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Resources, Population and Conflicts: Two African Case Studies*

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Résumé: Le présent article fait une analyse critique des liens complexes entre la population, l'insécurité des ressources et les conflits. Il affirme que la croissance démographique rapide au-délà des limites de la capacité de charge de l'éco-système, ainsi que les pénuries de ressources, ne peuvent à elles seules, être causes de conflits. Au contraire, les problèmes de répartition des ressources, l'accès au pouvoir, de même que le lien entre le mode de production et les contradictions inhérentes aux rapports sociaux, constituent les causes fondamentales de conflit.
Deux cas: le conflit opposant le peuple Ogoni et Shell, et les dimensions écologiques de la guerre civile soudanaise, permettent de démontrer qu'en situation de conflit, l'Etat en Afrique n'est pas simplement une médiation. C'est aussi un acteur qui réprime ses propres citoyens, les aliène et bloque leur accès aux ressources, au nom des intérêts capitalistes mondiaux et ceux des élites locales. D'où, les conflits autour du contrôle des ressources — le pouvoir — se définissent souvent en termes d'accès aux instruments de violence, le pouvoir d'Etat, et la survie des populations.

Introduction

This paper critically analyses the complex linkage between population, resource insecurity and conflict in Africa . It questions the thesis that rapid population growth, beyond the limits of the carrying capacity of the ecosystem or `resource-threshold', produces stresses which directly or indirectly provoke conflict. These contests for control over or access to depleted or scarce resources are considered to pose grave threats to

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national, regional and global security. Since the adoption of structural adjustment in most African countries in the 1970s and 1980s, and the end of the East-West Cold War, there has been a discernible trend towards `resource wars', or environmental conflict in the continent (Obi 1997b; Adepoju 1996). It has been noted, for example, that environmental factors and the struggle for resources were hidden but critical elements in the following conflicts: Ogoni versus Shell, the Sudanese civil war and the Rwandan civil war (Renner 1996). Other instances abound of disputes over ecosystems or renewable resources that are shared by different communities, ethnic groups and countries. Examples include the communal clashes between the Ijaw and Ilaje, and those involving neighbouring communities over land in the oil-rich Niger delta, the quarrels between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan over the waters of the Nile, and that between Senegal and Mauritania after the damming of the river Senegal (Timberlake 1985).

From the foregoing, it is clear that resource or environmental struggles play a vital role in defining conflict in Africa. The contribution to conflicts of the population or demographic factor depends on the extent to which it is responsible for resource scarcities and environmental stresses. This touches on the complex issue of how questions of causation, values and social relations can be posed in terms of the population-resource conflict nexus. Some point to the connection between the stress put on shrinking renewable resources by rapidly growing populations and the outbreak of violent conflicts (Renner 1996:36), along with grave security implications (Brown 1994), while others seek the answer in the interaction between the economy and the ecology, the structural roots of degradation, and the global relations of power which define resource use and its distribution (Williams 1996).

The debate on how important population size is to development is carried on from three main viewpoints: those who argue for a reduction of fertility and growth rates in developing countries, so that the carrying

capacity of the ecosystems is not exceeded and the resource-base is preserved for future development; those who argue that economic advancement or the market will take care of the problem of population growth; and a third group who predict that uncontrolled population growth will exhaust the resource-base over time and lead to 'demographic doom'(Choucri 1983). Whichever way it is viewed, the population variable is critical to understanding and overcoming resource insecurity and conflict in Africa, as it approaches the twenty-first century. Yet, it is important to note that the population factor by itself cannot explain conflict in Africa. It is only through the interaction of the 'population' with 'nature', in a series of complex processes touching on issues of production, access, rights, power, equity and sustainability, that we can begin to come to grips with the interface between natural resources and politics. This in turn defines the social contestants for the control of resources. This paper gives attention to this interactive process—in which the question of population plays a vital part—rather than treating the demographic trap as a fetish.

