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Conflict continuities: Africa in focus

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Citation

Berckmoes, L. H., Bruijn, M. E. de, & Jentzsch, C. (2025). Conflict continuities: Africa in focus. *Conflict And Society. Advances In Research*, 11(1), 63-74.
doi:10.3167/arcs.2025.110105

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4287811>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

SPECIAL SECTION

Conflict Continuities Africa in Focus

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ABSTRACT: It is tempting to interpret the eruption of armed violence in various parts of the world as a break with the past. However, in this special section, we call for attention to “conflict continuities” to understand contemporary violence. Challenging the conventional focus on causes or consequences, we argue that past violent conflict may serve to generate new conflict, in reworked forms. We foreground the psychosocial dynamics of conflict, particularly as they affect social relations and worldviews, often reproduced through cultural narratives. The special section brings together five studies from across Africa. In different ways, they reveal how conflicts are remembered, reiterated, and reproduced in narratives that circulate in families, communities, and national-level politics, thus embodying a generative force for new conflict and struggle.

KEYWORDS: Africa, agency, conflict continuities, cultural narratives, discourse, legacies, multidisciplinary, violent conflict

Causes and Consequences Entangled

The eruption of armed conflict in various parts of the world over the past five years goes against the post–Cold War trend of a decrease in armed conflict and battle-related deaths, particularly regarding state-based conflicts and their victims (Rusted 2024).¹ Notable are the Tigray war that started in November 2020; the civil war in Myanmar from 2021 onwards; the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine that began in February 2022; the civil war that erupted in Sudan in April 2023 and continues; the ongoing genocidal destruction of Gaza following Hamas’ attack on Israel on 7 October 2023; the increase in conflict in Syria since late 2024; and the rebel takeover of large parts of territory in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in January 2025, which threatened to plunge the African Great Lakes region into a Third Congo War (Titeca 2025). Although it is tempting to think of these armed conflicts as signaling a rupture in the global trend of conflict and a sign of a new geopolitical era, we propose that these and other outbreaks of armed conflict can be better understood by paying attention to what we call conflict continuities. All the epicenters of armed conflict just mentioned experienced earlier outbreaks of mass violence, sometimes



even decades earlier. Beyond the reflection that in these countries and regions, tragedy is repeating itself as farce (Marx, in Zizek 2008),² in this special section we seek to answer how and why earlier manifestations of armed violence inform new conflicts and struggles.

We have coined the concept “conflict continuities” to point to the enduring legacies of previous violent conflicts. With this concept, we foreground explorations of how violent conflict impacts social relations and worldviews in enduring ways. In particular, we pay attention to how these relations and worldviews manifest through cultural narratives mobilized in contemporary society. In doing so, the special section builds on, but importantly diverges from, earlier writings on conflict continuities, particularly as presented in the interdisciplinary field of peace and conflict studies. Since the 1990s, when a surge in civil wars inspired much scholarship on conflict, the field has been dominated by questions about the onset of violent conflict and its causes. Studies underscored the structural factors that help explain why civil conflicts occur (Collier and Hoeffler 2002, 2004). Economists and political scientists concluded that poverty, natural resource wealth, economic and land inequality, and ethnicity made it more likely for countries to experience war (Cramer and Richards 2011; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Ross 2004). In this literature, conflict continuities were understood as signaling a “conflict trap” (Collier et al. 2003: 83): countries that have experienced civil war have a high likelihood of experiencing it again, and the more recently a conflict had started and the longer it lasted, the greater the risk of ongoing or new violence (Hegre et al. 2017). The conflict trap reflects how wars worsen the political, economic, and social conditions of a country, including poverty, development, and forced displacement, while the dominance of the military and (intergroup) grievances help explain the onset of civil war in the first place.

