



PATTERNS, CAUSES AND IMPACTS OF WARFARE IN PRE-COLONIAL AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR STATE FORMATION AND POLITICAL ORDER

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Abstract

Africa has experienced numerous wars and conflicts in the pre-colonial period driven by factors that significantly shaped the future of the continent history. These wars took different dimensions including competing for territorial claims, struggles for control of trade routes, dynastic succession disputes and the pursuit of prestige among the earliest kingdoms. The study examines the patterns, causes and impacts of warfare in pre-colonial Africa using historical methodology that draws information from oral tradition, scholarly literature and archival records. The study reveals that despite various wars, African societies developed traditional conflict resolution mechanisms such as treaties and arbitration to manage disputes. In addition, the study demonstrates that warfare played a crucial role in state formation, population displacement, intergroup relations and the expansion of slave trade. It also shaped the political landscapes that European powers later encountered and exploited in the nineteenth century. Overall, the paper contributes to a broader historical discuss with an insight into the various conflict in Africa with emphasies on the need for historically informed approaches to peace building and governance in contemporary Africa.

Keywords: Pre-colonial Africa. State Formation. Causes of Wars. Conflicts resolution. Peace Building. Political organization. African History

1.0 Introduction

African continent has historically experienced both intra-state and inter-state wars conflicts dating back to the pre-colonial period.¹ These conflicts included inter-ethnic rivalries, expansionist, dynasty succession struggle, and competition over trade routes, economic and resource control wars, state building wars, resistance wars and wars of liberation. Meanwhile, war can be defined as a state of extreme hostility between groups which was aimed at a desired political end, and at the same time an act of violence used by a group (or groups) to compel another to do its biddings.² However, Africa did not have

monopoly on warfare: similar patterns of conflicts occurred globally during periods of formation as other parts of the world as Bosnia, Serbia, Turkey, Northern Ireland, Cambodia, Iraq, America and Burma, had their share of wars during the state formations. Therefore, conflict is an incurable aspect of human interaction because as far as human beings relate on daily basis conflicts are bound to occur and where such disagreements were not quickly resolved, it snowballed into a full time wars. Wars and conflict had greatly influenced the development of Africa with its effect felt in the political, social and economic changes noticed over time.



African socio-political development was defined by migratory movements processes of state formations and regional rivalries which were at times expressed through violent conflicts.³ Warfare remained an important tool in the development of African societies because of its complexities, multi-casualties, and contextually driven by changes of its societies and their interactions with internal and external forces. Contrary to the earlier Eurocentric interpretations that portrayed pre-colonial Africa as a region characterized by primitive and chaotic violence, recent scholarship highlights the existence of complex political systems, organized military structures, and sophisticated diplomatic traditions. Warfare was not only merely incidental but constituted an integral aspect of statecraft, economic regulation and social organisation.⁴ African reasons for warfare were largely interwoven ranging from state formation, territorial expansion, defense, dynastic succession to resource competition. Many African kingdoms and empires, like the Zulu, Oyo, Ashanti, Mali, and Songhai, maintained standing armies and sophisticated military systems to defend their domains against external aggressions, secured trade routes, acquired territories and asserted dominance over a geographical location. Moreover, African leaders cherished their independence and they would go every mile to protect their territory and guide it jealously rather than losing it. Conflicts in Africa were governed by cultural norms, religious beliefs, and indigenous systems of negotiation and conflict resolution. In many cases, war was seen as a legitimate tool for maintaining social stability, ensuring political continuity and balancing power between rival groups. At the same time, the physical geography of Africa, no doubt played an important role in

the nature of its conflicts. In the vast savannahs of the Sahel and the Sudanic belt, the absence of tsetse fly allowed for the development of strong cavalry forces.⁵ In contrast, in the dense regions of West and Central Africa, where horses could not survive, warfare was primarily infantry base. The invention and refinement of indigenous iron-smelting technology were critical here, as blacksmiths were involved in the manufacturing of spears, swords and arrowheads before the advent of the Europeans in Africa.