Population and Conflict: Critical Perspectives on Causal Linkages

While the danger posed to mankind by a rapidly expanding population, which was exhausting natural resources, dominated the debate on population for some time, the focus on renewable resources is more recent. With the end of the Cold War, increased attention is being paid to non-military (environmental) threats to global security. Of immediate relevance is the notion of environmental security.

> ... Proponents of environmental security argue that increasing stresses on earth's life-support systems and renewable natural resources have profound implications for human health and welfare that are at least as serious as traditional military threats (Porter 1995:218).

What is the relationship between population, conflict and environmental security? The answer lies in the analysis of the causal relationship between overpopulation, resource scarcities and conflict. Brown and Jacobson base their analysis on the conflict-generating potential of a demographically divided world: with one half, the industrialised world, having completed or nearly completed the demographic transition towards fertility being at or below the replacement level — and the other half, where rapid population growth in many countries is beginning to overwhelm local life-support systems, leading to ecological deterioration and declining living standards (Brown and Jacobson 1985). They further argue that 'ecological deterioration, economic decline and political instability reinforce each other, confronting governments with the prospect of social disintegration' (Brown and Jacobson 1985). Conflict breaks out, 'when growing populations compete over a static or shrinking resource base' (Ibid., p.25). It is also influenced by factors such as the inequitable distribution of resources, the interaction of other social factors, and the structure of the population — a population dominated by young people is likely to be a source of instability (Ibid., p.26). Population pressures could also trigger other underlying grievances or cleavages along ethnic, racial, class, communal, religious and regional lines (Homer-Dixon 1996). The notion of the demographic trap (in which the developing world, including Africa, is seemingly immersed) is not entirely new. What is new is the recent attempt to link the demographic trap to violent conflict. Before we proceed further, it is worth revisiting Notestein's `classic' land theory of demographic transitions. Notestein discerns three stages of demographic transitions: the pre-modern-high birth rate and high death rate; the modern-high birth rate and low death rate; and the third stage, marked by economic and social advancement — low infant mortality rate and a reduced desire for large families (Notestein, cited in Brown and Jacobson 1986:7; McNamara 1982). According to him, the risk that some countries might regress to the first stage has disastrous portents

(Notestein, Kird and Segal 1963). Although many scholars, particularly Brown and Jacobson, have gone beyond the limitations of Notestein's theory, and have drawn examples from various parts of the developing world to show how rapid population growth is depleting resources and breeding conflict and social disorder, they remain stuck in the paradigmatic limitations of the demographic trap. This emerges clearly from the analysis of the population-conflict nexus by Homer-Dixon (1994).

Homer-Dixon bases his analysis of the impact of population size and growth on `resource scarcities' and on resource (environmental) scarcities and conflict (Ibid., 1994:5-10). Reviewing three models of linkages between population size and conflict — differential growth and group identity conflict, lateral pressure and interstate and environmental security and civil conflict (Ibid.) — he concludes that the interaction of supply-induced scarcities, demand-induced scarcities and structural scarcities can provoke conflict (Ibid., p.12). Relevant here are demand-induced scarcities, which are attributed to population size and growth, multiplied by per capita demand for a given resource (Ibid.). In more recent works, Homer-Dixon builds upon the position that fast-growing populations worsen environmental scarcities, which `sharply aggregate stresses within countries, helping stimulate ethnic clashes, urban unrest and insurgencies' (Homer-Dixon 1996:359). He supports this argument with case studies from the developing world, where environmental (resources) scarcities have provoked violent conflict (Homer-Dixon 1994; cf. 1995). Although he believes that ingenuity can manage or adjust population growth and scarcities away from chaos, he is more concerned with the threat that environmental conflict in the developing world poses to the national and global security interests of the West: 'This violence affects western national interests by destabilising trade and economic relations, provoking migrations, and generating complex humanitarian disasters that divert militaries and absorb huge amounts of aid' (Homer-Dixon 1996:359).

A similar sentiment can be gleaned from Klare who argues that: 'High growth rates in crisis-ridden LDC's are likely to produce high rates of rural-urban migration, and from poor and low income ones to affluent countries' (1996:357).