Conflicts are indeed often part of global, geopolitical strife, and contemporary war ecologies are influenced by high demands for resources worldwide—land, but also minerals that enable technological innovation and clean energy transition. The ongoing conflicts in DRC, perhaps more clearly than elsewhere, show that advancements in such new technologies unequally serve the economic and power interests of a few. DRC, as one of the richest states in resources, has a population that counts as one of the poorest in the world. Referring to Western state and private actors, as well as neighboring Rwanda—both allegedly supporting the M23 rebel movement responsible for the current havoc in eastern DRC—a Congolese Banyamulenge refugee and community leader commented: “They are all there for the resources ...” (Interview by Berckmoes, Rwanda, 2025). The deliberate creation of chaos would be for the profit of these external actors and hence lead to a continuation of the conflict dynamics (Keen 2000). Meanwhile, the spread of social media helps create new transnational connections and circulate alternative sets of values, including right-wing ideology and transactionalism as alternatives to liberal democracy and human rights.

Yet while we acknowledge the significance of structural factors for the onset of war and the multiplicity of external agents contributing to war, in this special section, we call attention to how war impacts and changes internal dynamics in societies and groups affected by violent conflict. In line with Carolyn Nordstrom (2004) and Stephen Lubkemann (2008), we ask how war realizes and transforms social relations and cultural practices through conflict, thus “investigating war as a transformative social condition” (Lubkemann 2008: 1). In other words, in this special section, we argue that there might indeed be a “conflict trap,” but we do not interpret it foremost as a consequence of the entrenchment of structural conditions that make the conflict repeat itself. Instead, we add to studies that emphasize the (psycho-)social dynamics of violent conflict and ask how these linger on in its aftermath. After all, “collective violence ... targets the body, the psyche, as well as the socio-cultural order” (Suárez-Orozco and Robben 2000: 1). Social relations and worldviews are fundamentally changed through war, which has conse-

quences for its aftermath (Wood 2008). We thus posit that the “psychosocial consequences of the war ... may add an additional, destructive dimension to the post-war environment” (Lumsden 1997: 377).

Drawing attention to the internal, psychosocial impact of violent conflict on societies, we place this special section in the genealogy of studies on war and peace that integrate psycho-social disciplinary approaches. Rather than foregrounding causes, studies in this tradition have tended to focus on the consequences of mass atrocities, particularly those concerning conflict-induced suffering among individuals and their communities. The conceptualization of trauma, both individual and collective, has been most significant in this regard. Interest in trauma developed primarily in the aftermath of the First World War, when millions of soldiers returning from the battlefield presented with acute psychological problems. Initially understood as a physical affliction following exposure to exploding shells, awareness of similar problems among veterans without physical injuries prompted a re-evaluation of the symptoms as psychological in nature instead (Suárez-Orozco and Robben 2000). The field only burgeoned, however, following the Second World War, when high numbers of civilian casualties called for the treatment of massive trauma among civilian populations (Suárez-Orozco and Robben 2000: 16). It is also in this post-Second World War period when the first studies emerged that investigated the transgenerational effects of war and genocide, particularly concerning intergenerational trauma (Berckmoes 2022; Rakoff 1966). Initially centered around Holocaust survivors and their descendants (e.g., Bar-On 1995; Kellerman 2001; Rakoff 1966), more recent studies cover a multiplicity of populations confronted with conflict in their history, including Vietnam war veterans (Long 2013), Armenian survivors of genocide (Der Sarkission and Sharkey 2021), Cambodian refugees who escaped the Killing Fields (Mak and Wieling 2024), Ukrainian survivors of the Holodomor genocide (Bezo and Maggi 2015), and many more. The expansion of the field has prompted one of its leading researchers, Yael Danieli, to argue that the issue of multigenerational legacies of trauma “is a universal phenomenon” (Danieli and Maidan 2023: 1; Danieli 1998). These studies revealed a variety of mechanisms that help explain such enduring traumatic consequences, including psychodynamic, social learning, and biological mechanisms (Kellerman 2001). In particular, the latest discoveries concerning epigenetic changes (e.g., Lehrner and Yehuda 2018) convincingly argue that the legacies of mass violence span multiple generations.