The effects of wars African in the pre-colonial era were broad and significant, as it led to massive loss of lives, displacement, destruction of infrastructure, undermined economic development, weakened state institutions, injuries and disabilities, loss of sovereignty, political instability and erosion of social cohesion. In many cases, protracted conflicts led to the collapse of central authority, creating fertile ground for warlords, terrorism, and migrations. Despite, these challenges, African states in the pre-colonial era remained strong with peace building efforts, employing traditional mechanisms and community-based justice systems to manage post-wars period.

This study examines the patterns, causes, and impacts of wars in Africa during the pre-colonial era. Furthermore, it explores the evolution of various warfare and evaluate how internal dynamics affected African historical long-term development and stability. Thus, the paper uncovered the drivers of violence on the continent which polarized the continent and prevented Africans from coming together to confront the colonists when they emerged in the political space. The paper concluded that for a lasting and meaningful approach to peace building and political stability in Africa, one must understand the past wars and conflicts,



by so doing the past can be understood. It is only through this approach that sustainable solutions can be found to Africa's security challenges.

Patterns of Wars in Africa in Pre-Colonial Africa.

Legendary Wars of Origin

Africa early history featured legendary wars of origin, which were often tied to the creation and spread of distinct ethnic communities, preserved through oral histories, praise poetry, myths and rituals. These wars often explained migration, settlement patterns and ancestral lineage that helped to provide moral, spiritual and political frameworks for African societies.⁶ Another reasons for the legendary wars were issues relating to land, control of resources, power control and sheer ambition on the part of the more adventurous members of the ruling family⁷ who were desirous of carving territories for themselves. For instance, the origin of the Yoruba towns in the South western Nigeria, was attributed to the struggles, successional disputes and rivalries amongst the descendants of *Oduduwa*- the founder and progenitor of the Yoruba race⁸ that led to the rise of great Yoruba kingdoms like Oyo, Ile-Ife, Owu, Ijaiye, Egba and Benin. Prior to the dispersal period in life, *Oduduwa* was said to have migrated from somewhere in Benin to Ile-Ife,⁹ contrary to Samuel Johnson's assertion that he migrated from the East, to wage war against Ugbo people who were the original autochtones and pushed them out of the Present Ile-Ife. Similarly, the origin of Shiluk people, who initially occupied small area of the western bank of the white Nile¹⁰ in Southern Sudan was through the heroic deeds of their ancestor- Nyikang who came into conflict with his brothers Duwah and Apuny,¹¹ The conflict was over succession disputes, he

defeated in battle to establish a kingship and social order,¹² along the White Nile. This was also similar to the origin of the Kikuyu people in East Africa whose origin was due to the wars between the descendants of Mumbi and Gikuyu with other neighboring groups because of the need to survive, land inheritance and divine guidance.¹³

Expansionist Wars

Expansionist warfare was central to state formation in the pre-colonial African political development. States and empires engaged in military campaigns to extend their territorial boundaries, consolidate power, control trade routes and resources. The wars frequently occurred among different tribes, often initiated by larger or more powerful groups who sought to absorb smaller ones or acquire the weaker groups as conquered states. After conquest, the dominant tribe would typically appoint a representative as viceroys to oversee and administer the affairs of the newly integrated territories. Not only that, the conquered states paid annual tributes as tax to boost the economy of the empires. Great Empires like Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Oyo, Ashanti; Dahomey and many others that emerged at different times fought wars to expand their kingdoms and acquired territories to boost their economy.

Ghana Empire, whose original name was "Dokuir",¹⁴ was one of the earliest and most powerful states in Africa, flourishing between the 6th and 13th centuries CE. The empire which was located in the Sahel region, covering parts of present-day southeastern Mauritania and western Mali, rose prominently in West Africa, due to expansionist wars organized with the intention of dominating the trans-Saharan trade route and control of the exchange of gold and salt. This was made possible due to



the presence of a well-organized army which made her to conquer neighboring states and tribal groups like Audaghost- a key trading towns, Tekrur, Wangara communities and surrounding Soninke's chiefdom. Tributes were imposed on the conquered states which bolstered the served as revenues and bolstered the economy immensely while political influence were established.¹⁵ Thus, by 1068, Ghana Empire through several wars of expansion was the largest, wealthiest and the most powerful kingdom in West Africa extending its authority from the frontiers of Tekrur to the Western banks of Niger, and form the Mandingo area in the south to beyond the fringes of the deserts in the North¹⁶

