

**UNITAR Training Programme to Enhance Conflict  
Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa**

**Gorée Institut  
Dakar, Sénégal  
9-20 October 2000**

**The Sources of Conflict**

**By**

**Prof. Samuel C. Nana-Sinkam<sup>1</sup>  
Special Representative of the Secretary General  
of the United Nations in Guinea Bissau**

---

<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this document are those of the author alone.



# **The Sources of Conflict**

## **TABLE OF CONTENT**

Defining Conflict

Dismal Overview

Causes of Conflict

Typology of States

Philosophical Foundations of the Post Colonial State

The Social Construction of the African Inter State System

The Emergence of the African Post Colonial State

The post Colonial State as an Instrumental State

Multi dimensional Crisis and the dynamic of Instability in Africa

Crisis of Identity and the second instrumentality of the post colonial state

The Problematic Trinity

The Case of Guinea Bissau

# THE SOURCES OF CONFLICT

## Defining Conflict

Conflict is a very fluid, mobile, ambiguous word<sup>2</sup>. This has led to a lot of confusion in the literature on the subject. The conceptual imprecision associated with conflict has tended to generate its own discourse, which in many respects, has distracted attention from the main question of war, instability and insecurity that should be central to more focused approach to the problem of conflict. In fact, a school, concerned about the negative understanding of conflict and its equation with violence, has set out to change the “narrow and one dimensional account of conflict” with a broader appreciation of the concept as a “multi-dimensional social phenomenon” which is an integral feature of human existence, essential to the process of social change and transformation<sup>3</sup>. Some experts underline the state of conflict in terms of the absence of social harmony. Conflict in this context has been defined “as a state or condition characterized by the absence of social harmony”<sup>4</sup>. Yet, as confusing as this may suggest at a first glance, this view has its merits. For conflict can indeed be positive. It is when conflict goes out of control and the institutions that are created to contain its negative manifestation break down and can no longer provide the safety latches to restrain the deadly expression of differences, that the phenomenon itself becomes a problem. In deed, that conflict has acquired its negative normative connotation implies that the manner of the expression of divergent interests and often times value dissonance in society has become problematic. Thus the expression of conflicts through war and armed hostilities, whether inter or intra state, is an extreme expression of the failure or incapacity of the institutions of a system or mechanisms put in place for managing conflict. War is therefore conflict as violence. Conflict must not necessary imply violence. My use of conflict at this forum evokes it as a violent, extremely destructive reciprocal engagement between two states or by groups of peoples within a discernible political space against each other. Some term this as “deadly conflict”<sup>5</sup>. Thus, I am constrained to explain that my contribution here would focus on deadly conflict, or if you like war. In fact, I feel more comfortable with admitting that I plan to talk about why there is no peace, instead of defining conflict, which, given the evolving discourse, will only take us further and further abroad into the realms of psychology and from our main destination; which is to think about the issue of peace. Peace is the absence of war and the presence of social justice. So my basic preoccupation is about exploring the question “Why Wars, Insecurity and Instability in Africa?”. The focus will be on recent developments in Guinea Bissau.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ian Doucet (ed), ‘Understanding Conflict’ in Thinking About Conflict, (Resource Pack for Conflict Transformation, International Alert, November 1996) page 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.3.

<sup>4</sup> Salim A. Salim, Localizing Outbreaks, in Kevin M. Cahill (ed) Preventive Diplomacy, (Basic Books, The Center for International Health and Cooperation, 1996 ) page 102.

<sup>5</sup> See Carnegie Corporation of New York’s Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, September 1997.

## **Dismal Overview**

The African state system is in distress. Since 1970, more than 30 wars have been fought in Africa. A vast majority of the wars have had domestic origins within the respective states. That notwithstanding, once wars in African states erupt, they are often not contained within the territories of states from where conflicts started. Neighbouring states are often, directly or indirectly, covertly or overtly, implicated in the hostilities. In 1999, 15 of the 53 states in Africa were engaged in war. As a result of these conflicts, today, more than 20% of sub Saharan African population is affected by civil war. These wars in Africa account for more than half of war related deaths in the whole world. They have also resulted in more than 8 million refugees. The refugees eventually become sources of new conflicts or central to the escalation of old ones in the region. Refugees are known to have mobilized militarily to be actively engaged in armed hostilities. As a result of these conflicts, some states have imploded. Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Central African Republic, Eritrea/Ethiopia, Zaire, Congo (Brazzaville), Angola, Burundi and Rwanda are examples. Some of them have been fairly reconstituted as in Liberia and should we say Sierra Leone?. Notwithstanding the great costs, Liberia has been plunged back into civil war and Sierra Leone is yet out of the wood. Some states are in a perpetual state of war. These include Angola, Burundi and Somalia, which are practically states almost permanently in distress. Others have succeeded in maintaining a semblance of normalcy, but only after great trauma to their nationals and at great costs to the sub region as a whole. In none of these major flash points of deadly conflict in Africa has sustainable peace been achieved. What these cases demonstrate is the intractability of war in African states, once armed hostilities have erupted.