The consequences of this are migration, population displacement, urban overcrowding, decay and violence, intergroup conflict, over-stretched social services and the ineffectiveness of control measures by the state. Others include hostility and violence to immigrants from host or indigenous populations, immense human suffering and socio-economic and political crisis. Even to the most casual observer, there is no doubt that the overuse of resources leads to crisis. What has to be decided, however, is the relationship between population size and resource exploitation. With structural adjustment, Africa's demographic situation appears discouraging:

> Since the onset of the economic recession, the picture has been particularly dismal. Africa is the continent with the fastest growing population (3.3 percent), the highest total fertility rate (6.5), the highest rate of urbanisation (over 5 per cent per annum), maternal mortality rate (640 per 100,000 live births) and infant mortality rate (99.8 per 1000). The average life expectancy is merely 55.5 years and the annual productivity is very low. Overall output grew at only 2.3 per cent in 1991, a downturn from the 3.2 per cent of 1990 (Pearce 1994:66).

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that such a scenario has provided material for the neo-Malthusian protagonists of the demographic trap school and their environmental security friends. As Pearce rightly notes, this `population trap' perspective is merely a subset of the general modernisation thesis:

> 'The approach is descriptive and historical without sufficient reference to the external and internal patterns of interaction which set in motion or escalate poverty and low status'(Pearce 1994:66).

The ideological underpinning of the population discourse, linked to a single demographic transition to the Western model, is exposed as being "less about 'development', but more about defining populations,

safeguarding resources (now defined in global terms) and containing the unwanted spillover of disease-prone populations" (Pearce 1991). The relationship between population and conflict is thus not a simple one. A good deal depends on understanding the sociology of ideas which pose the problem as a demographic trap, rather than focussing on the real roots of resource-conflict and its linkages with the economic and political system, international actors, and the access to power over resources. There is also a need to transcend the strong managerial streak inherent in approaches which dwell on population control measures (family planning, contraception, etc.) and leave out issues of oppression, inequity, exclusion and grinding poverty, and the need for social justice and democracy.

Population, Resource Scarcities and Environmental Stress

The conclusions of Brown and Jacobson, Homer-Dixon and Klare, among others, when addressed to the specificities of the African situation, are fraught with conceptual problems. By seeking to 'modernise' African populations according to Western models, under the guise of the imperative of development and the avoidance of conflict, they tend to distort the population problem to fit their functionalist ends. In this section of the paper, the population-conflict nexus is reconstructed, based on a critique of orthodox population discourse, in order to reach the real roots of conflict.

Resources are defined and given value not by their simple existence, but by their interaction with the population. Processes of resource depletion/degradation, rather than being entirely the direct result of `bulging' populations, need to respond to the question of how economic and political systems interact with the ecosystem (Williams 1996; Woodhouse 1992; Hjort-af-Ornas and Lundqvist 1999). It is, indeed, analytically more rewarding to focus on the relationship between man and the environment as the resource-base, and correctly locate conflict not only as a function of exploding population, but as the

outcome of the struggle between socially defined groups for the control of the use and distribution of resources (Williams 1996; cf. Bookchin 1991). Three caveats must be entered here: capitalism, through the state and the turning of Africa's resources into commodities, blocks the rights and access of Africans to these resources; these resources are subject to the imperatives of globally-led commodity production, commodity exchange and accumulation of capital; and the ever expanding logic of global capital places a premium on profit, without regard to ecological considerations (Saurin 1996:86). External extractive hegemonic forces and their local allies (who fuel and profit from turning resources into commodities, thereby creating artificial scarcities and inequities) cannot be omitted from a proper understanding of resource wars and conflicts in Africa. In terms of its global structure, capitalism 'simultaneously concentrates wealth and energy both in certain locales and at certain social levels by extracting and dispossessing from other locales and social levels'. Resources are extracted or depleted, thus causing scarcities and stress, while the ecosystem absorbs the waste. Rapid extraction for profit, without considering the renewal or recovery of the resource base, and the consequent environmental stress, place the hegemonic social forces (local, national and global), which benefit from the accumulation of wealth from the plundered African resource base, on a collision course with those whose lives are directly tied to these ecosystems. At the root of this socially constructed contradiction is the transformation of nature in a logic that must be understood in global terms (Redclift 1987). In placing Africa within this logic, we need to recognise not only the role of 'covetous and distanced shareholders who derive huge financial benefits from these lands and people'(Saurin 1996:88), but also how global economic forces—international agencies and multinational corporations—exploit African resources, along with local collaborators and benefactors (Obi 1997b). The intensity of conflict arising from stresses placed on African resources and environment depends on the history and nature of capitalist penetration and accumulation, the role of