Other empires like Mali.1235-1600 CE) , Songhai, Oyo and Dahomey that rose in Africa after the fall of Ghana Empire, also fought wars of expansion with similar aim. Mali and Songhai fought more wars of expansions and occupied larger territories than Ghana Empire. She extended her influence over modern Mauritania and Senegal, an area formerly under the control of Ghana, Timbuktu, Gao and Niger River bend. More so, in southern Africa, the Zulu kingdom under the leadership of Shaka Zulu expanded through highly organized military campaigns in the early nineteenth century.

Wars of Autonomy

In the pre-colonial era, Africa also witnessed wars waged by many small polities to assert their independence off the larger African empires who had conquered them during the wars of expansion. Many ethnic groups that found themselves subjugated by powerful kingdoms like Ghana, Mali, Songhai and other early empires in the course of their expansion launched wars of autonomy to resist continuous political domination and restore indigenous authority. Hence, the ethnic groups took up arms against the

overlords to defend their territory, assert their freedom, and restore traditional leadership and cultural identity¹⁷ These wars often emerged when vassal states resisted heavy tributes demand, political domination, military occupation or administrative interference imposed by the dominant empires. More so, the attempt by the expansionist states to consolidate power and maintain territorial control, often fuelled strong resistance movements by the subordinate states who wanted to preserve their sovereignty.

In southern Africa, smaller chiefdoms resisted absorption into the Zulu Kingdom during the Mfecane period, so as to preserve their autonomy. In East Africa, the Galla (Oromo) migrations led to prolonged resistance against the established states such as the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia. The wars of autonomy fought by various conquered states often led to the rise and fall of great Empires in Africa. For instance, the rise of Mali Empire was due to the war of autonomy waged by Mari Djata", popularly known as Sundiata, while the desire of the Mossi people to assert their independence in the 14th and 15th centuries which contributed to the weakening rather than the direct fall of the Mali Empire.¹⁸ Their resistance and military pressure formed part of broader pattern of challenges that undermined imperial authority' Ashanti Empire strongly resisted Kumasi's dominance during periods of political instability, while provinces under the Oyo Empire occasionally revolted when the central government was weak in the nineteenth century.

Succession Disputes

Succession wars were conflicts over disputes concerning the rightly heir to a throne or political office after the demise, deposition or weakening of a ruler. In many pre-colonial African societies, succession



were ambiguous opened to contestation, which threw up rival claimants, which factionalized the society along the nobles, military leaders, or royal lineages, which resulted to armed conflicts to secure legitimacy and authority. This occurred because, not many African states had a structured successional arrangement to prevent rivalries after the demise of an incumbent and where such exist it was not observed. Great Empires like the Oyo and Dahomey Empires collapsed due to the rivalries amongst the royal families, on who to be enthroned after the demise of the incumbent. For instance, Lagos witnessed successional rivalries amongst the royal families between 1825 and 1851, which caused the disunity that paved the way for its annexation by the British colonists. The implication was that succession disputes wars often disrupted governance, weakened military cohesion which made the early African empires prone to both internal and external aggression.

Religious Wars.

Religious wars in the pre-colonial Africa were conflicts in which religion ideology, reform movements or the defense of faith played a central role. Although, political and economic factors were often intertwined with religious reasons, not withstanding faith based ideologies frequently provided the moral framework for warfare and state formation. Religious wars contributed to state formation and political fragmentation in Africa and the establishment of powerful centralized states. It also brought about prolonged religious conflicts that destabilized the continents. Religious conflicts occurred in parts of East and the horn of Africa between Christians and Muslims states, explaining long standing rivalries, competition for trade routes and territorial influence.¹⁹ In central Africa,

Christian rulers who embraced Christianity in the pre colonial period, such as King Nzinga a Nkuwu and Afonso 1, both of the Kingdom of Kongo, often created tensions between the believers of African Traditional Religion and the newly introduced Christian faith.