These studies have largely emphasized the harmful effects of mass violence, meaning that the productive potential of conflict legacies remain understudied. The main idea we put forward in this special section is that violent conflicts may not only reinforce already existing structural factors—such as inequalities and vulnerabilities—but that they fundamentally transform societies, imbuing relationships and identities with new meaning and generating new potentialities, including the potential for renewed outbreaks of conflict. In other words, to these studies we add an argument that foregrounds not the causes or consequences of violent conflict but one that troubles the chronology of violence: causes and consequences may become entangled. The special section thus builds on Nordstrom’s argument that the experience of collective violence “becomes a determining fact in shaping reality as people *will* know it, in the future” (2004: 59–60, *italics in original*).

Highlighting the transformative potential of violent conflict—in all its manifestations, including war and genocide—does not entail the argument that violent conflict entirely “reboots” society (Lubkemann 2008). Although war violence often seeks to destroy and unravel, it is only *in context* that, for example, “violence becomes organized and evolves into death camps, rape camps, or torture camps” (Suárez-Orozco and Robben 2000: 9). In this regard, building on long-term fieldwork in various parts of western and central Africa, De Bruijn and Both (2018) emphasize that social relations embedded in conflict dynamics often relate to a long and deep history of both

open and closed political strife; this deepens the embodiment of inequality and social relations, making societies vulnerable to new conflict. Their focus on “living in duress” reflects enduring socio-psychological consequences of these periods of (violent) strife. We thus propose that the experience of violent conflict, embedded in specific cultural contexts, makes it difficult to return to pre-conflict conditions. Hence, the experiences may become part of the “cultural narratives” of people, communities, and societies. Notably, both the “conflict trap” (Collier et al. 2003) and “duress” theories (De Bruijn and Both 2018) suggest that conflict and war have no specific time limits. Instead, they continue as open geopolitical orders, or as intangible dimensions of social relations after war. In this special section, we explore further why this is the case.

Through five case studies in this special section, we approach the question of “why” from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, highlighting different dynamics in the aftermath of violent conflict. Drawing on different disciplinary perspectives is enriching and necessary given that violence always aims at and impacts a multiplicity of fields (Suárez-Orozco and Robben 2000). Departing from the disciplinary perspective of history, Tycho van der Hoog, on the southern Africa region, and Ngozika Obi-Ani, focusing on contemporary Nigeria, both explore the present-day reactivation of the memories of liberation and independence movements. Corinna Jentszsch, on the other hand, takes a historical and political science perspective to explore the recent revival of a self-defense militia seen earlier during Mozambique’s civil war from 1976 to 1992. Inspired by digital ethnography, Mirjam de Bruijn and Luca Bruls explore how enduring inequalities and uncertainties created in conflict in the past inform social media practices concerned with conflict in contemporary Mali. Finally, Lidewyde Berckmoes with Juul Kwaks, Verena Mukeshimana, Benjamin Tuyishimiye, Eugène Rutembesa, Theoneste Rutayishire, Révérier Interayamahange, and Clémentine Kanazayire draw on psychological anthropology to ask how traumatic experiences of past conflict, flight, and genocide feature in familial, domestic pedagogies aimed at instilling (protective) practices and (fearful) worldviews among children in Rwanda. While taking us to a variety of past violent conflicts and ongoing struggles, these case studies all foreground the productive legacies of past violent conflict through their impact on cultural narratives.

Cultural Narratives

No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man.

Heraclitus

In peace and conflict studies, increasing attention to the importance of legacies of conflict has been partly driven by research in the 2000s that focused on *how* wars were fought rather than why they occurred (Kalyvas 2006; Wood 2003, 2008). This research focused on why violence against civilians plays such an important role during civil wars and what consequences this has for the dynamics of war. Indeed, while civilian casualties in the First World War were estimated at 5 percent, they rose to 50 percent in the Second World War and 80 percent in the Second Indo-China War, to some better known as the Vietnam War (Suárez-Orozco and Robben 2000). Civilians, scholars recognized, beyond being victims, can fundamentally change the course of conflict. For instance, in recent research, Norman and colleagues (2024) argue that digital advancement reflects the emergence of participatory warfare. This dynamic

of social media in fostering a new war ecology is also highlighted by De Bruijn and Bruls (this section).