the state in perpetuating oppression, discrimination, exploitation and distributive inequities, the level of environmental degradation vis-à-vis the survival of local communities and people, and the balance of social and political forces acting at the behest of global, national and local capital, or resisting their further penetration. One of the critical consequences of the growing globalisation of production and markets is the deepening of resource scarcities, environmental stresses, resistance and conflict in Africa.

Subjecting Brown and Jacobson to a transformatory critique, one can argue that within the African context, resource scarcities are mainly due to subordinating the African ecosystem to the demands and profit-motives of the global capitalist system, rather than to the survival of most Africans whose lives are tied to the land. Beyond this, the smaller populations of the industrialised world (particularly the West) enjoy the benefits of the transformation and transfer of Africa's resources, through the structures of global production and trade, which leave behind resource scarcities and intense national and local struggles for larger chunks of fast-shrinking resources. The contradictions within the African ecosystem produced by capitalist modes of production and accumulation and by authoritarian modes of governance lie at the heart of violent conflict. Population pressures are a secondary source of environmental stress. This is not to deny the obvious risks posed by high rates of population growth in the continent, alongside dwindling resources, growing poverty and deepening economic crises. What it does show is that the debate must take into account the often ignored, but real threat to Africa's resources from a small fraction of mankind located in the Industrial North, cornering the natural wealth of another continent, while blaming its victim for being poor and promiscuous. At a conceptual level, the challenge is to reject the influence of 'neo-Malthusian conservatism whose principal appeal is to a romantic signification of a fragile, innocent and vulnerable `nature' subject to the

inevitable depredations of human work' (Saurin 1996:84), in redefining the population discourse for Africa.

The Role of the State in the Population–Conflict Nexus

Consideration of the neo-Malthusian argument would be incomplete without a close examination of the role of the state, as the authoritative allocator of scarce resources, as a mediator, and also, paradoxically, as a contestant in conflict. The state in Africa, as a creation and function of capital, with its hegemonic classes aligned to global capital for the local accumulation of capital, is thus a central element in the interface between population and resources. The state in Africa has a largely ambivalent attitude towards population policy and discourse. On the one hand, it pushes the population growth agenda, defined by and largely supported by the West, while on the other, it does not follow up all aspects of implementing population control measures, for a number of reasons: resistance borne out of cultural, social and religious factors, the belief that population size is an asset for national productivity and development, and the reality that the problem might be more one of distribution than of size.

How then does the state `govern' resources in contexts of rapid population growth? First of all, we need to understand the nature of the state in Africa as the captive of a coalition of social forces whose interactions broadly reflect the social relations of conflict. The state and the social classes that define its hegemony intervene directly in the African ecosystem at the behest of global, national and local capital. The state promotes an agenda to turn the continent's resources into commodities, by guaranteeing the broad conditions for the accumulation of capital. Its penchant for technical, capital-intensive solutions to environmental problems end up by worsening these problems, which its unsustainable practices largely brought about in the first place. In its bid to defend the transformation of Africa's resources into commodities for the global market, the state intensifies oppressive