One major example of such wars was the desire of Islamic missionaries to properly introduce Islam to the people of Africa in place of the existing African Traditional Religion. Islamic religion had earlier made in-roads to Africa at the peak of Ghana, Songhai and Mali Empires, through various contact with the Berber Arab merchants. Despite, Africans maintained a considerable aspects of their traditional religion which they practiced side by side with the Islamic religion. Hence, the efforts of the Muslim communities to revitalize and prevent syncretic practice of the religion brought wars in West Africa. The wars were initially fought against those who combined Islamic with African traditional religious practices before later extending to the so-called infidels. One of the most significant examples of religious warfare in West Africa was the series of Islamic movements known as Jihads that occurred between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The jihad of Usman Dan Fodio was one of the most significant religious and political movements in the 19th century in West Africa.²⁰

In addition, other Jihad wars included that of Futa Jallon Jihad led by Karamokhio Alfa and Ibrahim Sori Maoudo c. 1725-1750, Futa Toro Jihad led by Sileymaani Baal and Abd al qadir c. 1769-1776, Masina Jihad by Seku Ahmadu 1818-1862, Tijanniyya Jihad led by Al-haji Umar's Tal c 1852 -1864 and the Maba wars of 1862-1867.²¹ The wars when considered assumed a religious perspective, however a cursory look of the



pattern and impact would reveal that the war had political undertone such as the Sokoto Jihad that had far reaching impact on the political cum power structure in Northern Nigeria.

Slave-Raiding Wars

Slavery and slave trade plunged Africa into nearly 300 years of devastating human exploitation, during which millions of Africans were forcibly transported by Arabians and Swahili traders across the Sahara Desert and the Europeans across Atlantic to work as slaves on plantations in the Americas, contradicting later European claims of a civilizing mission in Africast.²² The continent was depleted by the capture and transportation of able bodied men as articles of commodity for slaves labor. The slave trade both the Arabian and the European, which were carried out in Africa was done in a ruthless manner, raiding and destruction of lives, farmlands, crops and deliberate burning of properties. These Africans were taken as slaves by Africans who served as middlemen to the Arabians and Europeans. This, they did by declaring inter-tribal and the interstate wars, most importantly among the Yorubas to satisfy the increase in demands for African slaves to work in the Arabian world as domestic slaves and the New world.

Moreover, slave-raiding wars occurred when military campaigns were undertaken primarily to capture individuals to be enslaved, these wars reached its apogee between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries as a result of an increase in trans-Saharan trading activities, Red sea and Atlantic slave trades. Dahomey kingdom was notorious in organizing military expeditions aimed at capturing slaves and sell to the Atlantic Market. Meanwhile, the slave trade contributed to the prolonged Yoruba civil wars of the nineteenth century

such as the Owu-Ife war (1821-1828), Egba-Dahomey war (1851-1864) and Ibadan-Ijaye war (1861-1862) amongst others.

Resistance/ Defensive Wars

Most resistance wars in the pre-colonial period in Africa were fought by the different ethnic groups to protect their territorial integrity, sovereignty, economic interests, or population from external aggression and internal oppression. African societies resulted into wars to maintain and preserve their political independence, protect their economic interests, culture and social institutions. These wars of resistance occurred before the November 1884-February, 1885, and 1 the Brussels Conference of 1890, which served as the percussor to the establishment of formal colonialism in Africa. The resistance by the Christians Kingdom of Ethiopia against the persistence Islamic invasions during the medieval period was one of the major defensive wars fought the in pre-colonial African History. The Empire led by Emperor Geladawos resisted the invasion forces of the Muslim leader Ahmad ibn al Ghazi, popularly known as Ahmad Gran between 1529 and 1543. The invasion which was aimed to propage Islam led to the destruction of churches, settlements and christains institutions across the Ethiopian empire.²³ similarly, the Mossi states located in the present Burkina Faso were always at wars against external domination during the pre-colonial period. The Mossi kindoms, persistently defended their territories against the expansionist ambitions of powerful neighbouring kingdoms such as Mali and Songhai.²⁴ Often, the Mossi warriors consistently launched counterattacks and defensive campaigns to protect their political and economic indipendence. Their military prowess, calvary organisation and centralized political organisation unable



them to resist incorporation into larger empires.²⁵

Other notable defensive wars were the resistance of many communities in Central and East Africa against the Arab slave traders, the protest of the Kingdom of Kongo against the involvement of Portuguese in the slave trade, the Ashante Empires wars to defend and expand its authority in present-day Ghana, the resistance of the Kingdom of Benin against the British interference in its internal affairs before the eventual British invasion in 1897, Dohomey (Benin) resistance against the French (1890-1894), and the Madinka resistance against the French colonial expansion in West Africa led by Somouri Toure. It can therefore be concluded from the foregoing that African societies cherished their independence and resisted any form of imposition that would deny them of their right to independence.