Furthermore, as in research on trauma, the focus on civilians in peace and conflict studies has created opportunities to investigate conflict legacies. In this field, it has inspired questions about how war-affected communities inform post-war politics, economy, and society, including through post-war electoral mobilization (Van Acker 2016; Costalli and Ruggeri 2019; Courtois 2019), political sentiments (Cremaschi and Masullo 2024), armed resistance to insecurity (Osorio et al. 2021; Remijnse 2002), crime (Deglow 2016), and economic resilience (Ibáñez et al. 2024). As in the studies just referenced, we define conflict continuities as the apparent ongoing relevance and recurrence of civil conflict and war while recognizing that such continuity may be *heterotypic*. Indeed, we align with the view that contemporary conflicts are “refashioned and sometimes opaque and oblique reworkings of [the past]” (Stoler 2016: 5, about “imperial durabilities”). In other words, our point is not that repetition means replication but that the continuities in conflict encompass transformation and difference too (Bryant 2018; Deleuze, in Schmidgen 2013).

To understand the continuities forged through violent conflict, scholars, particularly anthropologists, have explored the role of agency. Many have emphasized how agency is constrained by violent conflict (Lubkemann 2008). For instance, studies have explored how people socially navigate war, seeking opportunities in contexts marked by limited life chances (Vigh 2006); how people start to embody violent conflict (De Bruijn and Both 2018; Stoler 2016); continue down “trodden paths” of taking up arms (Ahmed 2006; Crépin 2023; Debos 2008); or develop tactical responses when strategies seem out of reach in war-affected contexts (Berckmoes 2014, 2017; Utas 2005; Vigh 2006). In this special section, we are also interested in agency and combine this interest with a focus on narratives. Namely, we argue that waging as well as writing and remembering war “all shape its legacy, all draw boundaries” (Lepore, in Laderman and Martini 2013: 3).

Narratives are a fundamental way in which people organize their understanding of the world. In the narratives of many people we encountered during our own research, past experiences of conflict uncannily served as a point of reference for present-day experience and anticipation of new conflict (see also Bryant 2018). For instance, as a Congolese woman in her sixties commented upon her recent flight to neighboring Burundi: “I left before the rebels of M23 arrived [in my region]. We have faced intercommunal violence in this region before” (Yaga Burundi, Instagram, 21 February 2025). For this woman, the territorial gains made by the M23 threatened a repetition of the intercommunal violence she had witnessed years earlier. In response, she left in search of safer ground in neighboring Burundi.

Cultural narratives often contain historical and political references, including those related to violent conflict (Nordstrom 2004). These references need not be of a recent past, or of a conscious remembering or forgetting (Ricoeur 2004), but can be a heritage of past violence that lives on in the inequalities and violences of our present times (Stoler 2016) or as collective representations of past humiliation or loss (Volkan 2001). De Bruijn and Bruls in their article (this section), for instance, show how references to slave–master relations or past empires reinforce the subjective representations of ethnic polarization that are reiterated in social media narratives in Mali today. In a different way, Vakim Volkan (2001) argues that historical events of loss and humiliation that cannot be mourned may be transmitted transgenerationally and, over time, transform into “chosen traumas.” That is, the historical event, may turn from “a memory or shared piece of the past” (88) into part of a large-group identity, linking its members together. In this regard, he describes how the fourteenth-century Battle of Kosovo became a symbol of Serbia’s loss of greatness,

and was later turned into a symbolic cornerstone of the ethnic violence perpetrated in the 1990s. This component of identity “may lie dormant for a long period of time yet can be reactivated and exert a powerful psychological force” (Volkan 2001: 88). The article by Berckmoes and colleagues (this section), which examines how families in Rwanda narrate experiences of conflict, also demonstrates how these narratives may become formative to a group’s identity—in this case, that of Banyamulenge refugees in Rwanda—even as violent conflict is ongoing. Yet, as Volkan writes (2001), their findings suggest that whether loss becomes part of identity is not a given and may shift over the course of time, even across generations.

