts and Social Consequences

The social dimension of conflict as regards impact on women, children and the elderly should assume importance as they also constitute a key link in human development. When conflicts occur in Africa, the first and immediate casualties are women who are subjected to rape and other forms of violence against them as “punishment for the rebels”. Rebels also do the same (DR Congo, Uganda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, etc...). The tear-jerking impact of this violence is enormous in terms of poverty eradication and social development. Conflict-related violence against women incapacitates women and deprives their capabilities a great deal and in many ways. Absence of the rule of law, disruption of the family, the imminent threat to the safety of their children, the general violence against society disorient women and turn them helpless. And that is the worst thing to happen to women as it indicates the near total deprivation of their capabilities. If half of the population is in such a state and while a great many of their male counterparts are in active combat, one can easily see the state of disruption at various levels that particular society faces.¹⁵

Since a few decades now, conflicts in Africa have been particularly affecting children as they have been targeted by rebel groups to be used as combatants. This happened in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone and is still happening in Uganda, Somalia and DR Congo and possibly among the Tuareg armed movements in the Sahel (Mali, Niger, etc...). The involvement of children in conflicts as combatants and sex slaves has enormous impact on the

¹⁴ For details of the ideological stance see EPRDF, ‘The Development Lines of Revolutionary Democracy’, Addis Ababa, 1992 E. C. [2000].

¹⁵ In the case of the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, fighting the Ugandan army for more than two decades now, girl children are abducted and are held as sex slaves for the commanders and fighters of LRA.

process of social development. Children and youth constitute the generational domain of sustainable development as sustainable development is not just for the existing generation but more for the future one. Cultivating and nurturing children and youth as inheritors and responsible citizens of the future constitute a crucial component of sustainable development. Wars and conflicts disrupt this process – a process whose bearing determines the future setting. Secondly, the involvement of children and youth in conflicts disorients them as they are largely badly educated by the movement they are absorbed. Experience has shown that, a great many of these children have difficulties of one type or another in their post-conflict lives which in turn has a negative impact on the community they live with.

Another immediate casualty of any conflict is what has hitherto been the modicum of space for expression. News blackout on what exactly happens in conflict areas follows. As a result, little is known about what the consequences of the conflict are and what exactly is happening on the ground in terms of destruction to human lives, livelihoods and property. Both governments and rebels do not want the “wrong” side to be depicted by the media. Media blackout creates the propensity to resort to more indiscriminate killings and destruction on the part of both the army and rebels.

V. Conflict and Ethics

Conflict also has ethical dimensions. Conflict involves destruction of lives and property mainly affecting the poor, and one has always to ask whether or not such destruction is warranted. Should it really happen? In the history of nations, there have always been conflicts and wars of all kinds and some serving as vehicles of political and social changes and galvanizing the evolution at the economic level; while others constituted setbacks as they rolled back the “wheels of history”, so to speak. The Horn countries that for most of the past centuries had been enjoying stability and self-sufficient economies are now in an unbearably miserable walk of life because of cyclical conflict situation. Not forgetting the wars with neighboring countries, the proliferation of ethnic conflicts in today’s Ethiopia is as a result of the prevailing system of governance. It is true as Abbink aptly put it “often an ethnic revival is primarily a result of failing state policy...”¹⁶. Below, the magnitude of the ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia over the years 2000-2008 is shown in a sample study extracted from reports of IRIN (Integrated Regional Information Network of the UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs) and EHRCO (Ethiopian Human Rights Council).¹⁷

¹⁶ Abbink, 1997: 160.

¹⁷ For details of the reports of IRIN and EHRCO refer www.irinnews.org and www.ehrco.org respectively.

Deadly ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia based on IRIN & EHRCO report

Year	people	killed/wounded
2000-7	Afar vs Issa	dozens
2001	Borana vs Garri	62k198w
2002	Karrayu vs Afar	56k
2002	Nuer vs Anywaa	60k, 41w
2003	Oromo vs Ogandeni	18k, 21w
2004	Anywaa vs highlanders	200k
2005	Oromo vs non-Oromo	83k
2006	Guji vs Boran	125k
2007	Nyangantom vs Kari	unknown
2008	Derashe vs Konso	33k

IRIN goes on, “the continuing impasse over the border demarcation between Eritrea and Ethiopia presents an ongoing risk of an escalation that could have serious political and humanitarian consequences.”¹⁸ And all this is the making of the political elites at the helm of the states on both sides of the colonial demarcation.