Conflicts Resolution Mechanisms in Pre-Colonial Africa.

A retrospective examination of pre-colonial conflicts would portray African societies as inherently aggressive and perpetually engrossed in warfare or as war mongers, thereby suggesting an absence of peaceful co-existence as posited by colonial apologists. Meanwhile, this was far from the truth as Africans were peace lovers, which made them to have as part of their culture practices that facilitated long periods of peaceful co-existence amongst the people. Africans maintained a regulated society that only made wars became permissible after a customary process had been exhausted. African societies in the pre-colonial period, developed overtime traditional measures such as diplomatic, judicial, and socio-religious practices to prevent conflicts from degenerating to warfare and instead promote peaceful coexistence.

Traditional Measures for peaceful Conflicts Resolution

Africans in the pre - colonial period employed diplomatic mechanisms to manage inter-state relations and resolve conflicts peacefully. The *Arochukwu* kingdom, for example, utilized its oracle and trade networks as instruments of diplomacy and conflict mediation.²⁶ At the same time, envoys who had oratorical skills and neutrality, were exchanged between two estranged towns amicable settlement of issues.²⁷ The role of elders in settling disputes were also paramount as issues were thoroughly discussed until an acceptable consensus were reached. This practice was common in Somali where the Shir (Assembly of Elders) debated issues until a consensus (Heer) was reached and in Tswana societies where the Kgoltha served as a public forum where all adult males could speak, and disputes were aired and settled publicly, preventing grievances from festering.²⁸

In addition, African societies often relied on respected elders, religious leaders or lineage heads perceived as neutral and impartial to mediate disputes and maintain social harmony. For instance, the Mbundu of Angola used *ndundu* (peacemakers) from unrelated lineages to settle disputes amongst warring factions. In stateless societies like the Tiv of Nigeria, the “Swem” ritual and the authority of influential “Men of Substance” provided mediation frameworks that crossed clan lines.

Judicial, Oath-Taking Systems and Spiritual Sanctions.

The practice of judicial and oath-taking were notably employed when peaceful mediation failed. This system allowed the use of customary law and ordeals which serves as the basis for judgment.²⁹ Cases such as murder, theft, or land disputes were brought



before chiefs or special judges and where evidence was contestable, African societies employed ordeals which administered by priests or diviners, thereby transferring the decision to the spiritual realm. Some African societies employed the ingestion of sassafras (Erythrophleum suaveolens) in parts of West-Central Africa. Secondly, swearing of oaths on powerful symbols such as ancestral relics and sacred earth was to prevent the idea of people telling lies and a means of sealing agreements. For instance, the *Igbu Iyi* (oath-taking) in Igboland was so binding that it could resolve the most intractable disputes, as it was believed that catastrophic supernatural retribution would befall any individual who violated the oath not just on the individual but on their lineage.

In another way, compensation and restitution were one of the important measures of disputes resolutions in pre-colonial Africa. The systems of compensation ("blood wealth") were widespread customary legal mechanism in many pre-colonial African societies for resolving cases involving homicide, serious injury or wrongful death. Among the Nuer of South Sudan, payment of cattle for homicide (gor) was meticulously codified to end feuds and restore balance between lineages.

Spiritual-Social Affiliations and Customary Ties.

