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**Armed Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Moral-Rational Review and
Need for a Functional Explanatory Framework in Understanding of African Armed
Conflicts**

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper grapples with the complex and multifaceted nature of the Congolese armed conflict from 1993 to 2003 through literature and theoretical debates. It poses the intriguing question of how analytical views and theoretical assumptions on this Congolese armed conflict inform one about the impact of moral and rational considerations and proceeds to highlight the moral and rational layers of the conflict. The paper reflects on immoral and irrational mechanisms, processes, behaviors, and decisions as factors that made this conflict a deeply harrowing experience, with a staggering number of non-livable civilian deaths and devastating consequences since World War II.

Methodology: This paper used content analysis to unravel the trajectory of the Congolese armed conflict through a comprehensive document review of its historical and theoretical analysis. It employed a unique approach of critical moral reasoning to dissect moral and rational questions of the conflict's various causes, dimensions, actors, networks, and involved interests, thereby providing a fresh perspective on the conflict.

Findings: This paper revealed moral lapses in the Congolese armed conflict's occurrence, development, and resolution from its origins in local identity-based disputes to its transformation into one of the most protracted, deadly, and destructive cycles of violence. The paper found that the conflict's moral and rational aspects were, in their right, essential aggravating features because they impacted its status determination and development from its onset to the peacebuilding process, and a framed functional moral and rational inquiry is needed for a more structured explanation of this causation.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: With its critical moral reasoning, this paper extended the analytical and theoretical understanding of the Congolese armed conflict and offered practical implications for future analysis of African armed conflicts. By shedding light on the moral and rational features of the Congolese armed conflict, it advocates for a functional moral and rational inquiry framework to elucidate the functionality of relationships between moral and rational actions during the conflict and its development. The aim is to enhance the comprehension of the conflict and help define actionable tools for decision-makers during wars and peace processes in Africa, thereby making a tangible impact on the field.

Keywords: *Armed conflict, African Armed Conflict, Great Lakes Region, War, Morality, Rationality, Moral Inquiry, Just War Theory, Immoral and Irrational Behaviors and Decisions, Harmful Actions*

JEL Codes: *F51, D75, N47, N40, D60, D60, E70, N40, K49, N40.*

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INTRODUCTION

The Democratic Republic of Congo's armed conflict from 1993 to 2003 was one of the significant post-Cold War clashes in Sub-Saharan Africa with multiple dimensions, consequences, and critical moral inferences (Clark, 2011). From an ethical perspective, the wars series and repetitive peace processes demonstrated a poverty-war dichotomy as the armed violence occurred and lasted for years in an impoverished social and economic environment. The conflict experienced a vicious cycle of violence to the point of being named the greatest humanitarian crisis of the early 21st century, with war-related deaths estimated at several million. The International Rescue Committee (2008), applying a significant mortality survey, reported that the Congolese conflict and the related humanitarian crisis caused the death of an estimated 5.4 million people from 1998 to 2007 and continued to kill as many as 45,000 people every month. The conflict experienced forced displacements of millions, extreme child abuse, women rape, and other acts of violence (International Rescue Committee[IRC], 2008). This unique Sub-Saharan armed violence destructiveness in the middle of poverty aggravated poverty. Immoral and irrational features associated with the country's social, economic, and political dynamics from local, national, regional, and global contexts contributed to causing a full-scale conflict. The collapse of the Congolese state, linked to the political elite's uncharacteristic greed, played a foremost role in the aberrant acts of violence that followed. The Congolese armed conflict became a hallmark subject of multidisciplinary violence studies.

Problem Statement

Conflict experts and theorists have extensively analyzed the various aspects of the Congolese conflict alone and in comparative settings. Significant studies (Weiss, 2000; Kisangani, 2003; Daley, 2006; Prunier, 2009; Lemarchand, 2009; Clark, 2011; Williams, 2013) investigated its development from different perspectives, local and national dynamics, African and international extensions, disastrous consequences, and substantial global peacebuilding efforts. They highlighted varied domestic factors of the conflict, including political exclusion, land battles, ethnic polarization, and the struggle over natural resources. They also integrated regional and international features as the conflict's development reached beyond Congolese boundaries. Most of these works pointed out unethical behaviors and atomistic thinking, as the internal downturn offered a stark illustration of the ethical deficiency of the political and military agents operating in a broadly unfettered way. Before and during the armed conflict, the unethical political environment only set the country on the train of immoral and irrational behaviors, finally providing a breeding ground for the conflict's expansion, duration, and consequences. These critical moral and rational lapses ignited, fueled, and muddled warfare and the peace-building process in the cycle of this conflict. How can one understand the immoral and irrational features of the Congolese armed conflict through its cycle in different analytical and investigative studies that uncovered and covered them?

Conceptual and Methodological Approach

This paper aims to review the literature about the conflict, from context-based definitional and legal views of armed conflict to analytical and theoretical arguments, to clarify the moral understanding of its development and consequences. The paper views morality in its universalist sense, which concerns the objective claims of right or wrong for humans as one species that all rational agents worldwide understand as a universal standard (Blackburn, 2008). Nonetheless, this reflection also views rationality as a distinct feature in its formal and practical use or inter-actionist or intellectual approaches, as depicted by Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber

(2017). In its two approaches, rationality is the ability to evaluate justifications and arguments in dialogue with others and the intellectual process to form better beliefs and make better decisions. Rational agents would use reason in its formal component with logical consistency or its material component with empirical support to regulate themselves. Accordingly, practical rationality related to war and peace as human interactions must evolve around shared interests and benefits, not individual or group ones. Therefore, a moral-rational review in this paper means approaching the conflict-related questions through right or wrong lenses as independent from specific values or customs directly linked to traditional, cultural, or fragmental beliefs, systems, and interests. Without narrowing the meaning of moral principles, this review bridges the gap between the consequentialist, the virtue ethicist, and the deontologist's moral views.

This paper used an explorative method to unravel the relations between moral and rational considerations and the development of the Congolese armed conflict for their better understanding. It utilized content analysis through a document review of historical, analytical, and theoretical views from several studies. The study examined different research and academic publications as units of analysis, and it employed critical moral reasoning in exploring the conflict's various causes, dimensions, actors, networks, and involved interests to better seize moral and rational layers.

Upon reviewing different perspectives, this paper argues that the moral and rational aspects of the Congolese conflict are, in their right, essential drivers as they impacted the conflict's development from its onset to the peacebuilding process and need a functional moral inquiry for a better explanation. Through the lines below, the paper answers its main question by elucidating and discussing the nature of the Congolese armed conflict 1993- 2003 from international humanitarian frameworks, its analytical perspectives, and the theoretical debates on African armed conflicts. More to the point, the first section is an ontological and legal account as the paper acknowledges that the moral complexity of the Congolese armed conflict started from its determination from international humanitarian law. The second section examines the moral features pointed out in various analytical perspectives. The third section discusses moral considerations through African armed conflicts' characteristics and theoretical debates on political armed violence.