The consequences of this are the dismal socio - economic statistics of the continent. Today, four out of 10 Africans live below poverty line, on barely one dollar a day. Yet still, 30% of Africans have no access to medical services, while 40% of the population lack access to safe water. One out of every four African children does not go to school and 14 of the 20 lowest ranked countries in terms of gender development index are in Africa. As these scenarios replicate themselves in various facets of life and from one country to the other, the question arises why peace and stability seem to have eluded African states. In many respects, the conclusion may be reached that the African state, mostly a post-colonial phenomenon, has failed. The consequences of these failures have been to undermine peace, security, stability, and prosperity for its peoples.

## **Causes of Conflict**

Many causes of instability have been identified. These have been broadly classified into proximate causes and underlying causes<sup>6</sup>. Proximate causes refer to immediate reasons that propel actors to resort to armed hostilities. They point at specific forces and developments within a given limited recent historical space acting within a

---

<sup>6</sup> Ian Doucet (ed), page 4.

particular context and whose interplay strain to a breaking point institutional mechanisms designed to manage conflicts that are inherent in any social process. This may be typified by the massacres in Northern Nigeria in 1966 that immediately preceded the Nigerian Civil war or the fall of a long authoritarian rule of a Mobutu in the then Zaire that has led to the near dismemberment of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the same vein was Samuel Doe's dictatorship, which not only ushered in a decade of conflict in Liberia but also threw the immediate sub region into turmoil that has defied solution up till now. Siad Barre's legacy in Somalia has been the disappearance of the state. Mengistu ended his totalitarian state with a divided country. The world continues to watch the fate of Nigeria in the aftermath of Babaginda and the maximum rule of an Abacha. In all these, sanguine scenarios, institutional mechanisms were disabled or done away with completely to facilitate the hegemonic project of the partial state. Thus deadly conflicts represent a failure of institutional arrangement put in place to cope with the stresses of social processes.

Underlying causes focus on attributes that are fundamental, of long durée, systemic, to the extent that they may at once define the character of an interstate system of which each individual state is a member, and at the same time define the internal structure and processes of the constituent states of the larger sub system. They also impinge on the nature of relationship that develop between the constituent members of an interstate system. This may be exemplified by the structure of the African inter state system and the very nature and structure of the African state.

The structure of the African interstate system is defined by the arbitrariness of what has been termed 'its dehumanised boundaries' that were drawn in general disregard for local human factors and from an incomplete knowledge of Africa.<sup>7</sup> The same incongruous structure of the inter state system is replicated within in the absurd territorial configuration of the African state. The first instrumental character of the African state emanates from its antecedents as a creation of external forces whose projected *raison d'être* was, at different levels, to articulate the interests of its creators in the post colonial era. The second instrumental character of the African state relates to the deadly project of a perpetual struggle for the appropriation of the African state by contending domestic forces. These contending cleavages may be on the basis of tribe, ethnicity, religion, philosophical orientations and differential worldviews or ideological affinities. At these two levels, the problematics of the African post colonial state may be summed up as "Who owns the African State?" These two structural problems are closely inter-linked in initiating conflicts and imposing on it the deadly trajectories, which they assume. The fundamental causes in fact provide the context for the way the proximate causes interact to create a dynamic of deadly conflict, insecurity and instability which have led to the failure of institutions and mechanisms of the African state and its interstate system. The fixation with nation building has been described as the mother of all evils, especially in multi ethnic states, providing a cover for not so covert operations for the suppression human rights, minority rights and sub national

---

<sup>7</sup> Willie Breytenbach, *The History and Destiny of National Minorities in the African RENAISSANCE: The Case for Better Boundaries*, in Malegapuru William Makogba, *African Renaissance*, (Mafube Publishing, 1999).

identities, which have been the bedrock of violent dissent in the African state. Nation building in Africa has therefore become a nebulous project of doubtful utility. In the context of the post cold war era and the sensibilities of an evolved international society and its universal values, with its accent on internal self determination, more conflict can be expected until the Africa state mobilizes the will to rid itself of what Willie Breytenbach refers to as its legacies of mistakes<sup>8</sup>.