African by ways of life embeded proactive and integratives systems which naturally prevented conflict from arising. Diplomatic mechanisms included ritual alliances such as blood brotherhood, which fostered peaceful relations between communities. This was evident among the Luo people of the Great Lakes region.³⁰ This practice created sacred, inviolable bonds that prohibited conflict between the parties, establishing perpetual

peace and mutual aid. Marriage like royal and elite inter-marriages were strategic tools for building political alliances and "kinship" between kingdoms, as seen extensively between the Buganda, Bunyoro, and Ankole kingdoms. Similarly, the fear of spiritual punishment served as deterrent by the Africans to prevent wars. Breaking an oath or starting an unjust war could invite the wrath of ancestors, deities, or nature spirits, causing drought, disease, or defeat. Thus, the stability of many African societies were from the interplay between spiritual and social functions.

Conditions Precipitating Wars. .

War became inevitable option only when the laid down traditional mechanisms to settle disputes were exhausted and yet fundamental threat were not addressed. These were often caused by the breakdown of negotiation, rejection of mediation and adjudication, the refusal of the feuding parties to participate in dialogue, to accept the authority of a council, or to abide by a judicial verdict (e.g., refusing to pay compensation) often precipitated war. The violation of sacred trust like the shattering of the foundational bonds holding society together which included the murder of an envoy (a sacrosanct figure), the violation of a blood-brotherhood covenant, or an attack during a sacred festival or in a market (Ahiafokuu – market peace in Igboland). Such acts were "atrocities" that rendered standard mediation null and void, often demanding a violent response to cleanse the spiritual pollution and restore honor.

In addition, matters which constituted threats to sovereignty or survival were often considered beyond the scope of compensation or negotiation and could only solved by wars. These included the usurpation of sacred kingship symbols, the seizure of core ancestral lands, the blockage



of essential trade routes, or existential threats like famine-inducing raids. The Ashanti (Asante) justification for war, for example, was codified in the Forty Laws of Okomfo Anokye, which included defenses of the nation's integrity and the Golden Stool—its embodied soul. In such cases, the very survival of the polity as a spiritual and political entity was at stake.³¹ similarly, a situation where restorative justice failed made wars inevitable. For example, when the issues at hand remained were not resolved and unabated aggression where a party consistently raided neighbors despite paying compensation war was therefore mobilized as a collective security measure to incapacitate the aggressor, a shift from restoration to neutralization.

Lastly, African added spiritual approach by seeking the face of Supreme Being prior to the declaration of wars. Spiritual. Diviners would be consulted to know the will of the ancestors and deities to ascertain if embarking on any war was sanction or not by the Supreme Being. A divine assurance that the war was “just” and had heavenly backing was important for preparations, while a negative declaration could put a stop to the planning. This ritual step which was critical to the African beliefs underscored that the decision to fight war was not only planned by humans, but it required a divine sanction, framing the ensuing conflict as a sacred duty to restore balance.

Impacts of Wars in Pre-Colonial Africa

Warfare was a recurring decimal in the pre-colonial political life of Africa. Although. African societies developed elaborate traditional systems to manage disputes, but when these mechanisms failed, war became investable. The effects of wars in Africa were multifarious which shaped the continent political structures, economic systems, social relations, and long-term

historical developments. Warfare sometimes led state formation and military innovation, notwithstanding it brought instability and structural weaknesses that influenced Africa's later encounter with European imperialism³².

Political Effects

Warfare in pre-colonial Africa shaped the political life of the continent because it enhances state formation and expansion of centralized states. The expansion of African early empires were due to the military prowess and conquest which made them to consolidate authority and integrate diverse communities under unified administrations. For example, empires in West Africa like Ghana, Mali, Kanem Borno, Oyo, Dahomey and host of others expanded through organized military campaigns that strengthened central governance and administrative sophistication.³³ Military success from wars, consolidated royal legitimacy, and successful leadership in war were associated with political authority within many societies.

At the same time, many great African Empires went into eclipse due to incessant wars that drained their resources and promoted internal wrangling. Large empires could not effectively control the distant vassal states, leading to uprisings and autonomy movements.³⁴ Moreover, rival claimants to the throne mobilized their supporters to secure political power and destabilized the polity. Thus, in the pre-colonial. The long periods of intense warfare led to instability, balkanization and the altering regional balances of power.