ONTOLOGICAL AND LEGAL EXPOSITIONS

This first section examines the moral questions raised by the Congolese armed conflict through the lenses of international humanitarian law's definitions, reflections, and research-based assumptions. The ontological and legal discussions about the conflict offer critical points for a moral review.

Definitional Examinations

The Congolese armed conflict between 1993 and 2003 posed problems with its ontological analysis due to its complex warring parties and multiple overlapping armed hostilities. What type of armed conflict was it? A single or multiple conflict; an international, internationalized, national, or local; a territorial, political, economic, or identity one? Correctly classifying any armed violence as an armed conflict implies not just the application of international humanitarian legality but also the deliberation around morality about war. It brings the legal and moral frameworks to be comfortably invoked on conflict actions of belligerent parties (Chelimo, 2011). With its complexity, the classification of the Congolese conflict defied

rigorous conventional labeling of armed conflicts as framed by the 1949 Conventions, a legal regime dependable on verifiable facts per objective criteria (Vité, 2009).

Generally, an armed conflict is not the simple use of lethal weapons between armed people. It is a question of meeting some attributes that many armed conflict experts have long attempted to set down. The acknowledgment that an armed conflict exists somewhere suggests the acceptance that people justifiably kill others and destroy some properties that are military targets. It is a critical responsibility that has always caused difficulties in determining an armed conflict. Still, no global treaty has yet to define an armed conflict, from the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the Geneva Conventions of 1949, their Additional Protocols I and II of 1977, to the recent Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) of 1998. The first solution to the problem is determining a minimum threshold of violence before ascertaining the existence of an armed conflict. Besides international treaties, international case laws and individual state legal systems have framed essential parameters and provided legal clarity and meaning to armed conflict determination. International trial judgments, for instance, have offered additional evidential arguments.¹

Despite not clearly defining armed conflicts, international humanitarian law contains crucial legal orientations that help tally some (Vité, 2009). The Geneva Convention's regime identifies two categories of armed conflict: international armed conflicts (IAC) and non-international armed conflicts (NIAC). One can retrieve elements to classify the Congolese armed conflict from 1993 to 2003. The first category implies armed confrontation between two or more states, and the second is an armed confrontation between state and non-governmental armed groups or only between armed groups (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018).

As the qualifier "international" indicates, the two categories differ in the level of entities involved in the armed confrontation. Between these two categories, international humanitarian law recognizes an internationalized armed conflict where other states openly support warring factions fighting internally (Stewart, 2003). Many analysts agreed that the Congolese armed conflict was internationalized because of the intervention of other states' forces (Stewart, 2003). However, the forms and circumstances of different states' military intervention in the conflict raised substantial questions about invasion and invitation. The international divergence on these questions affected the global determination of the Congolese armed conflict as some states remained adamant about recognizing its international nature for political reasons or interests (Chelimo, 2011). These definitional and typological issues hid moral uncertainty and bargaining from material interests' logic, as many global powers positioned according to their national gains in the conflict. Moral bargaining took advantage of the conflict's different armed confrontations, which blurred its status between a non-international, international, and internationalized armed conflict. Despite foreign military interventions, the armed attacks of domestic armed groups and the legal status of belligerents determined its non-international conflict status, as indicated under Article 2 of the Geneva Conventions. The conflict crossed the violence threshold early in its development with its destructiveness, including the level of

¹ For example, The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia: The existence of a situation of "protracted armed violence" between a State and organized armed groups or between such groups (Prosecutor v. "Dule", 1995, para. 70); the involvement of the UN Security Council may also reflect the intensity of a conflict (Prosecutor v. Haradinaj et al., 2008, para. 49) (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2018).

casualties and human displacement.² This evidential fashion showed that it reached the summum of destructiveness with a greater frequency and intensity than many other conflicts of its time.

Even within the debates over quantitative and qualitative definitions, no specific criteria could disagree with its crossing of the violence threshold. Qualitatively, the Congolese armed conflict was a rivalry between different parties, states included, that manifested in military hostilities (Olaosebikan, 2010). Following Lewis Coser's conflict definition, it was "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties are to injure or eliminate their rivals"(Cited by Olaosebikan 2010, p.550). From this qualitative stance, one can detect the moral values behind motivational factors that determined the Congolese wars' intensity. Considering quantitative definitions that highlight the numerical value of war casualties as a threshold, such as Correlates of War (COW) by David Singer and Melvin Small, the conflict involved wars with at least 1,000 killed combatants annually by organized conflicting parties, and the party with fewer combatants could inflict at least five percent of their losses on the opponent (Bonn International Center for Conversion).

The numerical death criteria of regular combatant casualties could well be replaced with direct civilian deaths, displacements, and sufferings that Congolese society experienced during the conflict. This quantitative representation is even more reasonable because, like in many African wars, war-related combatant casualties were not reported accurately. The definition of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) seems ideal as it combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to resolve the problem of the civilian death count. Accordingly, a conflict is "a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year"(Uppsala University). Because contested incompatibility is central to the armed conflict, it points to belligerents' "perception of incompatibility awareness" (Salam, 2006, p.9). If perception plays an essential role, so do morality and rationality in conflict development.

Although the Congolese government was one of the principal belligerents, the armed conflict in DR Congo underwent many episodes of armed confrontations directly between non-state actors and, especially, identity-based parties. These non-state armed confrontations became established, persistent, and severe in intensity and number of casualties, spreading its destructive reputation(Vité, 2009). The complex hostilities in the Congolese armed conflict reinforced the moral questioning of its legitimacy under international law and academic discussions about interstate, intrastate, and non-state conflict. However, the ensuing general debates offered less insight into the moral dimension of determining an armed conflict. Examining international humanitarian law standards from the contextual specificities and imbrications of the Congolese conflict might give more moral and rational understandings.

² Evidential factors for determining whether or not the armed conflict threshold test has been crossed in NIAC situations include the number, duration, and intensity of individual confrontations; the type of weapons and other military equipment used; the number and caliber of munitions fired; the number of persons and type of forces partaking in the fighting; the number of casualties; the extent of material destruction; and the number of civilians fleeing combat zones. "Categorization of an Armed Conflict," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Contextual Understanding of the Conflict Status

Ontologically, politically, and legally, determining an armed conflict involves some contextual and expository considerations. That is why the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), international humanitarian law's legitimate guardian, applies a case-by-case evidential basis to determine armed conflicts. In the mix of national and international actors, it is essential to situate the distribution of responsibilities in the armed confrontations in order to determine the conflict's legal status. To this end, formality is crucial for insurgent groups because when an armed confrontation is a non-international armed conflict, non-state actors are expected to be sufficiently formal and functional to comply with international humanitarian law (UNODC, 2018). To testify to their formality, they must demonstrate organizational layers, such as command structure, disciplinary rules, and governing mechanisms (UNODC, 2018). This is the first aspect to examine multiple non-state parties that operated in the Congolese armed conflict.

