

CULTURE, POLITICS AND THE TRANSNATIONALIZATION OF ETHNIC CONFLICT IN AFRICA : NEW RESEARCH IMPERATIVES

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The ending of the Cold War has had a profound effect upon the international as well as domestic relations of countries throughout the world. Nowhere is this truer than in Sub-Saharan Africa. The superpowers, Russia and the United States, who had for almost four decades been committed to intense competition for ideological hegemony throughout the world, have now decided to instead cooperate. In the process, Africa is in grave danger of being marginalized or put up for triage in the world system. In recent years this danger has become increasingly evident with the emergence of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and its totalizing economic agenda (Tandon 1999). Poor and weak African states on the periphery of the world economic system now realize that they must fight for themselves if they are not to be overwhelmed by the global changes now taking place.

At the same time, in recent years there have emerged domestic conflicts, many centered on cultural and ethnic concerns that have increasingly intensified and spilled over borders. In some cases, such as in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, such conflicts have come to involve neighboring states entering domestic conflicts on the side of either the incumbent regime or armed opposition groups. In this way, the notions of state sovereignty that have governed state-state relations in Africa since the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) almost forty year ago are now being called into question.

As in other regions, international relations in Africa are no longer mostly global in orientation, but regional. Domestic conflicts that spill over borders tend to create problems of a much-expanded regional or sub-regional security dimension. At the same time many African states are faced with economies that are in a shambles and held hostage to international aid donors. Such situations cry out for regionally based recovery strategies.

In contrast to the Cold War era, the major powers of the world, as well as international organizations, are reluctant to intervene except for humanitarian purposes, encouraging instead that regional initiatives be taken to prevent and manage such problems. In response, African states have decided to fight the trend toward the

marginalization of the continent, and to attempt to try and find African solutions to their problems. The main problems confronting Africa today can be subsumed under the rubric of "security". However, instead of this term referring exclusively to politico-military situations, security is now viewed as a total generic concept that includes such dimensions as poverty, underdevelopment, migration and refugee flows, economic development, health epidemics and inter-state as well as domestic conflicts. None of these problems are exclusive to any one country or any sets of countries. They are continent-wide problems that are most reasonably approached at the sub-regional level.

One of the by-products of the ending of the Cold War was a shift in the policies of bilateral and multilateral aid agencies that are now applying conditions to the aid they dispense to recipients in developing countries (Nelson 1992). Political liberalization and/or commitment to effective and efficient public management, or good governance, are now prerequisites for most foreign assistance (Jaycox 1992). Poor governance and bad policies had created, over the first three decades of African independence, circumstances that by the end of the 1980s had become unbearable for the citizens of many African countries. This led to the emergence of popular movements for political and economic reform. In places where authoritarian regimes were most intransigent, such as Ethiopia, Sudan, Rwanda, and Liberia, armed movements emerged and assumed military capacities that were unimaginable 15 year earlier. The Cold War had generated a trade in arms that laid the basis for opposition groups to match the force of established armies. In other places, economic reform and external pressure on authoritarian regimes to democratize served to catalyze an emboldened civil society that began to press for political liberalization (Harbeson et al 1994).

In Africa today, the trend toward political democracy has had the unexpected consequence of heightening ethnic and other forms of social tensions. In some places, such as Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), this has resulted in domestic tensions that have easily spilled over into neighboring states.

One of the defining features of what is now commonly referred to as the "New World Order" is the emergence or resurgence of nationalism among large ethnic groups theretofore incorporated into multi-ethnic states (Keller and Rothchild 1996; Lake and Rothchild 1998). Not only is this an everyday fact of life in the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia, but also countries like Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan have experienced similar fates. In other places such as Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Mauritania, the intensity of ethnic nationalism may be lower, but nevertheless, it has the effect of creating a displacement of certain groups under stress from the state or other groups that want to purge them from regions they have inhabited for generations. Consequently, the concept of citizenship and notions of the rights of citizens have recently piqued the interest of scholarly observers of Africa and policymakers alike (Mamdani 1996;

Ndegwa 1997). What is important about contemporary domestic and regional conflicts in Africa is that they now have the propensity to become internationalized.