Economic Effects

The pre-colonial warfare had a far-reaching effects on economic system most importantly agricultural practices. Since main staying of the most pre-colonial African societies were agrarian, warfare



disrupted agricultural production as farms were destroyed, laborers were conscripted to the military to fight wars, leading to shortages in food supplies declined.³⁵ The disruptions in agricultural productions sometimes brought famine and long-term economic instability. In addition, trading activities were also affected due to insecurity along major commercial routes, which affected the movement of goods and merchants. At the same time, the desire for successful states to control lucrative trade corridors and resource-rich areas, increased their fiscal capacity.³⁶

Thus, as some regions in pre-colonial Africa faced economic loss, others witnessed economic gains due to warfare, mostly the intensification of slave-raiding. From the fifteenth century, trans-Saharan and Atlantic slave trades expansion led to heavy demand for captives.³⁷ Warfare became synonymous to enslavement, as war captives were incorporated into domestic labor systems with some sold into long-distance markets. Although, many great African Empires made profits, notwithstanding this practice contributed to demographic depletion and labor shortages in affected regions.³⁸ Due to the high cost of maintaining armies, states imposed tribute and taxation on conquered territories to generate revenue to sustain military operations. Over time, the imposition of heavy tribute sometimes provoked rebellion leading to armed conflicts that further strained economic systems.

Social Effects

Socially, armed conflicts led to significant loss of life through combat, enslavement, and displacement. Warfare led to uprooting of many communities, leading to demographic depletion that changed settlement patterns.³⁹ In regions where slave-raiding happened in large numbers,

family structures were destroyed and disturbed generational continuity. Another social consequence of war was forced migration as people fleeing warfare resettled elsewhere, sometimes starting new political entities. These forced movements contributed to cultural diffusion, fostered intercultural exchange and adaptation and transformation of ethnic identities, but at the same time caused hardship. As many pre-colonial African societies were organized around kingship and lineage systems, the loss and displacement of members undermined social cohesion. Changed the inheritance patterns and destabilized political authority within the community. Nevertheless, external threats sometimes made internal unity strong, as communities rallied around shared identities. Indigenous reconciliation systems, including compensation mechanisms and ritual mediation, demonstrated deliberate efforts to restore harmony after conflict.⁴⁰

Military and Technological Effects.

Warfare enhance military innovation and organizational development as states refined strategies, improved weaponry, and in some cases developed professional standing armies to combat enemies and at the same time fought wars of expansion. The introduction of cavalry systems in the savannah belt stimulated the military effectiveness of several West African states.⁴¹ in other regions, military restructuring under strong leadership prowess transformed changed the ways of state formed. The professionalization of armies elevated the social status of warrior elites, while military service became a pathway to prestige and political influence. However, excessive militarization entrenched authoritarian tendencies and diverted the state attention from economic and social development.



Legacies of Pre-colonial Wars

The cumulative effects of internal conflicts weakened many African states making them vulnerable to European colonization in the nineteenth century.⁴² Thus, European colonist powers explored the existing rivalries and disagreement amongst the African states to establish control. The European colonists went to the extent of forming alliances with local factions to facilitate conquest.⁴³ Although, many African societies posed significant resistance to colonial intrusion which they could not sustain due to lack of unified front. Pre-colonial warfare did not imply inherent weakness amongst the African nation, but reflected evolving political processes. However, these conflicts also reflected dynamic political processes rather than inherent weakness. African societies demonstrated resilience through adaptation, resistance and innovation.

Conclusion:

The paper argues that African society were plagued with various patterns of wars in the Pre-colonial period such as expansionist wars, defensive wars, struggles over trade routes, and slave raiding. However, these conflicts in Africa have deep roots in the internal dynamics of the pre-colonial period with a long term consequences, including loss of life, destruction of infrastructure, weakened social cohesion, population displacement, hindered economic and human development. Moreover, the wars also contributed to political and economic stagnation and lack of unity among the African societies which made the continent vulnerable to European exploitation and eventual colonial domination. Although pre-colonial African societies had effective traditional mechanisms for resolving disputes as wars were often a last resort, the legacies of these conflicts persisted beyond

colonialism. In the post-colonial era, weak state institutions, contested national identities, and struggles over power and resources have continued to fuel instability. Therefore, achieving lasting peace in Africa requires addressing both the historical roots and structural conditions of conflict while promoting inclusive, accountable, and development-oriented governance.

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