From the perspective of formality, the first phase of the armed confrontations in the DR Congo started in 1993 with the fighting between local armed groups without formal status. The Congolese national army got logically involved as a legitimate and regalian force. This could not be determined as an armed conflict based on international humanitarian law but rather internal disturbances. However, these armed confrontations became frequent and deadly, even though the count of deaths remained hypothetical. From many accounts, the situation crossed the violence threshold with the arrival in Congolese territory of the ex-FAR/Interahamwe, defeated Rwandese army and Hutu militia. Their presence and armed activities around the borders increased security threats for Rwanda and justified neighboring countries' invasion of DR Congo.

The second conflict phase commenced with the creation of The Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL) in October 1996 as a significant insurgent group against the Mobutu regime. In this phase, neighboring countries played a direct role in activating and intensifying armed confrontations. Violent clashes between local Congolese armed groups, Rwandese, Burundian, and Ugandan armed groups, and the Congolese army against AFDL, Rwandese, Ugandan, and Burundian troops who entered Congo. The United Nations's *DRC: Mapping Human Rights Violations 1993-2003* report mentioned how these neighboring countries' forces supplied military logistics and directly fought to capture the provinces of North and South Kivu and the Ituri district (2010). The neighboring countries' invasion, their direct clashes with the Congolese army, and their arrival in Kinshasa in May 1997 with AFDL troops officially demonstrated the international character of the conflict.

The third phase of the conflict started in August 1998 with the second war and the creation of The Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) after President Laurent Desire Kabila decided to end the presence of foreign troops on the Congolese territory. Again, Rwandese, Ugandan, and Burundian troops invaded DR Congo. Their troops airlifting from Goma to Kitona is one of the most daring and spectacular invading acts that the world has experienced. Like AFDL, the RCD rebellion was activated, armed, and accompanied directly by Rwandese and Ugandan troops. However, a military competition arose publicly this time between Rwandese and Ugandan forces, resulting in up to three direct armed confrontations. By several accounts, multiple rebel groups and local militias emerged from this foreign military rivalry on Congolese soil, proliferating lethal arms and spreading armed violence. This situation posed a moral question as tremendous immoral and irrational actions harmed many innocent

Congolese. To face Rwandese and Ugandan active invasion, the Congolese government resorted to several African armies, including Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola, and Tchad. Regarding the international conflict typology, this situation internationalized the already international conflict between the Congolese army and Rwandan-Ugandan forces.

The different phases of the conflict revealed the complexity and difficulty of its strict classification. Despite the presence of foreign armies, the conflict displayed features of NIAC as mentioned in Article 1 of the Additional Protocol II. More to the point, the conflict took place in the territory of Congo, the high contracting party, between its regular forces and insurgent armed forces or other organized armed groups that, under responsible command, exercised effective control over a part of Congolese territory. These insurgent forces then carried out sustained and concerted military operations against the Congolese armed forces from their controlled territories. This NIAC nature of the conflict did not immediately inhibit its IAC aspects. However, despite the evidence, the international instances struggled to fully recognize its IAC status and apply international humanitarian law, creating a moral permissiveness. This global permissive attitude allowed invading armies to continue their harmful activities toward Congolese civilians, as sufficiently documented in the United Nations's Mapping Report.³

Nevertheless, with Rwandese and Ugandan invasions of Congolese territory in 1996 and 1998 and visible violation of the non-intervention rule, the two Congolese wars had a distinctive international dimension (Clark, 2011). Therefore, international humanitarian law would have also governed the Congolese conflict as an IAC. The coalition of these neighboring states was a direct part of the conflict. It was indisputably an international armed conflict in the logic of Tadic's Appeal Judgement from the Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) that argued for the international status if another state intervenes in a conflict through its troops or if some of the internal belligerents act on behalf of that other State (Steward, 203).

In contrast to what some asserted about the internationalized status, the term is reductionist for the Rwandan and Ugandan military intervention in DR Congo, which was an overt invasion. It best describes the military intervention of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and other African countries officially requested by the Congolese government. This extension of belligerence to states that sent troops to fight alongside the Congolese army was legal because they intervened as third parties following the consent of the Congolese government. In keeping with the spirit of humanitarian law, these forces, like the Congolese army, were covert by the expression 'its armed forces' as they intervened on behalf of the Congolese government (Vité, 2009). However, different peace talks and agreements about the conflict treated the two sides of foreign intervention as simple impediments to the escalation of the conflict. They even linked the formal departure of invading forces to that of officially invited ones, portraying moral hypocrisy in treating the conflict's two sides.

Related to this discussion, one critical legal question, which is translatable to a moral one, concerns the consideration of Rwanda and Uganda as third-party states in the conflict. The initial action of these two countries was not to support the insurgency against established authority in DR Congo but a direct invasion. They initiated the Congolese insurgencies while

³ This report covered over 600 violent incidents, not just grave violations in the provinces directly affected by the conflict but also common ones in seemingly less affected parts of the country, providing an overview of the general context of immoral and irrational actions.

already having troops on the ground (Clark, 2011). Suppose that they are considered third-party under international humanitarian law. Therefore, a critical point should be the degree of direction and control they exercised over the insurgent groups. By several accounts, their military action achieved overall control over many armed groups in DR Congo, comprising more than financial assistance, military equipment or training, and operational support. The fact that they organized, coordinated, and planned the military actions of several armed groups proved their full responsibility.

More to this point, invading armed forces were far more important than the rebel forces at some points (Clark, 2011). Up to 15.000 Rwandan and 10.000 Ugandan well-trained and equipped soldiers were in DR Congo, alongside the RCD-Goma and RCD-ML groups, and occupied Congolese territories (Kisangani, 2003). As Zoë Marriage (2016) put it, “The two invading armies of Rwanda and Uganda set up administrative networks in the territories they occupied, and they operated by inflicting massive violence on the population and stealing from them, controlling trade, tax, and transport networks, and plundering natural resources”(p.515). After the first war, a Rwandan commander officially ran the Congolese armed forces as an Army chief. Many other overt military actions, such as the airlifting of Rwandan army troops across the Congolese territory to the vicinity of its capital city, Kinshasa, and the battle between Rwandan and Ugandan troops in Kisangani, proved the invading dimension of the conflict.