The current conflicts in the Horn of Africa, the DRC and Rwanda, for example, have created refugee flows and flows of armed combatants across national borders, catastrophic famine, and gross violations of human rights. In the process, what were once thought to be mere domestic conflicts, out of the purview of international organizations like the UN and regional organizations like the OAU, have now become internationalized. The major world powers see the potential for humanitarian crises in Africa growing into regional political crises that could result in outsiders being drawn in for whatever reasons unless regional conflict management mechanisms are put into place.

Given these new circumstances in African politics, Africanists scholars must reexamine the priorities in their research agendas. They must reconsider the paradigms and approaches they use to study the political economy of change on the continent. Central to this reconsideration is an understanding the interrelationship between domestic and regional politics, and a reconsideration of the relevance of international relations analysis for Africa as compared to an analysis of regional relations (Lake and Morgan 1997). Also, Africanists scholars must clearly understand the origins of transnationalized conflict under present circumstances. The field is wide open for new research in Africa that approaches political economy and international relations questions from a regional perspective. Until recently, for example, the tendency had been to consider the proper focus for the study of international relations as global rather than regional. However, recent events have shown that the challenge of the 21st century will be to develop analytical approaches that allow us to bridge the gap between international and comparative political analysis, so that we might better understand how domestic ethnic, cultural and political conflicts impact upon internal as well as sub-regional and regional relations. Such research would be of both discipline and policy relevance.

The present essay is particularly concerned with the issue of cultural pluralism in contemporary Africa and the origins of transnationalized conflicts rooted in only one dimension of cultural pluralism, ethnic identity. Ethnic identity may come to be conceived by an ethnic group as "national identity" when their goal becomes self-determination in the form of independence, partition or irredentism. A second objective is to examine the interaction between domestic and regional relations under these changed circumstances, and critically assess the prospects for finding regional and sub regional mechanism for ameliorating if not resolving such problems. The essay concludes by suggesting new directions for research in African politics. The approach advocated is one that straddles the boundaries of international relations and comparative political analysis.

The Origins of Transnational Ethnic Conflict in Contemporary Africa

Until recently, the postwar international political environment had been characterized by ideological competition and conflict between the United States on the one hand and the Soviet Union and Communist China on the other. Both ideological camps as a matter of policy discouraged the representation of groups based on a distinctive ethnic, national or religious identity (Ryan 1990, xix-xxi). Instead, there was an active attempt in policy circles to establish the viability of multiethnic, secularly based nation-states. This tendency in the realm of public policy was reinforced in social science scholarship, which generally ignored ethnicity, religion and sub national identity as potentially salient political variables and focuses on what was described as the process of national political integration (Young 1993, 21-23). To the extent that it existed and was relevant, scholars generally agree that ethnic identity was different from nationalism in that it did not require separation from a given multiethnic state and the creation of an ethnically pure nation state. Today, however, in parts of Eastern Europe and Africa, the notion of the inviolability of artificially created nation states is being seriously challenged, as ethnic groups assert their right to self-determination up to and including separation from the multiethnic state. With the demise of Soviet communism, ethnically based republics that had been forcefully incorporated into the Soviet Empire took advantage of openings in the political opportunity structure, and acted upon their claims to self-determination by cutting their ties to Russia (Esman 1994, 10). The political opportunity structure provides the context in which groups shape their strategies, tactics and ideological goals. Openings in such structures make it possible for constituent groups, even the most suppressed, to take action to break away from a hegemonic state.

In recent years domestic conflicts have been more common than interstate conflict, and when these conflicts are diffused and escalate, they threaten regional security. Diffusion involves information flows from one state or ethnic community to another state or ethnic community that already contains a high potential for conflict based on one or more forms of cultural pluralism. The new information, whether true or not, serves to inflame social tensions. Escalation, on the other hand, involves groups forging alliances with affinity groups across their borders. For instance, an ethnic group might ally itself with transnational kin groups, with the results often being intentional or unintentional spillovers, irredentism, or border conflicts (Lake and Rothchild 1998, 23-32). Such has been the case with Tutsis in Rwanda who forged an alliance with elements of Uganda's Hima ethnic group a decade ago in order to invade Rwanda and displace a Hutu-led regime. It was also the case in the late 1970s when Somalis living in Ethiopia's Ogaden region allied with kin people, including that of the President of that country at the time, Said Barre, in an irredentist effort to separate themselves and the territory they occupy from that country.