**It is the contention in this paper that instability in the African inter state system and African states is traceable to the post colonial nature of the African state and its inter state system, in particular the structural realignments of the peoples during the process of the reconfiguration of the externally imposed political units that were transformed into new state.** Today, with more than 53 countries demarcated by 165 borders, Africa is the most divided continent. This wholesale mechanistic transformation of the African geopolitical space contrasts sharply with the organic evolution of Westphalian and post modern states. In the African state, there is lack of allegiance of the people. The state lacks legitimacy in the perception of its citizenry. It is a doubly instrumental state that was created to first, articulate the interests of its metropolitan power in post independence. It is also a centralized state with a paternalistic leadership that is often transformed into an instrument of a local hegemony of one or two of its constituent nations. Thus concepts of the dinosaur state, the predatory state, the state as an alimentary canal, the rent state, all attempt to capture the essence of the African state. Indeed, Van de Berghe's description of the state as "the ultimate social parasite, a self legitimating protection racket, a killing machine run by the few to steal from the many" aptly describes the nature of the African state. It is these attributes of the state that set the stage for instability and insecurity in the African state and the African inter state system.

The character of this state implicitly generates conflict through a multidimensional crisis that is inherent in its structure. Such conflicts often acquire an intermestic character and dynamic implicating peoples, if not states, of neighboring states with close cultural affinity with part of the state in distress. This may lead to covert or overt involvement in the conflict. In more recent times, this involvement has become more overt. The proposal is advanced that African states and conflict managers should transcend the state and focus on direct participation of all peoples and nationalities implicated in every one conflict, irrespective of post colonial international frontiers, to find meaningful ways to resolve of manage conflict. The essence of this transcendence is to transform the constitutive norms of inter state relations, transform the economic infrastructure with denser linkages and finally emancipate Africa from wars, disease and want. It is a daunting challenge but an imperative one at the threshold of a new millennium.

### **Typology of States**

There are, at the threshold of the twenty-first century, three types of states; the post Modern or post Westphalian state, the classic Westphalian state and the post

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

colonial state. The post-colonial state in Africa, as a concept in the organization of societies and communities, is a foreign importation. Having been implanted in this new environment, the African state aspires to acquire the attributes of the classic Westphalian states. The post Modern states are mostly classic Westphalian states now evolved and forced by the emergence of a new dynamic of collective security, international politics and global economics to yield some of the attributes central to them as sovereign states. The post-colonial state was preceded by the truncation of the natural trajectory of evolving political institutions in pre-colonial Africa. The concrete expression of this form of state largely runs against deeply entrenched sociological realities. The state that emerged was also crafted to satisfy the post-colonial aspirations and protect the interest of the colonial creators of the state. The state was imposed from without and lacks root and legitimacy in the environment in which it has been planted. Arising from this, the structure, institutions and organization of the affairs of the African state that emerged are problematic.

### **Philosophical Foundations of the Post Colonial State**

These problems are compounded by the realist philosophical underpinnings of the inter state system, of which the African state is a part. Realism focuses exclusively on power and the monopoly of force by the state. It is also statecentric. The realist framework provides legitimation for the power of coercion of this state over the people. The African state was constructed late in the evolutionary life span of the state, when the evolution of international society and a global norm of governance had emerged. These developments have somewhat mitigated over time the realist foundations of the early state; the Westphalian model that was grounded on the accentuation of force and the extreme state centricity of the sovereignty. Thus in the classic Westphalian state that has evolved into a post modern state, there is less accent on force, especially in internal processes, within and among states in this category. Internally, there is emphasis on democratic principles and increasing entrenchment of human and peoples rights, supervised by supra national institutions beyond the control of any and all members of the inter state system of the post modern states. Social Justice has therefore evolved as the bedrock of the post modern state, while state violence has become a painful aberation used at great political cost to the state domestically. The African state was created by these same Westphalian forces that were themselves evolving toward the diminution of force in internal political intercourse and seeking ways to repudiate violence as a currency in inter state relations. This late entry into the inter state system is fixated with the search for the mythical limitlessness of the power of the state associated with early development of the state as a concept in the organization of societies. Thus, the African state has become the principal modern day carrier of values anachronistic to the very ideas of security and stability as defined in the context of the last decades of the twentieth century. But the consequences of the erosion of these established demarcations –or their redefinitions – have been both more complex and are often negative. Even as the revolution in communications and economics helped make borders obsolete, the political structures of the nation state system, particularly in Africa, has retained their formal power. The result has been dismal, as African states pursuing the deadly project of appropriating the state have used the rhetoric of nation