In sum, the Congolese armed conflict had a complex nature with state-based, multi-state, multiple non-state, and extra-state or transnational dimensions that implied regular battles between all levels of belligerence. This complexity came from the forms of hostilities that took place simultaneously. As Emizet Kisangani (2003) put it, “Six separate disputes were waged on the Congolese territory: Rwanda against the Armee de Liberation du Rwanda (ALIR); Uganda against its own rebels and Sudan; Angola against the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA); Burundi against the Forces for the Defence of Democracy (FDD); and the DRC government against its own rebel groups including the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD-Goma and RCD-Kisangani) and the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC)”(p.32). All these disputes rendered the conflict variable so that it defied a sole description (Clark 2011,149). Therefore, it can be termed a ‘mixed conflict,’ as it combines the characteristics of international and non-international armed conflicts (Vité, 2009). In international instances, states bargained their morality against some material gains when civilian casualties were mounting.

Furthermore, the reality of the Congolese armed conflict exposed the limitations of the international humanitarian law model with the question of the adequacy of its legal categories (Vité, 2009). It points out the effect of the absence of an independent international body authorized to decide systematically on armed conflict cases (Vité, 2009). These limitations permit morality breaches in the determination of Congolese armed conflict determination and its further consideration. The Congolese armed conflict was an inter-intrastate conflict with extra foreign involvement. It is, therefore, reasonable to accept that it formed a “conflict system” in the conception of Wood and Kathman, where a conflict consists of all actors in a determined geographic area that influence each other (Wood & Kathman, 2015). This conflict system allowed many international humanitarian law breaches, translating into moral impediments that several studies pointed out in their analytical perspectives.

ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVES

After discussing typology questions of the Congolese armed conflict and their moral inferences, this section reviews substantive literature on its occurrence and development. The Democratic Republic of Congo has undergone several armed conflicts since its independence in 1960 and is still experiencing armed violence in some parts of its territory currently. However, from 1993 to 2003, ten years, the country faced multiple armed clashes, wars, and peacebuilding processes. The time was harsh, with two significant wars, the first between 1996 and 1997 and the second between 1998 and 2003. The conflict's development reached far beyond the local and national boundaries regarding belligerents, interests, and networks. In this respect, Barnett Rubin (2006) agreed that “the episodes of violence derive[d] from inter-related processes at the local, national, regional, and global levels connected by a variety of networks, leading some to call this type of war network war”(p.6).

A substantial analytical effort has gone into exploring, understanding, and explaining the Congolese armed conflict's various dimensions, extensions, and actors' engagement at local, national, regional, and international levels. Multiple, complex, and interwoven factors have been explored, and no one appears central (Clark, 2011). Noteworthy studies have mainly focused on the conflict's historiography, investigating, describing, and clarifying its origins, causes, and development within the perspectives of the Great Lacs region (GLR) conflict dynamics, the African continent scales, its disastrous consequences, global dimensions, great peacebuilding labors, and domestic political subtleties. In each of these perspectives, moral questions took a substantial place.

Great Lakes Region and African Continent Perspectives

The analysis's common ground of the Congolese armed conflict is that it had been a multipolar event with complex tentacles. Its spread was multidimensional, multispatial, multisectoral, and multiscalar in horizontal and vertical institutional articulations. However, multiple studies used the GLR context and the African continent's conflict dynamics to explore and explain it. The GLR's ethnopolitical intricacies and conflict dynamics, which occupy a dominant explanatory position, faced diverse grounds. Without a standard definition of the GLR's space or an authoritative level of analysis (Omeje & Hepner Redeker, 2013), its delimitation constitutes a question of disagreement between maximalist and minimalist geographic approaches.

Some analysts, such as Patrick Kanyangara (2016), preferred a maximalist delimitation defined within the context of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) with countries located in east and central Africa – namely Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Republic of Congo, Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan, Kenya, and Sudan. In contrast, some others, like Kenneth Omeje and Tricia Hepner Redeker (2013) and Rene Lemarchand (2009), suggested the region's most ontological demarcation, which includes only the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, and Uganda. This paper shares this five-state configuration that transpires a widespread apprehension of the region.

Most of these states have experienced tangled, sporadic, recurrent, and protracted conflicts in the postcolonial era. Numerous studies have unveiled that the ethnic landscape and intricacy beyond national boundaries inherited from colonial agencies form an essential layer in these conflict dynamics. Lemarchand (2009) noted that “the potential for conflict is inscribed in the discontinuities in population densities, the availability of land, the cultural fault lines

discernible in different language patterns, modes of social organization, and ecological circumstances”(p.4). This conflicting setting primarily drives the struggle for political power control between local, national, and regional ethnicities. The Hutu-Tutsi antagonism in Rwanda and Burundi remains its whirlpool that sends waves into other states, especially the DRC. However, most scholars agree that this ethnic and colonial background offers limited and incomplete explanations of this conflict dynamics.

On this account, besides the congenital ethnic and colonial legacy landscape, socio-economic and political issues and challenges constitute other critical sources of tensions and disputes. Kanyangara (2016) included governance issues, identity division, structural violence, exploitation, and equal access to natural resources as prominent conflict-prone features of the region. Mathew Banda (2012) used a socio-economical view and noted the unfair land distribution, marginalization of large and small populations, and the neglect and ill-treatment of individuals along ethnic lines in the region as causes of community-based sentiments and ethnic resentment at the root of complexly violent disputes. On the political register, situations and events such as harsh and destructive dictatorships closely described state systems under disorder, demonstrating a lack of rational thinking in the acting of political leaders (Banda, 2012).

Nonetheless, the ethnic-imposed mental constraints have cultivated conflict-generating thoughts and behaviors over humanistic moral consciousness and holistic thinking. It is what produced the Rwandese genocide, which Herbert Weiss (2000) considered as “the first event in a series which has transformed a relatively peaceful society-the DRC-into an arena of conflict and war”(p.2). Gerard Prunier (2009) saw it as a catalyst, precipitating a crisis that had been latent for many years and reached far beyond its original Great Lakes locus. Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002) shared the same perspective and called the Rwandese genocide one of the region's most salient variables of the historical background of the Congolese conflict. Conversely, John Clark (2012) found the Rwandan Patriotic Forces (RPF) invasion of 1990 with Ugandan support, which set the stage for the Rwandan genocide, as the key antecedent of the Congolese conflict. From this explanatory perspective, the collapse of the Congolese state was the cause of a permissive condition that nourished the predatory or extractive propensities of other states in the region (Clark, 2012). Subsequently, the conflict significantly swamped a large part of DR Congo, with the intervention of the bordering states and other African nations.

Many analyses stretched the GLR perspective to the African extension of the Congolese Second War. The intervention of multiple African countries in this war was remarkable in a continent where armed conflicts are generally and formally limited to a single state's military forces and covert foreign military support against rebel groups. Nine states officially joined the war and fought in the Congolese soil. This African scale of the conflict encouraged the label “Africa's First World War” (Daley, 2006, p.305). However, David Van and Sam Garrett (2014) supported the term “Great African War”(p.440), which they found more convenient despite DR Congo remaining the hotbed of the conflict and foreign national troops not being active for an extended period compared to domestic belligerents.