In the case of Africa in general, conflicts are in the first place manufactured by the political elite who controlled political power and practicing mal-governance. The conflicts are not just between neighboring countries but also among various social groups within each country as cited above – ethnic, sub-ethnic, religious, or regional. Such conflicts erupt mainly as a result of ill-thought government policies that are compulsorily related with the people’s self-existence. According to the functions of the mal-governance prevalent, a viable and articulate opposition did not emerge as a result of the suppression of political space for participation as well as for expression. In other words, by depriving society of the freedom for expression and participation, the political elite is actually depriving the emergence of a viable opposition that may eventually resort to violent means to assert ones legitimate rights, thereby sowing the seeds of its own destruction and the seeds of conflict. It is quite evident that the form of the regime and its link to society is a

¹⁸ IRIN report of 17 February 2009

crucial factor, for it in turn influences both the dynamics of the domestic political conflicts and coalitions (Skocpol 1994; Goodwin 1994).

The irony of all these, however, is the fact that the Horn of African elite in most of the countries are not elected by the people in the first place. Therefore, at the root of it all, there is the question of legality as well as having the moral high ground to resort to military offensives against rebel movements. By the same token, rebel movements are not elected either and the same question of legality and of morality goes to them as well. Instead, the government claims to be legitimate because it is in power and declares the rebel movement illegal. Hence, it is absolutely legal in the eyes of the government to quell the rebels militarily. The rebel movement, on its part, traces its legitimacy through historical reconstructions as it happened in the case of the rebel movements in Ethiopia and Eritrea, or any where prevalence of repressive rule in general exists. In these claims and counter-claims of legitimacy, society plays no role as both rebels and governments discount them by totally monopolizing the space upon which civil societies could have strived to make constructive impacts.

VI. Conflict and External Forces

External/international forces also play decisive role in manufacturing and managing conflicts that destabilize or unseat states. The history of conflicts in Africa in general and the Horn in particular amply testifies to the fact that no conflict has been sustained without the involvement of a neighboring 'state' and/or an international force who stood either on the side of a government or rebel movement. Ethiopia during the successive reigns of Emperor Haile Selassie and Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam was bolstering the Southern Sudan rebel movement led by SPLM against the Khartoum government, while the Sudan was reciprocating by supporting rebel groups like the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) which were fighting against the Ethiopian government. On the other hand, in their drive for resources such as the untapped oil reserves lying in the Ogaden region and sphere of influence, the former Eastern Block and the West had been involved in the conflicts between Somalia and Ethiopia for long devastating years, at times by switching sides. "And it was ironic to observe the so-called 'Stalinist TPLF' – seen at the height of the Cold War as terrorist by the 'free democratic Western alliance' – being supported by the USA and Western European countries as it ascended to power"¹⁹ sidelining all democratic forces and emerging civil society organizations that could have at least neutralized the monopoly of power by the TPLF. This USA and Western European ill thought policy in itself had immense contribution in deepening the crisis of the Ethiopian state and sustaining conflicts at different levels.

¹⁹ Aregawi Berhe, 2000: 97.

International forces involve themselves in African conflicts out of a number of interests. During the Cold War, the major factor was the ideological divide and sphere of interest intertwined with economic interests mainly access to natural resources such as minerals. In the post-Cold War situation, the economic interest became the dominant one. Neighboring governments followed similar pattern as their globally hegemonic counterparts though some government are still bogged down in mutual destruction as it is the case in the Chad-Sudan and Ethio-Eritrea conflicts. The case of the conflict in DR Congo a few years ago poses a unique picture when four neighboring governments such as Uganda, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Namibia were involved militarily. Ostensibly political, the motive at least of Ugandan and Rwanda involvement was economic as the top brass of the two armies' looted Congo's minerals as was later verified by a UN report.²⁰ This entails war and destruction of nerve-racking magnitude. The same UN report also accuses Western companies of looting Democratic Republic of the Congo. An extract of the report shown below illustrates the involvement of the Western Companies.²¹

Sample of companies importing minerals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo via Rwanda

<i>Company</i>	<i>Country of destination</i>	<i>Merchandise</i>
Cogem	Belgium	Cassiterites
Muka-Enterprise	Belgium	Cassiterites
Issa	Germany	Cassiterites
Chpistopa Floss	Germany	cassiterites
Veen	Netherlands	coltan
Banro-Resources Corp.	Malaysia	cassiterites, coltan
	Canada	cassiterites
Bharat	United Republic of Tanzania	cassiterites
Rwasibo-Butera	Switzerland	coltan
Afrimex	United Kingdom	coltan

²⁰ "Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic Congo" to the President of the UN Security Council from General Secretary Kofi A. Annan, 12 April 2001.

²¹ For further details see Annex I of the Report.

Finconcorde

Russian Federation

cassiterites, coltan²²

As Chris Talbot wrote in 26 October 2006, the UN report concludes, despite vain hopes that the West will halt the looting of the Congo, that “the necessary networks have already become deeply embedded to ensure that the illegal exploitation continues, independent of the physical presence of the foreign armies.”²³

International involvement as a whole and particularly of France and the US in the post-Cold War setting as well as the current policies of Western donor states on conflict-breeding undemocratic governments in Africa needs to be a subject of analysis. The basis of their relationship in particular has to be scrutinized adequately.