building and the instruments of violence of the state to render the peoples helpless and insecure. Rather than provide security, the African state itself had become a merchant of violence.

From the perspective of realism, the state is expected to enjoy the monopoly of the use of force within a clearly defined territory that contains a population whose relations with the world are conducted by this all-powerful sovereign. What this translates into in the hands of dictators in young post colonial states is that the ultimate test of their sovereignty is to coerce everyone and everything on their way into submission. In matured Westphalian state, the post modern state, the forces of history have mitigated the unbridled use of power by the sovereign. In young post colonial states, the sovereign is uncertain and brooks no challenge to his power and authorities. Power is absolute, rulership is maximum and the realist injunction is literally applied. In Africa, conflict is thus generated in multi national states, where power is usually concentrated and centralized in one person and one party who and which represent only an infinitesimal fragment of constituent nations and peoples of the state. National institutions are discarded, or disabled to function or redesigned to serve the interest of the maximum ruler and a cohort of his cronies of the same ethnicity, tribe or religion which is imposed on the state. This eliminates the possibility for democracy. Indeed, democratic ethos is the very anti thesis of the realist conception and use of power in the African state. As an instrumental state, power is only limited by the concerns expressed by the metropolitan mediators who turn a blind eye for as long as their political and economic interests are protected by the dictator. A convergence of interests at the two levels of instrumentality of the African state guarantees the peace of the graveyard. Peace in this setting is defined purely as the absence of war. For as long as the state can repress the people and opposition, there is peace, in the realist sense.

### **The Social Construction of the African Inter State System**

Sub Saharan Africa has been a battle ground for alien ideas since its contact with the outside world. From the destruction of the Ghana empire by Arab invaders to the capitulation of the Kingdom of the Bakongo to the force of Henry Morton Stanley, Africa has been at the receiving end of the ambition and aggrandissement of external forces. These intrusions were rationalized in various ways including the need to evangelize and open up the Dark Continent. The self imposed burden of reconstructing the world of Africa by all colonial powers, including Europeans and Arab would-be masters of Africa, was based on assumptions of inferiority of the structure of ideas, values, traditional knowledge and institutions indigenous to Africa. The ultimate goal of foreign ideas and its violent intrusion in Africa was to possess the real estate, perpetuate exploitation, and if possible to transform the African man and black man in particular into a being in the image of the colonizer.

Whether it was indirect rule of a Lord Lugard, the dehumanizing brutality of Belgian colonial system, the assimilationist policy of the French in Africa or even the confused regime of the Portuguese, the underlying principle was the same. It was the domination, control and exploitation of a people perceived as inferior and weak. The

imposition of these foreign ideas and systems of thought had always generated tensions in the various recipient black communities. Arab imperialism needed to kill to conquer and islamize down to the Atlantic. European powers launched their attacks on black Africa beginning in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. These two major aggressors against the integrity of black Africa embraced the dogma that subjugation was beneficial for Africans. Black African resistance to Arab and European cultural and political imperialism has continued in various ways, including subtle rejection of the new institutions and the denial of legitimacy to them. This has been most pronounced in the political realm because of the very nature of politics as a basis of the distribution and policy making.

### **The Emergence of the African Post Colonial State**

With modest modifications, the general configuration of the African political system resulted from the partition of black Africa at the Congress of Berlin in 1885. At that Berlin Congress, European colonial powers partitioned Africa into territorial units. Indigenous Kingdoms, evolving States and communities were arbitrarily divided; unrelated areas and peoples were just arbitrarily joined together. In the 1960s, these arbitrary reconfigurations were indiscriminatorily transformed to newly independent states. These post colonial states inherited the colonial boundaries, together with the challenge that the legacy posed to their territorial integrity and to their attempts to achieve nationhood. The states inherited had been designed to exploit local divisions, and not overcome them. Along with these was also the challenge of forging a genuine national identity from among disparate and often competing communities trapped in the post colonial states.