Cultural narratives of past violent conflict are inevitably subject to remembering and forgetting: only some historical events are remembered (Argenti and Schramm 2010). Moreover, the shaping and activation of memories of past violent conflict may be less agentic. They can present a conscious act, “work” (Fabian 2003) undertaken by different actors to coexist in the aftermath of genocide (Buckley-Zistel 2006) or to legitimize the belligerent acts of states or rebel movements, for instance. The recurring war in Mozambique, as discussed by Jentzsch (this section) is also (partly) legitimized by memories of the force of prior manifestations of traditional militias. Similarly, in Van der Hoog’s article in this special section, we find that contemporary political parties strategically narrate their role in historical violent struggles to legitimize their claims to power. Drawing on the same historical event, political opponents craft their own versions of the past. In the article by Obi-Ani (this section), we also see how official state narratives—and long-enforced silence—may encounter contradictions strategically framed by political opponents. Obi-Ani’s study, for example, points to the role of “memory entrepreneurs” who are part of the diaspora living in Europe. Such strategic memory work is much less present among Rwandan families, as we read in the study by Berckmoes and colleagues (this section). They show that children’s learning of the past in Rwandan families—in contrast to learning among the Banyamulenge refugee families participating in the same study—is primarily marked by the absence of narratives of violence and its direct consequences, including the death of family members or the imprisonment of parents or grandparents.

Attention to cultural narratives inevitably calls for recognizing the impossibility of reducing the experiences of violent conflict to a story (Nordstrom 2004), let alone a single story. Victims, perpetrators, witnesses, writers, politicians, and scientists are “all condemned to the restrictions of representation” (Suárez-Orozco and Robben 2000: 7; Nordstrom 1997). Moreover, “[n]arratives are not transparent renditions of ‘truth’ but reflect a dynamic interplay between life, experience and story” (Eastmond 2007: 248). Cultural narratives may attribute significant importance to “myth,” or elevate narratives to “mythico-histories” (Malkki 1995). In this regard, Van der Hoog and Jentzsch point to the importance of rituals and legends, for instance by former liberation struggle leaders (Van der Hoog, this section) or militia leaders (Jentzsch, this section). Myth also plays a role in the narratives of the Banyamulenge families in the study by Berckmoes and colleagues. In these families, return to the homeland becomes an almost mythical—or messianic—promise, and the longing for return is an almost biblical obligation.

However, rather than viewing these characteristics of cultural narratives about experienced violence as limitations, we interpret them as an opportunity to identify how the past, present, and future are subjectively and continuously lived and shaped. Consequently, we argue that such an approach may help us grasp how societies and social relations are made and remade by people in and through war. In his study on the intergenerational transmission of trauma among three generations of Holocaust survivors, Dan Bar-On (1995) turned to a narrative approach when he realized the impossibility of isolating interwoven processes following the Holocaust. For Holocaust survivors and their descendants, experiences of emigration, immigration, family

structures and processes, and personal processes were all intertwined. The narrative approach reveals not only the transformational experiences of people in conflict but also their interpretations of these experiences and their resulting actions, which render the social fabric a discursive experience. The discursive experience is important, as it informs people about the possible interpretation of their futures, on the basis of which they will act. The articles by Berckmoes and colleagues; Obi-Ani; and Jentzsch in this section, among others, point to the importance of present and future circumstances in shaping specific conflict continuities. For instance, in the studies by Obi-Ani and Jentzsch, new conflict actors emerge in response to ongoing structural violence and insecurities, whereas Berckmoes and colleagues point to the importance of caregivers' and children's ideas about their futures. The lingering past is also central to understanding people's social media practices in the ongoing violent conflict in Mali (De Bruijn and Bruls, this section).