Regarding the transnationalization of ethnic conflict, the central question in such cases is: How, why, and when do ethnic conflicts in Africa spill across borders? The roots of transnational ethnic conflict can be traced to the perception of ethnic groups that their

physical security is in jeopardy at the hands of some other ethnic group or groups (Lake and Rothchild 1998, 7-9). When such a situation exists and the state is either unwilling or unable to mediate between groups or to provide them with assurances that they will be protected, groups that perceive a serious threat will at the very least be prepared for violent conflict, and may even go so far as to engage in a preemptive strike. Myths and memories of exploitation, discrimination, and violence perpetrated on one group by another drive the groups further apart (Gurr 1993, 5-6). For example, a group like the Tutsi of Rwanda might feel threatened by what the Hutus might do to them if they controlled the state. Ethnic entrepreneurs among them might make sure that they recollect things that happened to their people at the hands of Hutu governments in the past, and this can be used to justify preemptive strikes against Hutus to make sure history does not repeat itself. If it does repeat itself, the Tutsi want to make sure that their group comes out on top. On the other hand, the Hutu might have memories of their exploitation and domination by the Tutsi during the colonial period. They may either fear that this could happen again, or they might fear that they will not have their first class citizenship rights protected by a Tutsi-led government.

Whether or not ethnic conflicts become transnationalized depends on certain historic and/or immediate circumstances. The historic factors can largely be traced to the invention of tribes, and with the removal of colonial social control mechanisms, the stage was set for the unleashing of tribalism in the post-independence period (Davidson, 1992, 11-12). The more immediate causes can be categorized either as precipitant or facilitating factors. Precipitant causes might include economic or political crises with ethnic undertones, inflammatory rhetoric on the part of ethnic entrepreneurs, or real or imagined fears of an ethnic group that incumbent elites are either unwilling or unable to make credible commitments to protect them against ethnic hostilities (Fearon 1998, 107-126). Facilitating factors might include the total collapse of national government and/or the availability of massive amounts of weapons of war, as was the case in the Horn of Africa following the end of the Cold War. The removal of the stabilizing effects of superpower competition in the region made it much more likely that violent ethnic conflicts might occur.

Lake and Rothchild (1998, 7-9) note that under conditions of extreme insecurity and ethnic distrust, the situation is ripe for a diffusion and/or escalation of ethnic conflict across borders. Fears are diffused within states and sometimes between them. When there exist kin groups in neighboring states, ethnic conflict can either intentionally or unintentionally become transnationalized. Much depends on political opportunities as perceived by ethnic entrepreneurs. For example, Hutu militia driven out of Rwanda by the Tutsi-led Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) in 1994, continued to wage war from across the border with Zaire (now the DRC). By 1996, RPF soldiers were fighting Hutu militia inside Zaire, and the Zairian army seemed powerless to do anything about it. In the process, the "softness" and

weakness of the Zairian state was laid bare, giving rise to the emergence of internal rebellion against the Mobutu regime.

Managing Transnational Ethnic Conflict in Africa

Although transnationalized ethnic conflict is relatively rare in Africa today, there is increasing concern among the continent's leaders, as well as in the international community, with finding mechanisms for the management of domestic conflicts that have the potential to spill over borders. History has shown that permanent solutions to such conflicts are nearly impossible; therefore, success is most likely in the prevention and management of deep and potentially violent ethnic conflict. Individual countries might engage in various strategies for internally eliminating or managing ethnic differences.

Conflict Elimination.

The most common options available for the elimination of ethnic differences range from genocide to total assimilation (McGarry and O'Leary 1993a). The incidents of ethnic cleansing that were attempted in Rwanda in 1994 clearly could be considered genocidal (Adelman and Suhrke 1999). This option is almost impossible to fully implement effectively today because of the outcry it ultimately raises in the international community.