social relations, which worsen existing ethnic tensions. It resorts to violence, coercion and divide and rule tactics, to break the blocking power of the alienated and dispossessed. The economic role of the state and its pervasive intervention in all spheres of African society underscore the extent to which it controls access to and distribution of resources, to the exclusion of the majority of the population. The state's expropriation of resources, and the control of the instruments of state power by a social class that is a minority of the population, means that the processes of control, access and distribution are accompanied by organised state violence in the face of resistance, which has become increasingly intense since the 1980s. Resource scarcity (and insecurity) is thus defined by the state's monopoly of resources (involving the global and national fractions of capital), to the exclusion of the direct producers, who then contest their marginalisation. The extent of and intensity of conflict is often determined by the form of the state and its repressive capacity. Despite the extent of this repressive capacity, counter-hegemonic social movements have challenged the African states' exclusive control of resources, resulting in conflicts and 'resource wars'. Accountability, transparency and the welfare of the people have been further undermined by the adoption of structural adjustment programmes by most African states, since the latter half of the 1970s. Resistance to adjustment and to its pernicious alienating features is a critical aspect of on-going conflicts in Africa over the shrinking and degraded resource-pie.

By virtue of the increased presence of global capital and the processes of globalisation, the state in Africa continues to hold the people captive, in order to free resources for the global market. Detached from the people but at the same time bound to them, the state is caught in its own contradictions. This is sometimes reflected in intra-class, cross-class and trans-class conflict. Conflict is not always directed against the state, but can involve different contending interests and groups, defined by their power over resources. Perhaps a most

dangerous consequence is that the social forces and interests, which define the state in Africa, make it exceedingly difficult for the state to mediate in conflicts, as it is itself a source of conflict.

From this, it can be seen that the struggle for shrinking resources in Africa is more than a mere function of overpopulation. The population trap is an inadequate explanation for the structural roots of conflict, even though it may affect the intensity and the outcome of ecological wars.

In the next section, two African case studies are described, to explain the complex causal linkages of conflicts, and to show how contests over resources are the direct outcome of the contradictions of authoritarian governance and its interaction with the ecosystem.

The Ogoni versus Shell

> Oil and environmental conflict are rooted in the inequitable social relations that undergird the production and distribution of profits from oil, and its adverse impact on the fragile ecosystem of the Niger delta, it involves the Nigerian state and oil companies on one side, and the six million people of the estimated eight hundred oil producing communities concentrated in the seventy thousand square kilometre Niger delta on the other (Rowell 1994).

Of all the conflicts in the Niger delta since the late 1980s, that of the Ogoni versus Shell has received the widest attention throughout the world. The 500,000-strong Ogoni ethnic minority group has confronted one of the world's strongest and richest multinationals, Shell. and also the full might of the militarised Nigerian state. Stripped of control of their oil-rich ecosystem by colonial and post-colonial legislation, and alienated from the products of their land, with the attendant oil pollution destroying the ecological basis of their peasant agro-based subsistence economy, the Ogoni struggle is in reality a fight for survival. In 1990, during the early stages of the conflict, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), a coalition of Ogoni associations, the Federation of Ogoni Women Association (FOWA), National Youth

Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), Ogoni Teachers' Union (OTU), and the Ogoni Professional Union (OPU) (Williams 1996), presented the Ogoni Bill of Rights to the Federal Government of Nigeria. Among their demands were an end to the expropriation and degradation of their lands, payment of reparations and rents for the oil wealth taken out since 1958, compensation for damage to the environment, and the respect of their rights to control their land and protect their identity. The Ogoni ecosystem thus became 'a contested terrain reflecting social and political relations as expression of power over production, distribution and access' (Obi 1997a:137). MOSOP, as the social movement of the Ogoni, was 'essentially driven by quest for self-determination, to wrest their ecology from Shell and force the Nigerian state to accept their right to control their land and the proceeds therefrom' (Ibid.).