On the same account, analysts investigated each African intervention's state or leader motives. Using a neo-realist scheme, Christopher Williams (2013) contended that “Insecure states operating under the driving neo-realist logic of ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’ plunged into the war. As a result, Africa sadly experienced its own Great War, caused by a very similar constellation of forces to those that mired Europe in conflict more than eight decades

before”(p.96). For his part, Jason Stearns (2012) mentioned that the armies of the nine intervening countries did not seem to have a clear cause or objective. Many other analysts linked the interventionists' motive to the predation of Congolese natural resources, as all sides in the conflict regularly exploited it to pay for themselves and serve their interests (Lemarchande 2009, 216), “Economic gain appears to have been a powerful motivator [],” as Ola Olsson and Heather Congdon Fors (2004, p. 325) put it. However, the term predation is more appropriate for what Rwandan and Ugandan invaders did, as there is a consensus that their armies quickly started exploitative and commercial activities (Olsson & Congdon Fors, 2004). The African escalation complexified the conflict with intricate networks and enormous consequences due to the increase in the conflict’s intensity. Literature approached the GLR dynamics and the African extension as demonstrations of the Congolese armed conflict’s multiscalar but also included the international and humanitarian perspectives.

Global and Humanitarian Perspectives

Extra-African states and non-state actors participated in the Congolese conflict in many ways during its evolution, politically, economically, and humanitarily, on an individual or collective basis through international organizations. Several studies investigated global dimensions of the conflict, notably the global leaders' attitude, corporate natural resources business, massive international governmental and non-governmental intervention, international mediation, and the robust peacebuilding machine. Regarding the global attitude, for instance, there is analytical agreement on the supportive role of the United States in favor of Rwanda and Uganda’s belligerence in the conflict. In her international dynamic analysis of the conflict, Zoë Marriage (2016) cited the financial backing of insurgency, the indirect support through uncritical aid to Rwanda and Uganda, and the lack of international regard or censure as three ways of the West participation in the conflict.

Similarly, Clark (2012) contended, "This perspective accords well with empirical observations of the main students of the Congo War that U.S. support for Rwanda and Uganda were critical in the onset of the 1996 war and the 1998 interstate wars in Congo”(p.158). He confirmed Reyntjens and Prunier's position that the two countries benefitted from important material supplies and communication systems during the conflict with considerable American largesse (Clark, 2012). This American support for these reputed chosen allies enabled them to violate international laws and practices openly and gravely in the DR Congo without promptly and substantially moving the international instances against them.

Various other international actors entered the Congolese conflict game because of the illegal exploitation of natural resources. The United Nations’s Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo offered grounds for many analyses related to international corporate implications in the conflict. In that regard, Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002) highlighted the determination of outsiders to exploit the Congolese power vacuum and maximize resource extraction. It was the logic of plunder in which foreign official individuals and structures, Mafia groups, offshore banks, and transnational mining companies enriched themselves (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002). The continued armed conflict made the country’s precious raw materials a low-cost market for global capitalists.

The disastrous consequences of the conflict triggered the attention and action of many other international actors. As conflict zones became no man's land, armed hostilities intensified and developed Congo's awful notoriety for its systematic, lethal, sexual, child, and ethnic violence.

For example, rape became a weapon of war, with over 200,000 women and girls raped by rebels and combatants (Omeje & Hepner Redeker, 2009, p.45) and millions of refugees and displaced Congolese. The fighting caused a figure of over "four million," with most casualties due to diseases (Stearns, 2012, p.5), making the conflict the deadliest event since World War II (Van & Garrett, 2014).

These mass casualties and humanitarian disasters, with still individual unestablished responsibility, triggered a massive intervention of non-governmental organizations, international conflict resolution, and peacebuilding initiatives with significant resources and efforts. During an extended period, more than half of the Congolese government's national budget came from international partners, making the country resemble a 21st-century "protectorate" (Autesserre, 2010, p.3). The UN peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO, became a paramount security support in the country. For the first time in any conflict, an international committee instituted by a multilateral agreement, the Pretoria Accord, formally took a leading role in supporting and implementing a political transition (Klosterboer & Hartmann-Mahmud 2013). The Congolese government relied heavily on international humanitarian aid. Apart from urgent relief aid, the international partnership supported several peace accords, armed forces integration, a unified transitional government, and the first democratic election. Still, it failed to end the armed violence to this day.

Many researchers have focused on investigating these aspects of global intervention and its challenges, weaknesses, and moral issues. Some argued that the universalistic conflict resolution models did not work out. Accordingly, Patricia Daily (2006) concluded that "the signing of peace agreements in the DRC (2000) and the deployment of the U.N. peacekeeping missions (U.N. Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo-MUNOC) did not allow the return of peace in the country, resulting in a condition of no peace, no war"(p.30). Similarly, Brian Klosterboer and Lori Hartmann-Mahmud (2013) highlighted the limits of conventional approaches that look exclusively at national and international levels without seeing the importance of micro-level actors. However, local tensions and actors shaped the economic, political, and ethnic context of the conflict. David Van and Sam Garrett (2014) underscored the naivety of the approach related to political transition. The conflict's peace process policies did not challenge some critical moral questions, such as good governance and equality of access of all citizens to the state's resources, an essential distributive justice question. Instead, it allowed the domestic political elite to share scarce public resources and connect with international entities, actors, and networks that served their agendas.

Domestic Perspective

Several studies underscored domestic issues as crucial conflict factors. The essential drivers were the Congolese state, social, economic, and political agencies, politicians' behaviors, and people's mental structures. Many situated the origin of contradictions, confusion, and rampant anarchy in statelessness produced by Mobutu's regime, making state governance the primary breeder of the conflict (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002; Lemarchand, 2009; Banda, 2012). Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002) thought that the decay and corrosion of the Congolese state strained the conflict and made it possible for small states to invade, occupy, and loot the country. Omeje & Hepner Redeker (2009) found that the full-scale Congolese war of 1998 to 2003 occurred because of the failure of the Congolese state to recognize the need to associate all political components with the war efforts. In a slightly different view, some pointed directly to the governance efficacy of the Congolese administration as the state continued to be a significant player.

Klosterboer and Hartmann-Mahmud (2013) noted serious limits to the reach and effectiveness of the Congolese state. Similarly, Vicent Muderwa (2012) saw the absence of good governance values and principles. Noticeably, state functioning issues constituted the spreading channels of unethical behaviors in different fields, especially among political actors and interest groups.