One may say the post-Cold War period heralded a “new era” of peace and social development. Eruption and creation of conflicts in Africa and particularly in the Horn, however, seem to be unabated. The Cold War has ended; but not the dictatorial policies of governments in Africa that, as we have seen above, are self-centered and bred conflicts. In view of such a situation, Western powers keep their eyes closed in face of brutally repressive governments and kept on supporting them. When President Barak Obama warned such repressive governments in Africa and elsewhere by stating that “they are on the wrong side of history”, millions and millions of poor people in these countries pinned their hope on him that he would do something about these repressive governments. One year on, there is no sign that Obama will ever lift his finger to do anything about them. On the contrary, as events turned out to reveal, he continued his support to repressive governments such as that in Ethiopia, a nation that has always been in tears of repression, famine and want. Yet, the paradox is that Western donors keep on telling us that democratization is important for development and so on, while on the other hand they keep financing anti-democratic dictatorial regimes.

VII. Ending Conflicts in Africa

²² Cassiterite is a precious brilliant gem and a principal ore of tin, while refined coltan is a vital element in creating [capacitors](#), which are used in a vast array of small electronic devices, especially in mobile phones, laptop computers, pagers, and other electronic devices. Tantalum from coltan is used in consumer electronics products such as [cell phones](#), [DVD players](#), [video game systems](#) and [computers](#). [Export of coltan from the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) to European and American markets has been cited by experts as helping to finance the [present-day conflict in the Congo](#), with the DanChurchAid agency asserting that “much of the finance sustaining the civil wars in Africa, especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is directly connected to coltan profits.” An estimated 6.9 million people have died since 1998 in the war in the Congo (ref. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia).

²³Ref. www.wsws.org

Africa, Horn of Africa in particular has been ridden with several forms of violent conflict for most part of the post-independence period. Though, every part of the continent has not been affected with conflicts, the countries and sub-regions affected by conflict for most part are still suffering from chronic conflict situations. The Horn countries are cases in point. These conflicts can be categorized as ethnic and political. Social conflicts, though latent still, are also raging practically throughout the continent. In most cases, violent conflicts in Africa were and still are made possible with intervention of at least one neighboring country that harbors insurgencies and an international force that supplies aid directly or indirectly. Thus, African conflicts have multiple characteristics.

So many attempts have been made both by multi-lateral institutions such as the UN and AU as well as individual countries to bring peace to the various violent conflicts raging in the continent but with little or no success. For one thing, in most of the conflicts, neighboring states and global powers have been involved that needed the involvement of many of these actors when peace is sought. Secondly, the contradiction between political imperatives and political perspectives has prolonged the conflicts. And thirdly, the disparity between the generation of the conflicts and their management also contributed to the prolongation of the conflict. It is crucial to take these categories into consideration when conflict is analyzed in a new light.

Undoubtedly, those areas of Africa affected by conflicts are the ones that lag behind in terms of social development and economic growth. This is mainly because conflict impacts heavily on economic categories such as poverty, production, market, capital investment, accumulation, wealth creation, rural development and environment. This is not to speak of the social consequences of conflict on the position of women, children, the elderly, status of education and health. These consequences compel us to examine conflicts in a new light.

The various factors that lead to conflicts may have different forms and propensity, but they are all interrelated and could be categorized as internal and external factors. The internal factors comprise the lack of a system of governance that is based on people's consent. This phenomenon has created the conditions for authoritarian elite to run a deformed state and disempowered the society. On the other hand, the external factors encompass powerful states who put their national interest at the cost of weaker nations and foreign NGOs who are dependent either on the powerful states or the elite of the host nations that have already been an impediment to the growth of civil society.²⁴

The resolution of conflicts at the political level between the warring factions must be weighed therefore against the background of the consequences mentioned above, without ignoring the intervention of regional and international forces, which undeniably come-over with their own interests. The feasible remedy for such package of problems lies in an organized society that could manage to institute a worthy and accountable state. This may inevitably require an uphill struggle but it appears to be the only plausible path.

²⁴ Aregawi Berhe, 2001: 33

So far, we have observed that the state that was duty-bound to over-see the collective interest of people under its jurisdiction failed to perform its declared functions. In this regard, the situation calls for the formation of an accountable state i.e. a system of governance that operates by the rule of law and harness the infinite potentials of its people. The formation of such a state is a difficult task but not impossible. A conscious and united endeavor of democratic political forces together with the emerging civil societies with the clout to enforce process of peaceful change could turn this dream into a reality. This way, the prevailing tradition of resolving conflicts by means of war can end and the negative influence of external agents can be checked. No matter how difficult it may appear, the establishment of the institution of an independent and accountable state is therefore a decisive bridge to cross the enormous hurdles posed by conflict-breeding states.

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