The assimilation option is also difficult if not impossible in situations where integration is tantamount to the establishment of hegemonic control according to the cultural preferences of the ruling ethnic group. Successive Sudanese governments, including the present one, have attempted this project but have failed precisely because the objects of the assimilation are not willing to abandon their own cultures completely. All of the governments of modern Ethiopia, except the present one, had tried and failed to assimilate disparate ethnic communities into a state with a common, if multiethnic, identity.

Another common option for eliminating ethnic differences that might become transnationalized would be partition or secession. This was attempted by the Ogaden Somali in 1977-78; it is today a goal of some members of Ethiopia's Oromo nationality; and it is now also being seriously considered by both sides in the Sudan conflict.

Conflict Management. Methods for managing ethnic differences, as opposed to eliminating them, within a country vary from the strategies of national leaders to the intervention of external actors (Evans 1993, 9). Domestically leaders might engage in policies of hegemonic control or transparent state-society relations. The objective of the second alternative is to build trust among all citizens. Lake and Rothchild (1998, 205-13) identify four main trust-building options for nation leaders: 1) demonstration of respect for all groups and their cultures; 2) formal or informal power sharing; 3) elections according to

rules that insure either power sharing or the minimal representation of all ethnic groups in national politics; and 4) federalism or regional autonomy.

African leaders are increasingly realizing that hegemonic control is not a prudent long-term ethnic conflict management strategy. Wherever this has been tried, it has failed. This point is amply made by the Ethiopian and Sudanese cases.

As difficult as they are to achieve, trust-building approaches to managing ethnic conflict in Africa seem to hold the most promise. In almost all cases where national leaders adopt such approaches they are likely initially to be viewed with suspicion by groups who have previously felt insecure. However, through actions and policies that demonstrate the commitment of government to respecting all groups and cultures, confidence and trust can be engendered.

Power sharing is becoming increasingly popular in Africa, with the most recent experiments being in Burundi, Djibouti, and South Africa (Shezi 1995, 199). In each of these cases a conscious attempt was made to assure ethnic groups that they had group representation at the level of national government. Confidence-building measures such as these are best seen as new ethnic contracts.

Rather than genuine power sharing, however, it is more common for political leaders in Africa to demonstrate only tentative commitment to power sharing, and to present only the appearance of attempting to form governments that are characterized by broad ethnic representation at the leadership level, and that give the indication of being concerned with social equity and the equal worth of all individuals and groups. In Ethiopia, for example, the new government has introduced a number of policies intended to show its respect for all the country's nationalities. The constitution calls for the creation of ethnically based states that possess considerable autonomy. At the same time, politics has been structured in such a way that the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front dominates at all levels. So progress toward trust building must be measured in small degrees. Yet, it would appear that the regime recognizes its importance.

South Africa's first all-race, multi-party elections were held in 1994, according to modified proportional representation rules. No one party was able to achieve an absolute plurality, and a few nonviable parties were canceled out (Reynolds 1994). Subsequent negotiations resulted in the sharing of executive power by the appointment of the leaders of other parties who did well in the elections to significant cabinet posts. This seems to have been enough to engender wide confidence in South African society that the country's leaders were committed to protecting the rights of all citizens no matter what their race or ethnicity. Consequently, negotiation over a new social contract as represented in a permanent constitution proceeded with a minimum of serious conflict or ethnic/racial tensions.

Federation and regional autonomy are other approaches that can be used to build trust among groups that formerly felt threatened. However, this approach is likely to fail

unless leaders are willing to make credible commitments and to demonstrate consistently that they respect all citizens. Sudan unsuccessfully attempted a regional autonomy strategy. It was undermined by what proved to be a hegemonic project on the part of Islamic fundamentalists. Nigeria has been relatively more successful at making federalism work in the wake of the Biafran Civil War. Presently Nigeria has thirty-one states. Federalism was chosen as a strategy in 1979, following the war, in an effort to avoid future severe ethno-regional conflict. Since then, there have been no further serious threats to the maintenance of Nigeria's national boundaries.

No matter what strategy is chosen, success depends greatly upon the commitment of leadership. If leaders are not prone to compromise and to operate transparently, ethnic tensions are bound to reemerge. And in some cases the resulting tensions will turn into full-blown conflicts.