Therefore, the politicians who became belligerents brought up different challenges during the conflict. The political fighting and infighting resulted from a lack of ideological purposes and ambitions, leadership adversity, and precarious political alliances. Prunier (2009), citing the Belgian Congo specialist Jean-Claude Willame, highlighted the frustration of being excluded from power as the only common denominator of domestic actors. For most political leaders, the only thing that mattered was military and financial opportunism (Van & Garrett, 2014). Congolese politicians were more interested in gaining power and less concerned about establishing a state of law. The patchwork of political leaders who competed for power and control formed the critical friction point (Klosterboer & Hartmann-Mahmud, 2013). The lack of political virtue made the conflict resemble seventeenth-century European wars, as the development and the continuation of the conflict and the stateless environment served the interests of politicians.

Lastly, some studies investigated the disputes and fights between different groups over values primarily linked to culture and identity and local political and economic interests. For example, some individuals or groups attempted to impose their values on others or claimed the exclusive right to a set of values (Muderwa, 2012). Subsequent local conflicts found their primary roots in this desire of ethnic and subethnic groups to achieve local preeminence or safety (Clark, 2012). Political and tribal leaders exploited these competing local factors for their political promotion and set aside group interests. Consequently, the fight for the prevalence of community groups sparked tribal and regional identity competition. Group fragmentation became even more frequent with the shifting of the individual identity around ethnic communities following the change of leaders' political threats and fortunes and the emergence of different political groups (Clark, 2012). Klosterboer and Hartmann-Mahmud (2013) considered this domestic dimension an essential determinant not to overlook in the Congolese conflict because the local dynamics of greed and exploitation affected peace and conflict.

Furthermore, Omeje and Hepner Redeker (2009) criticized the deliberate interposition of interests in exploitative and unjust political, social, and economic institutions. The adverse values and habits developed since Mobutu's regime were not dismantled and converted to virtuous practices for the common good. The new power preferred to build on the reckless political legacy of the past, ensuring the continuity of the same system of domestic exploitation based on violence. Muderhwa (2012) found the problem in the individual and collective conscience of the Congolese that supported an infernal cycle of violence and prevented a lasting peace. The different investigations of domestic realities, issues, and challenges revealed the impact of unethical behaviors and irrational thinking on the conflict cycle. Moral and rational impairment of political and military elites about the conflict's social, political, and economic contexts caused the conflict to scale with harmful actions. However, most agreed that the Congolese conflict demonstrated a combination of multiple situations, diverse levels, and scales, as in many African conflicts.

AFRICAN FEATURES OF THE CONFLICT

This section briefly examines moral corroborations through the features of the African armed conflict in the Congolese conflict. Despite its peculiarities, Congolese armed conflict is an

event that occurred within the African social, political, and economic landscape. Exploring the literature on African conflicts helps one corroborate some common traits and patterns. As many Africanist researchers have constated, African conflicts have no single deterministic cause (Bujra, 2002). The causes of African conflicts are numerous and various. In this respect, Johnson Olaosebikan (2012) mentioned arbitrary borders created by the colonial powers, heterogeneous ethnic composition, inept political leadership, corruption, the negative effect of external debt burden, and poverty. If the causes and contexts of African conflicts differ in each case, some similarities bring them closer, including profound disagreements over the nation's vision, struggles over state-society relations, contests over national leadership, the risk of rapid expansion across borders, and creating conditions of foreign involvement (Aall, 2015).

Notwithstanding, Paul Williams (2016) placed these common traits into the “two worlds”(p. xiv) categorization: the African state system and its outside margins. The two worlds represent a rigged political system on the one side and its underlying economic conditions on the other. Both inevitably drove many countries to violence. They are susceptible to producing a fragile political and economic environment that becomes the nidus of the domestic political elite, armed movements, and international actors. Many African countries, including DR Congo, experienced this reality in the post-Cold War era as state-society relations were impacted by the dynamics associated with the politics of regime survival (Williams, 2016). State failure, political elite greed and grievances, and social group digressions are critical system layers and offer moral and rational depictions for a moral inquiry.

The first dimension is the state's failure and its corollary of power holders' need for political domination. In this context, the legitimacy of a political regime is challenged with strategies that often provide the crucial intersection between local political dynamics and international networks, structures, and processes (Williams, 2016). The regime reacts with approaches that aim to instrumentalize disorder and violence to assert authority. Subsequently, it owes a great deal to the explosive mix of state institutions that struggle to maintain legitimacy among the domestic population and the political strategies of regimes seeking to preserve their privileged status (Williams, 2016). There is, therefore, a rise of unprofessional security forces and practices running state violence. If the power holders in the Mobutu regime had not resisted political demands for system change and had accepted a transitional government peacefully requested by the Congolese, the armed conflict could have been of limited scope.

The second element, directly relevant to the state's failure, is the greed and objections of the political elite that sustains lousy governance. This political elite, smaller in number, forms a power network that enjoys the most benefits of scarce public resources. At the same time, income and wealth inequality, middle-class inexistence, and high-rated poverty characterize the socio-economic conditions of much of the population. Military dictatorships and civilian authoritarianism in Africa are the sources of this state's institutional atrophy as the sense of social contract ceases to exist, and the interest of the ruling elite is prompted (Adefisoye & Bamidele, 2018). The mismanagement of public wealth serves the kleptocratic greed, contributing to economic plunder and stagnation. The privileged individuals within the inner political circle use their political positions to control and run the state to their benefit and advantage. These political inner circle privileges mainly justified President Mobutu's refusal to hand off power to Etienne Tshisekedi, the popular opposition figure who was considered a legitimate leader, even when the regime was doomed to collapse during the first war. Similarly, Laurent Desire Kabila refused to share power with non-violent opposition, although the second war demonstrated a daring invasion of the Rwandan-Ugandan forces (Weiss, 2000).

The blatant mismanagement and the resulting systematic political immorality become the center of political grievances and struggles for those outside the power system (Williams, 2016). Therefore, they criticize these greedy politics as a source of economic and social misfortunes and rampant poverty. They reclaim political change and the instauration of a just and fair political system that allows good governance and human development. However, the resistance of kleptocratic leaders and corrupt bureaucrats makes peaceful political fights hard. In many African countries, armed violence became a legitimate means to get political change (Williams, 2016). This legitimization of violence-based political fights made the armed rebellion against Mobutu well-received and welcomed, even though it was covering Rwandan and Ugandan invasions. In contrast, the Second War illustrated an opposite attitude because of the political opportunism demonstrated by a mosaic of the political agents that joined the insurgency against Laurent Desire Kabila.

The third element of this African conflict-based system is the digressions of non-state structures. They portray the negative role of social and non-state groups that became preponderant in the African armed conflicts with the advent of the post-Cold War era and the rise of internal disputes. The non-state groups and militias formed on the basis of tribes, clans, and regional communities claim ownership over resources, such as land, water, forest, and minerals. Many scholars of African conflicts, such as Williams (2016), concluded that the phenomena increased with the states losing their legitimacy and authority in maintaining security, providing survival services, and making appropriate and fair decisions. Taiwo Adefisoye and Oluwaseun Bamidele linked it to the African state's unwillingness or inability to adequately provide public services to the people. This can be coupled with poor socioeconomic development, especially in the zones of violence (Adefisoye & Bamidele, 2018). Therefore, non-state groups tend to take over the states' regalian attributes, gaining recognition and granting themselves the right to wield power, exercise authority, and claim legitimacy. The eastern part of DR Congo experienced this trend of community-based group activism and its downsides.