The legacies of the Berlin Conference is that the international system in Africa is a patch work of sociological incongruities of states largely perceived as illegitimate by their own citizenry. This has led to identity crisis, developmental crisis, crisis of participation, crisis of integration, and a host of identifiable crises in which the state is permanently enmeshed. Unresolved these crises lead to alienated citizenry, disorientation in the systems of thought, malalignment in the trajectories of social development, institutional and normative anomie and imbalances in the structural, material and ideational foundations of the post colonial states and societies in black Africa.

### **The post Colonial State as an Instrumental State**

The impetus for independence was varied. Some of the colonial powers were forced by the forces unleashed by the logic of the participation of non European peoples in the Second World War to grant independence to their colonies. In so doing, most of the states were contrived to remain weak domestically and dependent externally. The foundations of the states were laid in such a way as to compromise its ability to achieve stability, independence and national cohesion. Electoral processes were designed to entrench those seen as amenable to control by the departing forces. In this way, the colonial powers set the stage for election malpractices and legitimized practices that

have become some of the most ready source of conflict in black Africa; election rigging. The essence of the instrumentality of the post-colonial state was for that to serve the interests of its metropolitan power. Sometimes the state was only an extension of the image of its metropolitan mentor state. The strong cultural ties between ex colonial territories and their metropolitan mentor states were at the foundation of their enduring influence in the social construction of these states. The colonial forces built spheres of influences that were maintained at the expense of domestic repression. Their anointed dictators in the post-colonial states did not rely on electoral mandates to rule. Thus, the state was a state without a will, as the people possessed no sovereign powers. The true sovereign was the often, but sometimes not so, invisible hands of the external force managing the affairs of the colonial state. Indeed, such was the power of the external force that African states were often barred from formally interacting between and among themselves directly. In this connection, it is to be observed that most of France's military interventions in sub Sahara Africa had been to stabilize restore or impose regimes supportive of French policies in Africa. **In the case of Guinea Bissau, it may be argued that the last civil war revolved around a potential change in the sphere of influence to which the country belong ed. In effect, the civil war was a clash of local surrogates of foreign interests, which spiraled out of control because the PAIGC, as a national institution, decayed and too feeble, was unable to manage the conflicting interests represented by the domestic contending forces that sought to appropriate the state for its metropolitan controllers.**

### **Multi dimensional Crisis and the dynamic of Instability in Africa**

The consequences of all the above is that African state perpetually labours under the yoke of multidimensional crisis. These may be highlighted as the crisis of identity, crisis of integration, participation and distribution. These constitute the sources of instability. Once the state is unable to address these crises before they erupt into armed hostilities, the conflict that is generated draws the attention of watchful interested parties in neighbouring states. As result of the arbitrary nature of the international boundaries of African states, the allegiances of peoples flow across these boundaries. The problems of the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda translate into sub regional problems in Hutu/Tutsi antipathies in Burundi, in the Republic of Congo and draws in Uganda. The problems of Tutsi in the Democratic Republic of Congo leads to a full blown rebellion that toppled the dinosaur state of Zaire under Mobutu Sese Seko. Decisions of the Zairean national conference on the Tutsi and the so called Bayamulenge leads to an invasion of Tutsi forces from Rwanda. Mobutu's nemesis came from the decision of the national conference on the Tutsi, rather than from any domestic political problem. The problems of the Ewe in Togo cause ripples in relations with neighbouring Ghana.

