BOOK REVIEW:- *THE ROOTS OF AFRICAN CONFLICTS: THE CAUSES & COSTS*

Edoh Agbehonou

Savannah State University, USA

The Roots of African Conflicts: The Causes & Costs is a comprehensive collection of essays which try to unveil not only the root causes of African conflicts, but also the physical and psychological, socio-political and economic damages that these conflicts have inflicted upon Africa, its people and environment. It is comprehensive in a sense that it touches the two aspects of conflicts in which most African countries have been embroiled since independence. Both African violent and nonviolent conflicts are the centerpiece of discussion in this book. With regard to violent conflicts, the emphasis was on armed conflicts. The book also discusses poverty and food insecurity in Africa as examples of nonviolent conflicts. Twelve popular scholars in the field of African studies contribute to the edition of this book. This book is divided into nine chapters preceded by an introduction and a prologue.

In the introductory section, not only does Zeleza provide a detailed summary of the book, but also he classifies and discusses all the five different but interconnected types of wars ("imperial wars, anti-colonial wars, intra-state wars, inter-state wars, and international wars" pp. 2-3) Africa has experienced and those that are ongoing. He argues that these wars are either driven by political ambitions or ideological beliefs. By imperial wars, Zeleza contends that Africa has contributed tremendously in the two World Wars by providing thousands of troops to its colonial powers, serving in combat zones and theaters of war, and providing primary commodities (mineral and agricultural) to European colonial armies for war effort. Africa also participated in the Cold War and served as a place where the "U.S. strategy of proxy-war to 'roll back'" (p. 4) was first tried before implementing it in other parts of the globe. According to Zeleza, the two World Wars and the Cold War, which constitute the imperial wars, alongside with the wars of liberation have created fertile conditions for current African conflicts. The crisis in the Great Lakes Region exemplifies well the long lasting legacies of imperial wars.

In the post-colonial era, the new African nations had to deal with a series of issues, including nation-building and unfair relations between Global South and Global North that had led the former in a perpetual dependency on the latter. Africa countries face, in addition to the already complex problems of identity (ethnic, religious, and cultural), arbitrary nature of borders demarcated by the colonialists without consideration of African realities, a systemic corruption and authoritarian regimes that are unable to provide basic needs for their populations. Classified as an international war in which Africa is unfortunately part of, the current 'War on Terror' has forced many African states to restrict and even forgo both political and civil rights of their peoples. The implementation of domestic and foreign policies enacted by these countries does nothing but accentuates religious cleavages between Muslims and Christians. This was the case in Ethiopia, Northern Nigeria, and Kenya, to name a few. In the same order of ideas, Lumina argues that "most of the African anti-terrorism laws are likely to erode not only the human rights of the people but also the fundamental principles of humanity" (p. 194).

Controversial questions, such as: Are borders to blame?; Religion or ethnicity?; Resources or identity?; and Modern weapons and pre-modern armies?, help Mazrui to lay out possible sources of conflicts in Africa. He argues that African conflicts are so complex that "there are no single and easy explanations" for them (p. 36). At the end he contends that colonial legacies inherited by Africa are the roots of its current conflicts. One of the most important contributions Mazrui makes to the literature on the causes of conflict is the discussion of dualism and pluralism dichotomy. He posits that dual societies are more dangerous than plural societies, for their likelihood to get trapped in a positional bargaining and impasse whenever they face conflicting issues remains extremely high.

The issue of identity as a potential cause of African conflicts is the main concern of both Akokpari and White in chapters 3 and 5, respectively. However, while Akokpari is interested in the question of citizenship, White revisits Frantz Fanon's psychological perspectives on liberation and post-colonial wars and uses the critical feminist theory to challenge what she calls "the androcentrization of inferiority" (p. 137), that is the traditional psychological view on gendered identity. White argues that traditional role that women are assigned to, that is, women must stay home and care for the family while men's duty is to go out and work, is socially constructed by the colonizers and reinforced by the African men in the post-colonial era. She points out that during the liberation wars, African women were confronted with two types of struggles: fighting men's behavior within the military and "the external enemy" (p. 161).

Akokpari elaborates well on the "Self/Other" dynamic where the "Other" is excluded from sharing state power and resources. This was the case in Ivory Coast where Alassane Ouattara, an Ivorian of an immigrant descent, was treated for not being a "true Ivorian" and therefore, was not

allowed to contest the presidency in his country for over a decade. Akokpari identifies the roots of the Ivorian crisis right. However, even though all the successors of the late President Houphouet Boigny, from Bedié to Gbagbo, saw Ouattara as a threat to their powers, it was under Gbagbo that Ouattara was able to contest the presidency in Ivory Coast. But looking at the country's 2010 post-election crisis, Akokpari's prediction on Ivory Coast's future was correct.

One of the most fascinating things about this book is that it addresses the roots of African conflicts in a more balanced and comprehensive way. It looks at the causation of these conflicts from both external factors and internal factors such as authoritarianism and corruption, poverty, and the composition of state's cultural fabric. However, in a logistic regression analysis, Henderson dismisses ethnic factors and regime type as major causes of African conflicts and finds that while colonial legacy and an increase in military spending are more likely to increase civil war onset, economic development decreases the likelihood of civil war (Table 1.1.). Furthermore, the book offers some steps that Africans ought to take so as to reduce the occurrence of these conflicts and improve the living conditions of their people. These steps include: "cultivating toleration, developing pluralism, improving civil-military relations, and fostering innovative Pan-African solutions" (p. 41).

However, some of the approaches to African conflicts such as "inter-African colonization and annexation" (p. 46), and the idea of having a possible African Security Council mirroring the current UN Security Council may not work in this era of globalization and democratization. The fact is that UN itself is under a serious criticism, for its Security Council is not representative and critics, including former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, are calling for a structural change of the UN Security Council. In all, the language used in this book is clear, understandable and accessible to scholars in the field of conflict management. Given the inaccessibility of data on Africa and other developing countries, the tables and figures provided in Chapter 8 by Sikod on the linkage of conflicts and food insecurity and production, will be very helpful in future studies. The references provided in this scholarly work can be used by other researchers and scholars interested in African studies and African conflicts as a starting point of their investigation.