The Dialectic of the Conflict

The dialectic of the conflict was mainly defined by how Ogoniland was related to the global capitalist system, through the colonial and post-colonial state, and through Shell's `ownership' of oil fields within Ogoni territory, from which it tapped oil for the global market. This was particularly significant for global capital, as oil is the most viable source of energy for transforming nature into commodities (Obi 1997a:138). Yet, the Ogoni remained excluded from any direct access to their resource. As Saurin (1996:88) argues:

> The destruction of Ogoni lands in Southern Nigeria by oil companies including allegedly Royal Dutch Shell satisfies the covetous and distanced shareholders who derive huge financial benefit from those lands and people. At the same time, the Ogoni pay the permanent cost of ecological degradation and repression, whilst relinquishing their control over what happens to their land, to the oil, or the product of their labour.

The alienation of the Ogoni from the products of their land and labour brought mass poverty, disease, unemployment and misery, leading MOSOP to accuse Shell of waging an ecological war against the Ogoni.

When initial MOSOP demands were not met by Shell or by the Nigerian state, the movement decided to block access to Ogoni oil by force. Local resistance by MOSOP was therefore an attempt to stop further expropriation and environmental degradation, and thereby to protect the very existence of the Ogoni.

The dialectic of the conflict would be incomplete without considering the role of the Nigerian state. The Nigerian state relies on Shell to produce approximately 51 percent of `its' oil (Obi 1997a:141). Shell's dominance over oil in Nigeria, means that the state is dependent on Shell for its share of oil rents. Without Shell, the state and the social forces which dominate it cannot gain access to oil rents. Any action against Shell in Nigeria would therefore be an assault against its `unequal partner' the state. For this reason, it protects global accumulation, of which Shell is a vital actor. In relation to the Ogoni resistance to Shell operations, it has been argued elsewhere that:

> The objective role of the state and the interests of the ruling coalition perceive the Ogoni resistance as subversion, an act obstructive of the expansion of global oil capital in a period of crisis, and therefore needing to be crushed at all cost (Obi 1997a:142).

In opposition to Shell and the state, the Ogoni have stressed the injustice and immorality inherent in the exploitation of their oil resource without restitution: For a multinational oil company, Shell to take over $30 billion (worth of crude oil) from the small defenceless Ogoni people and put nothing back but degradation and death is a crime against all humanity (Saro-Wiwa quoted by Efeni 1993:8).

There is also the issue of land scarcity arising from the degradation of the land and waters of the Ogoni by oil pollution. The 500,000 Ogoni were squeezed within an area of 404 square miles. Within this constricted space, they play 'host to six oil fields with numerous overland pipes connecting various oil installations, two refineries, a huge fertiliser plant, petrochemical plants and an ocean port' (Naanen 1995:65-67). In the words of Naanen, `Ogoni represents the paradox of

capitalist accumulation—as the poorest and most industrialised enclave in Nigeria (Ibid.).

The Ogoni struggle is generally presented as one for self-determination by an oppressed ethnic minority group within a structurally unbalanced Nigerian federation, in which the major ethnic groups control oil resources found in minority areas. The site of the conflict has remained in the area of oil production, distribution and access. The main targets of MOSOP were Shell and the state. It internationalised the struggle, bringing the situation to the attention of the United Nations, Amnesty International, Greenpeace, the Geneva-based Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO), the London Rainforest Action Group and Bodyshop, among others. Within the Niger delta, it mobilised the Ogoni to protest against Shell's activities and it eventually forced Shell to stop its operations in Ogoniland. According to Shell sources, this stoppage of oil production in Ogoni caused the Shell-state partnership an estimated daily loss of 9.9 million from May 1993 (Izeze 1994). In response, the state mobilised armed troops to assert its control of 'Ogoni' resources. Several villages were sacked, people lost their lives, while thousands were displaced, fled into the bush, or even into exile. Suspected MOSOP cadres and sympathisers were arrested and detained. The worst blow came when nine leaders of MOSOP, including Ken Saro-Wiwa, were hanged in November 1995, on the orders of a special tribunal, after being convicted of inciting a mob to murder four Ogoni chiefs (Obi 1997a:146).