Increasingly some observers believe that preventive diplomacy should be employed to address both interstate and intrastate sources of conflict. The objective of such a strategy would be to head off conflicts through diplomacy before they erupt. This approach has two dimensions: early preventive diplomacy and late preventive diplomacy. Early preventive diplomacy involves good offices and skilled diplomacy as soon as tensions become apparent; and late preventive diplomacy involves efforts to persuade adversarial groups to desist when conflict appears to be imminent. A corollary to this approach would be the preventive deployment of peacekeeping troops in order to serve as a deterrent to conflict (Evans 1993, 39). To be most effective, such deployments should be robust, involving a sizable contingent of appropriately armed peacekeepers with clearly defined rules of engagement.

Once conflicts occur, preventive diplomacy and preventive deployment must give way to peace making. In such cases, arbitration and mediation on the part of third parties is called for. Such actors might be internal to the troubled country, and represented by a person of high moral standing, or someone who appears to be neutral to the given conflict, or an individual with widespread charismatic appeal. However, with regard to the most intractable conflicts in Africa, such as Burundi and the DRC, the trend seems to be toward the intervention of external actors; individuals such as former President Jimmy Carter or Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former South African president Nelson Mandela, government official representing one or another major power, representatives of the UN, OAU, or sub-regional organizations such as ECOWAS and the Intergovernmental Agency for Development (IGAD). Under the auspices of the OAU, the late former president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, between 1995 and 1999 provided good offices in an effort to stem the spread of ethnic conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the controls exercised by the superpowers over regional clients in Africa have been removed, and the possibility of growing numbers of incidents of transnationalized ethnic conflicts is increasing. The realities of this situation

have encouraged African leaders to seriously reconsider the norms of external intervention into domestic conflict situation (Keller 1997).

The UN, like the OAU, has historically supported the idea of the inviolability of the national boundaries of African states that existed at the time of independence. Consequently, it has been unwilling to become involved in adjudicating boundary disputes among neighbouring states, and it has generally stayed out of mediating domestic conflicts. Until recently, the UN intervention in the former Belgian Congo crisis in the early 1960s was the only incident in which the UN decided to commit troops in an effort to restore peace in Africa (Jackson 1982). At the time many observers seemed to believe that this action would serve notice that the UN would intervene anywhere in Africa where a communist threat was perceived. However, the Congo operation proved to be unique and was never repeated.

Despite its record in this area, in the 1990s the UN began to rethink the notion of state sovereignty and the norms of intervention in domestic disputes. This was prompted by Iraq's brutal repression of the Kurds in the aftermath of the Gulf War (Stremlalu 1991). Also, civil war in Somalia catalyzed the UN into action first on humanitarian and then political grounds. In the spring of 1992 the organization committed peacekeeping troops to Somalia in an operation called the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) I. The primary motivation was humanitarian. The force was to clear the way for desperately needed food deliveries to an estimated 1.5 million people threatened by war-induced famine. In late 1992 the Security Council authorized the deployment of a US-led military force, UNOSOM II, to protect relief workers as they attempted to reach at-risk populations. Whereas the US defined its role in strictly humanitarian terms, the UN envisioned a wider role for UN forces: to disarm the armies of local warlords and create an enabling environment for the restoration of a Somali national government. The latter objective proved to be a failure, as the UN was unable to make peace among the leaders of warring ethnic factions or to build peace by creating an enabling environment for the return of civilian government grounded in the trust of the general population.

The lessons of Somalia have forced the leaders of the international community to look more carefully at the possibility of regionally based approaches to the regulation of ethnic conflicts that either are or have a good possibility of spreading regionally. Mohamed Sahnoun (1994, 54), asserted, "The UN headquarters must establish strong permanent and functional relationships with the regional organizations so that they can coordinate their regional response to specific needs in different regions of the world. The current system is not adapted to the post-Cold War international environment and routinely reacts to crisis through improvisation."