### **Crisis of Identity and the second instrumentality of the post colonial state**

The crisis of identity springs from widespread perceptions of the illegitimacy of the African state. Is the person Tutsi or Rwandan? Which of these two identities takes precedence? In many African states, the dilemma is profound. In Rwanda as in Burundi, as recent events have shown, it would appear the Tutsi or Hutu identity takes

precedence. This implies that the interests of the Tutsi would come before the interests of the state. The African state therefore becomes an instrument in the hands of whichever of the peoples in the multinational state captures it. The state becomes an instrument for the advancement of sectional and parochial interests. The traditional paternalism associated with the African leader runs in a concentric fashion. At the core of the power concentric are the dictator and his family, who control the vast resources of the state. The immediate concentric zone is a loyalist mostly drawn from his tribe. They comprise the security chiefs, the controller of the national treasury and heads of the pivotal sectors of the economy. The post colonial African state is a security state. The state is defined as the cabal of thieves. The Abacha and Mobutu phenomena typify this. General Abacha was at the center. His son ran the family conglomeration of businesses that taxed every contract of the central government, which were contrived to pass through this syndicate. The national petroleum industry was destroyed in order for the family to control the national economy. The security chiefs were kinsmen from his home. Abacha was first of his tribe before being Nigerian. His identity crisis was effectively resolved in favour of himself and his tribe. To keen observers of the sources of conflict, this identity crisis manifests itself in many ways, sometimes in more measured and sophisticated ways and at other times, in extremely crude manner of the Abachas and Mobutu. The implication of this is that conflicting interests cannot be successfully mediated through democratic means only.

There is also an institutional dimension dilemma for the state itself. While it is fashionable for state functionaries to refer to the state in terms of the nation state and post colonial states constantly allude to the process of building their nations, the reality is that there is the constant struggle within the constituent nations to capture the state. Thus nation building becomes a political rhetoric of those who have captured the state in their search to legitimize their hegemony. Thus reality of the constant struggle for domination by a part or a coalition of parts of the state belie the rhetoric of a nation in being or the claims of the state being a nation state in fact. The struggle is also expressed in the attempt to build the image of the state as a reflection of the dominant hegemony in the state. The culture, including language and religious beliefs of the hegemonic group in the state, is often imposed on the other constituent nations in the state. The interests of the state are defined in terms of the interests of the dominant hegemony. In essence the African state lacks a unified vision of its corporate image, interests and *raison d'être*.

Thus the constant question is to which of the constituent nations belong the post colonial African state. To which nation belongs the state? Is Nigeria the nation of Hausa Fulani and others? Is Rwanda a Hutu or a Tutsi country? Is there a Nigerian or are there many nations whose aggregate can be referred to as Nigeria? This reality then accentuates the crises implicit in the state, especially the identity crisis, for if the state is captured by a constituent part of the corporate whole, the state then is transformed into the instrument for the articulation of perceived interests of this group. The Hutu dominated Rwanda is first a Hutu state and the RPF controlled state is first a Tutsi state. In both instances, other constituent units of the state are alienated and may often take up arms to either capture the state back or to found its or their own autonomous

nation state(s). Given the structural alignments of the interstate system, the domestic conflicts arising for the attempt to work through the structural incongruities of the Rwandan state fuels conflicts in Burundi, Zaire and refugee problems in Tanzania and finally engulfs the whole of the Lake Region in interlocking conflicts. The identity to be assumed by the nation state then compete with the various autonomous identities that compete for relevance and recognition in the nation in being.

Since identity defines interests and is the basis of interest articulation, conflicting identities bring in their wake the other crisis of distribution, participation, integration and all the other problems that come with the disaggregation of interests in a supposedly single polity. The Hausa Fulani identity implies that in West Africa, a Hausa Fulani dominated Nigeria is aligned toward the north of the sub region as the Hausa Fulani stock in northern Nigeria protects the interests of all Hausa Fulani in the sub region who form a distinct cultural group across international boundaries in the sub region. The practical implication is that Nigerians are favorably better disposed toward Hausa Fulani leadership in Nigeria at the federal level, than say federal leadership of say, the Igbo and even the Yoruba. Within the framework of such identities, what normally would be termed domestic matters have clear implications outside the sovereign state that these interests elicit direct or indirect intervention of other interested parties outside the borders of the state in question.