Despite the repression of the struggle by the state, and the refusal of Shell to negotiate with MOSOP, the conflict has continued, albeit in a different form. Within Nigeria, MOSOP is rebuilding itself, with its crisis management committee issuing press releases on matters relating to their struggle. It is also involved in a national and international campaign for the release from detention of the twenty Ogoni youths,

currently awaiting trial for the murder of four Ogoni chiefs. MOSOP's international campaign has continued, led by its leaders in exile. It seeks to mobilise support for the imposition of sanctions on the Nigerian state, and also to force Shell to act in an environmentally responsible manner[1] (Alabi Williams 1996; cf. Akinrinade 1997).

In the case of Ogoni versus Shell, it is clear that the nexus between population size and resource-insecurity is not the primary cause of one of Africa's best known environmental conflicts. The primary cause of conflict lies in the dialectic of globalisation and local resistance: the profit motive versus the survival of a people.

The Sudanese Civil War

The Sudanese civil war — one of Africa's longest and most bitter — has usually been presented as a war of secession by the mainly Christian and customary religionist black southerners from a Sudan largely controlled by the Northern Arab Muslims. Before going further, I need to state that this case study does not attempt to deal with the causes and ramifications of the Sudanese civil war. This is far too complex a subject for a short study of this nature. My intention is to focus on some ecological-economic linkages in the war, which are only beginning to receive serious attention. This new perspective on the Sudanese civil war has begun to show the connection between state authoritarianism, the economic crisis, the deepening ecological crisis and the escalation of the conflict. Some scholars have shown how the exhaustion of the carrying capacity of the ecosystem, as a result of over-grazing, deforestation, depletion of aquifers, and drought, has led to the displacement of peasants, either to become settlers in other rural areas or in the margins of urban centres or refugees in neighbouring countries (Timberlake 1985). Others have been quick to point out how resource

1 It must however be noted that following the death of the Nigerian Head of State General Sanni Abbacha in June 1998, his successor General Abdulsalami Abubakar released the 'Ogoni Twenty' from detention.

depletion and distributive inequities fuel conflict over shrinking resources (Okidi 1994). Arguing along the lines of the emerging ecological perspective to the Sudanese civil war, Suliman and Omer state that: '... many of the current disputes are not being fought along the traditional political borders, but most remarkably, along the ecological borders that divide richer and poorer ecozones' (Suliman and Omer 1993:23).

Yet, it is important to locate the origins of the resource scarcities and stresses, which have found expression in the conflict, within the Sudanese ecosystem. These lie in state repression, resource-exploitation and environmental degradation. According to Renner (1996), this partly involved the mechanised, large scale agricultural schemes undertaken by the northern Sudanese elites—Jellaba—in concert with their global allies, backed by the Sudanese state and the World Bank. The intention was to produce cash crops for the world market, and thereby provide profits for the various factions of global capital. As a result of such projects, between 4 and 5 million hectares of fertile land were appropriated, taking away the land and livelihoods of about 2-3 million peasant farmers, who had practised rain-fed agriculture (Renner 1996). According to another study by Suliman, 95 percent of the forests of eastern Sudan were cut down, Sudan's fragile soils were exhausted, and yields of sorghum, millet and groundnut fell by some 80 percent, while about 17 million hectares — half of all arable land in northern Sudan — was lost to soil erosion (Suliman 1992).

By the mid-1970s, when Sudan adopted a programme of economic adjustment at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, the rate of exploitation of Sudanese resources and their commodification for global markets rose. To cite Suliman and Omer (1993:50), again: '... the loan conditionalities of the World Bank and the IMF which have considerably boosted this restructuring of resource

utilisation away from local needs and local markets towards the demands of the international market'.

The alienation of the peasants from their land—the very basis of their survival—intensified existing stresses, which were further aggravated by the 1983-85 drought, thus deepening the ecological crisis of the Sudan. The resultant displacement, famine and even death led to resistance by the dispossessed peasants and ethnic groups such as the Nuba. This was met with repression by the Sudanese state, and resulted in an estimated 1.3 million people being killed and 3 million displaced by war and war-related famine since 1983 (Hutchison 199; cf. *Scottish Sudan News* 1995:71).