Apart from the failure of adversaries to make credible commitments in the course of third-party negotiations, much of the blame for failures in such efforts must be laid at the feet of the international community, which has always been reluctant to intervene either coercively or non-coercively in conflicts where they do not perceive their vital national

interests to be at stake. Even when regional actors, despite lacking the resources to do so effectively, are willing to attempt to manage their own problems, the international community has historically been reluctant to provide support for regionally based interventions. This has particularly been so in the case of African disputes. For example, in 1994 there were clear signs that Rwanda was on the brink of a major internal conflict. The OAU wanted to act to prevent this from happening, but it lacked the resources and turned to the international community for assistance. However, this assistance was not forthcoming and the result was a catastrophic genocide (Adelman and Suhrke 1999).

The OAU has from time to time been willing to try and engage in peacekeeping in domestic conflicts that have become regionalized, but it has not had the wherewithal to do so effectively. Such was the case in the first major OAU peacekeeping effort in Chad in 1981-82. It was under financed, and plagued by logistical problems. Most recently, the OAU has more or less stood helplessly on the sidelines as the conflict in the DRC has further conflagrated, drawing in neighbouring states such as Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Angola in support of the Kabila government, and Rwanda and Uganda in support of rebel opposition groups.

The most successful inter-African peacekeeping effort to date has been that mounted by ECOMOG in 1991, with the objective of restoring peace and order to Liberia. After five years of peacekeeping, the West African units of ECOMOG were augmented by troops from Uganda and Tanzania. By August 1995, some semblance of order had been restored, and warring parties had agreed to a government of national reconciliation. Eventually national elections bringing Charles Taylor to power were peacefully concluded.

Although it was founded to manage conflict among member states and to represent their interests in international forums, the OAU has played more of a reactive role in addressing threats to national and regional security, working through informal channels rather than through established mediation and conciliation institutions.

Policy Challenges of Transnational Ethnic Conflict in Africa. African leaders have increasingly come to feel that the security, stability and development of every African country affects every other African country, and Africa cannot hope to make progress toward development or democracy without creating the conditions and institutions necessary for lasting solutions to problems of security and instability. In this spirit, at the 1992 OAU Summit in Dakar, Senegal, a resolution was passed calling for the establishment of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention and Resolution (OAU 1993). The Mechanism was formally approved the following year, even though it was unclear as to how much authority it would have to intervene in the affairs of member states. Early indications are that the member states of the OAU have not adopted an attitude conducive to the establishment of Wilsonian multi-lateral collective security systems. In other words, it is not clear whether the notions of state sovereignty and the norms of intervention will indeed be altered in the process of implementing the Mechanism.

The primary objective of the Mechanism is said to be the “anticipation and prevention of conflicts.” In situations in which conflicts have occurred, the Mechanism is supposed to be responsible for undertaking peacemaking and peace-building activities. In cases of severe conflict, such as the present situation in Sierra Leone, there is provision for the OAU cooperating with the UN. Such was also the case in late 1996, when African troops were committed under the auspices of the UN to the humanitarian force organized to insure the delivery of food and other relief supplies to Rwandan refugees in the war-torn Great Lakes region of Central Africa.

The obstacles to the successful implementation of the Mechanism are formidable. Chief among these is cost. Bilateral aid donors and the UN have made contributions, but many more resources are needed.

Despite the heavy resource implications of establishing the Mechanism, at its 1995 Summit, the OAU reached agreement among attending heads of state to place their armies on standby for possible intervention in increasingly unstable Burundi. These actions were preceded by the inauguration of the Cairo Center for African Crisis Solving, which hosted a one-month training course for twenty-eight military officers from fourteen countries on conflict prevention and management. Plans were also made to establish similar centers in the other sub-regions of the continent.

At the root of the funding difficulties is the fact that Africa is composed of fifty-three of the poorest countries in the world, many of which are characterized by unstable politics and food insecurity. Their militaries are small and they already spend too much on military purposes. How then will they afford over time to participate in the Mechanism? Who is to pay for the training and upkeep of the elite troops that each country must make available to the inter-Africa peacekeeping force?