Subsequently, the most active non-state groups become critical as they assist local populations in various internal matters, including security affairs. Some have attempted to violently challenge the Westphalian state's legitimacy (Visagie, 2014). However, the absence of formal responsibility inhibits the accountability of their actions when states are still the official upholders of order and security and the providers of public goods (Visagie, 2014). In DR Congo, many ethnic and community-based organizations transformed themselves into militias as Congolese state institutions could no longer provide security services. For example, the Mai Mai movement, which cut across ethnic groups from North Kivu to South Kivu, became a critical player in the Congolese conflict. This reality turned inter-community disputes into armed confrontations, which expanded harmful behaviors and decisions.

This African Armed Conflict analytical framework highlights the state failure due to political distortion of the power holders, greed or grievances of the political elite, and the negative role of social groups. It also pinpoints moral questions about Congolese armed conflict occurrence, currency, and recurrence. These systemic traits and patterns are inherently the base of wrongness and harmfulness that exacerbated the conflict. Consequently, morals and rationales behind them explain the political culture and the resulting conflicts' extreme violence and destruction. They alienate African politics, wars, and peace processes, as revealed in the literature on the Congolese conflict. This conflict exacerbation through behavioral patterns needs an analytical frame capable of relating and explaining the extent to which these moral

and rational traits inform political and military attitudes toward, during, and after an armed conflict. Extending and framing these empirical moral-based relations is essential to underline the relationship between these moral and rational dimensions and the Congolese conflict. It will be a moral inquiry approach to behaviors and decisions relevant to a public matter (Boston, Bradstock & Eng, 2010). A larger theoretical debate may also add insights into this need for a moral and rational framework.

THEORETICAL DEBATES

This section approaches Congolese armed conflict through general theoretical assumptions about armed conflicts and reflects on their moral and rational insights to emphasize the need for a proper explanatory framework. From the definitional discussion mentioned in the first section, This paper views a conflict as a perceived interest divergence between two or more entities that likely becomes a violent struggle or clash. Armed conflict inherently features human existence with its recurrent violent and destructive moments. Theoretically, assumptions have been devised to primarily explain conflict causes, nature, development, management, and the prospects for its resolution. Many conflict experts have used these general theoretical assumptions to analyze and explicate Congolese armed conflict through its different phases using paradigms such as competition over human beings' self-interest, limited resources, and social interactions between political or identity groups that define and scale the conflict.

Empirically, Congolese armed conflict actors justified their conflicting behaviors with different arguments that align with theoretical assumptions. Relatedly, despite neighboring countries' vital support and role in the First War, the AFDL rebellion's leaders claimed that their insurgency against Mobutu's regime was a revolutionary war. They presented it as a radical political change against an oppressive and corrupt political system. However, after the victory, the different groups that formed the insurgent alliance got into infighting. After about a year, the coalition broke into pieces, causing the Second War involving a new rebel group, the RCD, again supported by neighboring patrons, against the newly installed Kabila regime. RCD's leaders articulated their conflicting rationale around democratic values. However, the new rebel group rapidly exploded due to the opposing visions and interests as a military competition and confrontation broke out between the Rwandan and Ugandan forces on Congolese soil over controlling the rebellion, territories, and natural resources (Banda 2012). These competing interests divided the rebellion into several armed groups, where ethnicity became a critical factor. While all claimed to fight the central government for a democratic and just society, they failed to demonstrate the same values (Kisangani 2003, 66). In a constantly developing dynamic of game interests, they struggled between themselves, displaying different theoretical conflict assumptions.

Several general theoretical assumptions can be used to comprehensively analyze armed conflicts, including Sub-Saharan African ones. This paper's reflection reviews them through four main groups: historical materialism, neopatrimonialism, identitarianism, and traditionalism, which have critical moral and rational inferences. These assumptions are not isolated but complementary and sometimes overlapping. Omeje and Hepner Redeker (2009) brilliantly covered the theoretical debates about African conflicts, particularly the GLR ones. Their insights apply optimally to the Congolese armed conflict.

The first line of assumptions is based on historical materialism, which explains the Congolese conflict from its material resources from colonialism to current global economic structures and

their impacts. From this perspective, the roots of this conflict are in the colonial heritage's impediments and the persistence of their effects. As in many other African countries, wars in the Congo continue the ravages of colonialism and neocolonialism because of the complex intersections of imperialist exploitation and prebendal plunder by governing elites and local factions. Reviewing Dani Nabudere's points about the Congo War as a World War, Sanya Osha (2018) contended, "...The political and cultural equation required for harmonious existence prior to the imperialist intrusion has not been fully restored"(p.2). Under this view, strategic natural resources and the symbiosis of local greediness and capitalistic predation are essential in explaining the Congolese conflict. For Kisangani (2003), the greed approach, the core of historical materialist views, best explains the Congolese conflict. These views are deeply moralist, articulated around the wrongdoing of capitalistic minds to weak human societies. However, the problem with historical materialist views on the Congolese conflict is that they minimize the critical role of moral and rational dimensions in the conflict's internal causes and factors. Those who tend to privilege these claims are generally motivated by ideological convictions against capitalistic modes of riches production and imperialist support, making their arguments inflated and sometimes peremptory.

The second line of assumptions relates to neopatrimonialism as "a functional threat to the peaceful political development of African states and the development of societies in general." (Erdmann & Engel, 2007). These assumptions outline the form and nature of the postcolonial Congolese state and its impact on the conflict as informal politics invades formal institutions to intimately link to each other in various ways and by varying degrees (Erdmann & Engel, 2007). The resulting hybrid regime let customs and patterns of patrimonialism co-exist with rational-legal institutions. In this context, one can conclude that the Congolese conflict directly resulted from the abuse of state power by the Mobutu regime and its successors. The neopatrimonial interests of the elite in power were the stakes to extend, protect, and defend to the detriment of other groups. Neopatrimonialism manifests through immoral and irrational practices in politics, including corruption, nepotism, clientelism, tribalism, and other high political intrigues that cause the dysfunctionality of the state and create a conflict-based political environment. In this sense, bad governance and structural violence are the neopatrimonial roots of the Congolese conflicts. Neopatrimonialist views point to internal moral and rational issues in the origin of armed conflict. However, because it is often used as a catchall concept, neopatrimonialism is less pertinent in terms of using moral and rational tools to explain the development of Congolese armed conflict.