Up till today, the hostility and tension arising from the overcrowding of urban centres, and the intense competition for access to and control of fast depleting lands and shrinking water resources continue to exact a huge toll on the Sudanese peasants (Hutchison 1991). This occurs from forced evictions by security forces, conflicts over farmlands or grazing lands, and from resistance to the military forces of the Sudanese state, international capital, the Jellaba and their rich Baggara allies.

It is clear from the foregoing that the Sudanese ecological crisis is not a mere function of population size, but has more to do with political decay and with environmental degradation as a result of capitalist agriculture and state oppression, which has resulted in displacement, resistance and violence (Harir 1994). Resource insecurity in the Sudan and the contradictions caused by capitalist accumulation and the state's hegemonisation project have continued to intensify one of Africa's longest conflicts, even to the extent of its assuming partly genocidal dimensions.

Conclusion: Towards a Human-centred Conflict Resolution Framework

This paper demonstrates that the relationship between population growth, the depletion of natural resources and the outbreak of conflict from stresses generated by the first two, goes beyond the need to avoid eco-catastrophe and social disintegration in Africa, simply by arriving at a balance between birth and death rates. The causal linkages are more complex and deeper than is suggested by modernisation-based population arguments. Having contested its scientific legitimacy, and exposed its ideological character as a project for inserting Western values in African population discourse and social science in general, I have exposed the linkage between the population trap and the hegemonic agenda of global capital.

The structural roots of resource scarcities in Africa are determined historically by how the continent was inserted into the global capitalist system, by the character of the state and by the subordination of local needs and markets to global demands and markets. Conflict becomes inevitable when the threshold of extraction, degradation and repression directly threaten the basis for the population's survival. The attempt to place all the blame for resource-wars on Africa's high population growth rate must therefore be rejected, and the role of political and economic inequities and external economic agents in causing `scarcities' must be exposed.

Another important issue in the role of the state in Africa at the present conjuncture, when it usually acts according to the logic of global capital, while blocking out issues of equity, popular participation in governance, and the respect for people's rights. Rather than expand democratic space and allow equal access to resources, the state resorts to repression. In most cases this worsens tensions and provokes conflict. Governance occupies a very critical position in determining how the people can settle issues of equity, access and justice in relation

to 'scarce resources'. Going beyond this, it should address the structural roots of stresses that provoke conflict.

How can we resolve conflict in this ecological crisis and in struggles over resources? The first step would be to eliminate the production and distribution-based inequities which worsen the stresses and provoke conflict. Along with this should come democratisation of all aspects of social life and a realignment of the currently skewed power relations. This would put governance truly in the hands of the people, for the unfettered pursuit of their interests and welfare, and those of coming generations. The massive export of resources from Africa must be halted. This requires a transformation of the dominant economic system in Africa into one that reflects the interests and needs of the people, and the restructuring of the global market economy to ensure economic justice for developing countries. The notion of sustainable development must abandon the view that unbridled market forces can rationally allocate resources in Africa.

Finally, population discourse must be centred on the people, whose interests it purportedly seeks to address. Models imposed from above, or imported from the West will fail, the more so, as they miss both the structural basis of resource-conflicts and the very important issues of people-centred democracy and justice, which lie at the heart of conflict-resolution in Africa.

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Abstract: This article critically analyses the complex linkages between population, resource insecurity and conflict. It argues that rapid population growth beyond the limits of the 'carrying capacity' of the eco-system and resource scarcities cannot alone be the cause of conflict. Rather, issues of the distribution of resources, power, and the linkage between the modes of production and the contradictions embedded in social relations are the fundamental causes of conflict. Using two cases: that of the conflict between the Ogoni, and Shell and the ecological dimensions of the Sudanese civil war, it is shown that the state in Africa is not just a mediator of conflict, but is an actor in conflict, repressing its own citizens, alienating them, and blocking their access to resources, at the behest of global capitalist interests and those of local elites. Thus, conflicts over the control of resources—power—tend to be defined more by access to the means of violence, state power, and the survival of the people.