Another pitfall has to do with state sovereignty and the norms of external intervention. Will the OAU in fact be able to assert its assigned authority when crises emerge? Will the Mechanism be obstructed by member states that have yet to buy into the new conceptualizations of state sovereignty and the norms of intervention? Although African leaders tend to agree that the Mechanism is needed, it is unclear what most would do if there were confronted with a situation in which the OAU Mechanism had decided to intervene to resolve conflicts in their own country. Certainly such intervention would be more likely in smaller and weaker states (e.g. Burundi). But even then, the decision to intervene in any country will not be taken easily.

In cases of the most severe conflicts, the OAU continues to support regional initiatives such as the peacekeeping effort of ECOMOG in Liberia and the mediation of IGAD in the cases of Sudan and Somalia. Such regional capacities, however, are still in their incipient phases, and fraught with all the problems attributed above to the OAU Mechanism.

What had become abundantly clear by the mixed results of the intervention of regional and international actors in efforts to bring peace to the most severe cases of ethnically and culturally based conflicts in Africa such as Sudan, Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC is that constructing peace is a multifaceted process. It works best when such an intervention pre-empted the eruption of ethnically or culturally based conflicts in deeply divided societies.

External interventions that go beyond the efforts of the UN or the OAU (e.g. US, EU, Arab League) would be most effective if it were indirect and represented in the material and logistical support of UN or regional efforts. Rich countries such as the US, UK and France could make significant contributions through behind-the-scenes mediation and financial and technical assistance to regional peace initiatives (Rothchild 1997).

In cases where conflict has erupted and spread regionally, the activities of outside actors cannot be confined to peacekeeping - that is, the containment of actual military activity on the part of ethnic adversaries. The further challenge is to develop effective political strategies for peacemaking. Most often severe ethnic conflicts are inspired and promoted by leadership with their own personal agendas. Unless leaders declare that they are committed to peace, and are willing to demonstrate that they are serious, tensions will remain and may even escalate.

Conclusion and Directions for Research

Conclusion. Severe ethnically based conflicts, as we have seen, are generally based on elements of a group's historical memory, fear of physical insecurity, and upon perceived or real discrimination, inequalities, or inequities. Any peace effort must find ways of addressing these problems through public policies and through programs to build trust of one another among constituent ethnic or nationality groups; and to engender a sense that government is credibly committed to respecting and protecting the rights of all groups. The securing of the commitment of political leaders to social justice, establishing a government that is transparent and honest, and making sure that the political system operates according to the principles of democracy would go a long way toward effective conflict management and peace-building.

Although African states have the right to sovereignty, their leaders have the responsibility to govern in such a manner that protects the rights of all citizens, and engenders trust and legitimacy in the general population. Should they do otherwise, the current thinking in Africa is that they open their countries up to the possibility of external intervention into their domestic affairs on universalistic human rights grounds.

Directions for Research. No longer can Africanist scholars confine themselves to research that confines itself to analyses of national politics or international relations. It is quite clear that not only is an understanding of regional political dynamics an imperative, there should also be more attention given to the interaction between domestic and regional

politics, as well as domestic politics and international affairs. This research should not simply be of disciplinary relevance, but also policy relevance.

In addition to focusing on the origins, dynamics, and possible resolution of ethnic conflicts, comparativists should begin to critically examine efforts in Africa to develop mechanisms for regional and sub-regional cooperation not only in political matters but also in the realm of economics. As has been demonstrated by ECOWAS, IGAC, and SADC, what begins as organizations to promote regional economic cooperation often end up being much more, involving themselves in politics as well.

The worldwide trend toward the establishment of regional common markets has also taken root in Africa. ECOMOG has been in place for more than two decades, and the East African Cooperation is making strides to revive cooperative economics among states in that region. In southern Africa, SADC has been transformed, and plays a major economic role in that region. It is projected that within less than a decade African states will have established themselves as a regional trading block that rivals the East Asian "Tigers" and other similar groupings. We could learn much from the attempts to establish new sub-regional trade regimes and other forms of economic cooperation. Such developments will no doubt impact significantly on interstate as well as intrastate relations.

In the near term, Africanist students of politics should initiate studies in the political economy of development and international relations from the perspective of regions and sub-regions. Necessarily, such studies will bridge the boundary between comparative politics and international relations, concentrating on the impacts of exogenous and endogenous factors on regional as well as domestic politics.

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