Arising from the intrusion of foreign structures of ideas, knowledge and values into Africa has been another imposed identity based on the hegemony of imposed and foreign religions that have become serious sources of cleavages and conflicts in Africa. Besides the numerous political divisions already identified, Africa and particularly black Africa has to cope with the problem of foreign faiths that have pushed aside indigenous belief systems and divided the sub region into Christians, Muslims and believers in indigenous faiths. Such has been the imposition and its entrenchment in the social fabric that Africans have fought and killed each other over faiths that have been imposed on them. Religious intolerance is rife. Nigeria epitomises this. The recent decision of the state of Zamfara to institute the Sharia in a predominantly Muslim state has raised serious questions about long term stability of the Nigerian federation. The identity of the citizens of that state as Muslims appears more important to that state than its common heritage and identity as Nigerians. The minority Christians in the state feels alienated as Christians. The two identities are extra African. Yet these identities have become potential source of instability not only in Zamfara state but also for the Nigerian federation as a whole. For Nigeria as a whole, the series of Zango Kataf riots since the mid 1990s leading to the deaths of thousands have demonstrated how volatile religious affiliations and identities have become in African states. This has also raised constitutional questions in the federation as a whole. Yet, in the midst of all these contentions and mayhem resulting from fanaticism of adherents to foreign religions, the practitioners of indigenous faith have remained the most peaceful in the face of disrespect and vilification by the former two. Based on these foreign imposed identities, Africa has gone through cycles of conflicts and wars. Nigeria's civil war in 1967-70 was as much a religious war as an ethnic conflict. Conflicting interests in the Nigerian state are perceived to spring from either ethnic interests or religious interest. Often the two

may mesh, such as when the North perceived to be generally in favour of the Sharia. These generalizations hide truths and the devils that are in details. It is therefore possible to talk of an unholy trinity of imposed identities from which spring conflict and instability in the African polity.

### **The Problematic Trinity**

In essence, the social construction of the identities of different peoples of Africa is at the heart of the instability and conflicts in Africa. In the post colonial era, this social construction is expressed into two different ways. Domestically, the problem of distribution of values along tribal and ethnic lines accentuated by colonial powers and inherited by the post colonial state meant that the state had to compete for the allegiance of the peoples with their tribal or ethnic loyalties. The pre colonial allegiances seem to have triumphed over the attempt to forge a new nations or nations. A second of these is the struggle between Islam and Christianity within the African state. This struggle has led to conflict and opened the way for external interventions in African affairs. Besides ideological considerations of the cold war era, religion, in a strange mixture with ethnicity, seem to be the most predictable source of conflict in black Africa. The third manifestation is the division of the peoples along lines imposed by their colonial experiences. This operates more at the macro level. African states are either francophones, or anglophones or lusophones. These artificial divisions are also expressed at the micro level. Hence the Yoruba in the Republic of Benin is a francophone, who defends the interests of French culture against the Yoruba from Nigeria, who finds the values of the Yoruba francophone bizarre. Though they have the same allegiances to their common cultural heritage, in real life they belong to different cultural interest zones. The same applies to the Ewe in Ghana and Togo. The interplay of these forces all impact on African conflicts to give it their intermestic character, because the flow of these identities across international borders imply that conflicting interests that are the sources of conflict are in themselves not contained within the frontiers of the African state. Islamic northern Nigeria is interested in the push of Islam from northern Sudan to its south. Southern Nigerians can also identify with the struggle of the south of Sudan to resist forcible islamization.

### **The Case of Guinea Bissau**

It is argued that the nature of the inter state system of which Guinea Bissau is a member had been subject to intense competition by external forces traditionally understood to pursue their post colonial foreign policy interests in that region. One of the two forces was bent of retaining its spheres of influence and maintaining the status quo while the competitor was determined to widen its influence in that immediate sub region. In the parlance adopted in this paper, there was a danger of the Bissau Guinean state passing as an instrument from one sphere of influence to the other. Internally, the decay in the PAIGC, the one party of the state, had weakened it as a mediator in reconciling the internal allies of the two external forces. These domestic contending forces, the military Junta and the Nino Vieira presidency, were allied to their metropolitan mentors and their orbits of influence in the immediate sub region. The

immediate cause of the simmering clash was the change of national currency from the Pessô, which was tied to the currency of the status quo power, to the CFA, which was tied to the currency of the challenger. The power transition implied in the economic policy was clear to the two external forces and their proxies. The political price entailed in the economic policy demanded critical foreign and security decisions that ran against long held axiomatic foundation of Guinea Bissau's security policy in the immediate sub region. The policy itself derived from the cross border cultural affinities that had stamped on security calculus of the sub region an intermestic character. It was thus natural for actors sub regional actors to intervene militarily in the affray. In achieving the goal of changing its metropolitan mentor and effectively altering the balance of power in the immediate sub region, political costs called for were beyond what the Joao Bernardino Vieira could pay. The war was not unpredictable at that point. The rest is now history.