The third line of assumptions is identitarianism, which is closely linked to neopatrimonialism but is not always dependable. Identitarianist arguments explore and use unidimensional identities as the causes of wars (Sen, 2006). Ethnic, tribal, kinship, religious, political, and other group identities explain many wars. From these views, "Many of the conflicts and barbarities in the world are sustained through the illusion of a unique and choiceless identity" (Sen 2006, p. xv). Ethnicity and contested identities dominate these views in the analysis of African conflicts (Braathen, Boas, & Saether 2000). In an environment of weak state authority as that of DR Congo, protracted latent ethnic hostility turned into in-wars between ethnic groups. Moreover, politically manipulated communities competitively averted their social consensus and damaged their fragile cohabitation. Sometimes, a tribe may desire the power to dominate and define its preeminence, making conflict inevitable and even uncontrollable as others think about their defense through armed groups. For instance, the ethnic-based hostilities between communities such as the Lendu and the Hema gave the Congolese conflict a form of a vicious

confrontation that many analysts viewed as a regression to pre-modern tribal societies. Opposing communities and combatants committed awful crimes against each other, stemming from burning, raping, and cutting bodies into pieces due to hatred or sentiment of revenge or retaliation. Identity-based arguments offer relevant grounds to explicate the relationship between moral and rational considerations and conflict harmful behaviors. However, they must be put within an extended explanatory framework to fully and clearly explain these relationships.

To a lesser extent, traditionalist views are the fourth line of arguments from which to retrieve moral and rational apprehensions. These views, notably conceptualized through the new barbarism notion, explore the war violence resulting from traits embedded in local cultures (Ricards, 1996) and highlight cultural, customary, and even mystical aspects of the conflict, particularly with tribal involvement. When evoked in the Congolese conflict, they use cultural cognition and atavistic features to explain some of its events. Communities' attachment to some traditional symbolism is a source of conflicting minds or a means of resisting aggression. For example, ancestral lands and resources motivate fighting as a spiritual commitment. On the other hand, combatants use magical beliefs, devices, and practices to claim protection from the enemy's bullets, supernatural strength, invincibility, and certainty of their victory, but also to harm others. Illustratively, soldiers can practice cannibalism because they are spiritually or ritually convinced that eating body parts of a particular human species increases their invincibility. Exploiting these atavistic practices and regressive facets of the Congolese conflict only depicted it as anathema to modern society (Daley 2006, p.304). Therefore, the traditional views of African conflict, mostly exploited by media, are parcellary and can only explain a few armed conflict behavioral attitudes.

Despite their explanatory vigor, these different assumptions regarding the causes, nature, and dynamics of Congolese armed conflict raise criticisms as some experts denounce their broad limitations and negative role in creating misconceptions about African conflicts. For some, concepts and notions, such as tribal or ethnic differences, are misused or overused, casting a biased analytical attitude on African states and politics. Daley (2007) stated that “the conflict literature on Africa is focused on pathological factors internal to the state: ethnic hatred, overpopulation, neopatrimonialism, greed, barbarism, and retraditionalization—all contributing to a pervasive image of inherent dysfunctionality in African societies”(p.5). Omeje and Hepner Redeker (2009) suggested investigations and narratives based on an alternative framework that includes careful, humanistic, and fine-grained analysis.

Broadly, all reviewed the theoretical views present hybrid imagery of the Congolese state and the conflict that ravaged it. Therefore, the Congolese armed conflict is understood as a complex mix of colonial legacies, institutional agency, patrimonial interests of postcolonial elites, and tribal and cultural norms and beliefs to be more frequently or more problematized (Omeje & Redeker Hepner, 2009). Unethical behaviors and atomistic thinking translate immoral and irrational patterns in the causal and aggravating issues of most African armed conflicts, making them complex puzzles. Devising and organizing these patterns into a catered framework will help understand and clarify the functionality of immoral and irrational actions' impacts on Congolese armed conflict development and other African conflicts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Congolese conflict literature revealed interesting moral and rational deficiency layers in its ontology and development, determining its protraction. However, generally, armed conflicts

are human society's inherent and heartbreaking recurrent experiences due to political, economic, cultural, and religious divergences. Their drivers are often immoral and irrational actions around power struggles, anxiety, greed, and prejudice (Knauff & Spohn, 2021). Still, African conflicts have under-explored analyses of the relative weight of moral and rational deficiencies, especially their functioning and direct impact on political violence development. Not many studies have strived, in a framed way, to analyze the functionality of moral and rational deficiencies comprehensively. A framed analytical tool could have schemed the relationships between morals and rationales of conflict actions and their consequences and presented a new way of thinking through changing culture, mentality, values, and principles about armed conflicts that ravage recurrently many African countries.

Moral inferences about the Congolese armed conflict strongly suggest a structured inquiry into the political and military agents' ethical and rational behaviors and decisions before, during, and after the conflict. This inquiry will assess how unethical and uncritical behaviors led to the breakout of the conflict, as well as its escalation, expansion, and duration. Indeed, political and military agents' moral and rational conduct likely increases the chances of preventing, de-escalating, and quickly stopping violent disputes. Thus, it is essential to delve into the moral and rational considerations of the Congolese conflict parties' actions and their relationships with conflict development and consequences to illuminate the analytical perspectives and theoretical debates.

Nonetheless, if the moral and rational considerations of Congolese armed conflict could translate to different levels of responsibility from start to end, it is crucial to apprehend their materiality. In the Congolese armed conflict, the decision to go to war and continue it to a certain extent was a political responsibility aligned with political objectives. The political entities' unethical and irrational characteristics affected it to the extent that it produced its destructiveness. The decision-makers could rationally define military action, but because its final aim was corrupt or emotional, it affected the outcomes of any military confrontation. As David Fisher (2013) posited, "Decisions at the political/strategic level are crucial to the assessment of whether or not it is just to go to war—the jus ad Bellum"(p.76). Both before and during the war, the political leaders, supported by their military and civilian advisers, are required at political and strategic levels to continually assess the good expected to be achieved by the war (Fisher, 2013). The military-strategic commandments, tactical engagements, and ground battles expose the effects of unethical motives and decisions. If the wrong outweighs the good, war consequences devastate society.

This paper's argument underscores the profound significance of analytical views and theoretical debates in constructing the Congolese armed conflict as an intricate interplay of societal factors revolving around political power and violence. Moral and rational considerations form the bedrock of these factors and their causality. However, the critical work and research conducted about the conflict have, to a certain extent, neglected to focus on the functional relations between moral and rational considerations and war development. Therefore, an essential recommendation of this study is to construct a functional moral and rational inquiry into Congolese armed conflict's harmful behaviors to grasp the intricacies of ethical and rational values that define them. This needful framework will inform and guide future moral and rational assessments of other African armed conflicts. In addition, it will provide a supplemental apprehension of African armed conflicts from which political and military decision-makers can base their decisions during wars and peace processes in Africa.

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