In brief, by combining agentive perspectives and a focus on cultural narratives, in this special section, we seek to explore how past violent conflict is experienced by those affected, and how, in turn, their experiences become seeds for current and potential future conflict.

This Special Section: Africa in Focus

This special section is the outcome of a year-long collaboration between researchers from different disciplines: international relations, political science, history, social and medical anthropology, digital ethnography, and law.³ Although our approaches and theories of conflict diverged in many ways, we found common ground in our multi-disciplinary focus on cultural narratives, in which the main actors are citizens, citizens who have turned into war belligerents, or those who think they can (un)make war in politics. We present five studies that explore the narrative legacies of violent conflict in various parts of the African continent, focusing on Southern Africa, Mozambique, Central Africa, Mali, and Nigeria. By bringing together studies from different disciplinary perspectives, we seek to advance theoretical understanding of conflict continuities rather than focusing on methodologies for studying them.

Our focus on Africa, a region often considered to be on the periphery of the global order, presents an effort to more systematically map the processes through which conflicts transform social relations and worldviews that enable or engender conflict continuities of various sorts. All of the included countries are postcolonial states which since Independence have experienced violent conflict and repeated struggle, war, and/or genocide. Their histories of post-Independence conflict followed decades of colonial domination. However, in other respects—such as their histories, sizes, populations, and geographical characteristics—these countries differ widely. In this sense, each of the case studies highlights different ways in which conflict continuities and narration matter.

We do not argue that there is one way in which conflict continuities occur across Africa or that the processes we describe are unique to the African continent. Indeed, references to states and regions in discussion of the conflicts covered in the various articles falsely suggests that their causes and consequences are geographically confined. Our analyses indicate that conflicts with epicenters in Africa are deeply embedded within transnational and global networks of ideas, goods, actors, and technologies (Nordstrom 2004). Recent and contemporary conflicts confirm this increasingly internationalized character of civil conflicts around the world (Rusted 2024). By centering experiences in regions often considered peripheral, we seek to juxtapose these often taken-for-granted positions. Moreover, by focusing on diverse countries affected by

conflict in Africa, we hope to stimulate similar explorations in other world regions—drawing on contextually embedded perspectives to understand the patterns and differences across contemporary war ecologies worldwide.

We introduce the articles in turn. Obi-Ani's contribution analyzes conflict continuities in Nigeria, where descendants of survivors of the Nigeria–Biafra war (1967–1970) mobilize memories of that war to demand, once again, an independent Biafran state. “Memory entrepreneurs” on social media revive the prior struggle to respond to contemporary grievances, which the Nigerian government has been unable to address. These memory entrepreneurs present the militants of independence movements as “cult heroes” to provide a solution to these contemporary struggles. Their cultural narratives provide a platform for political mobilization, which contributes to conflict continuities.

Prior struggles also play an important role in van der Hoog's contribution on the legacies of the southern African liberation struggles. Introducing the concept of the “liberation lens,” van der Hoog argues that veterans of the liberation wars have come to see contemporary politics only from their specific experience of those wars. The veterans dominate the political system and justify political decisions from the perspective of the country's liberation, which perpetuates a narrow understanding of the country's social and political trajectory. This argument contributes to the special section's view that war transforms social relations and worldviews, with a lasting impact on those who experience war and their descendants.

Jentzsch's contribution focuses more on the continued relevance of specific conflict actors (i.e., the Naparama militia) and how cultural narratives about their successes in past wars contribute to their revival in the present. In Mozambique's current Islamist insurgency in Cabo Delgado province, a traditional militia re-emerged that had been active during the country's civil war from 1976 to 1992. Militia leaders actively reminded communities of legendary narratives of the militia's activities during the previous war to defend the local population from violence, which contributed to reinforcing their legitimacy in fighting in the current war. Thus, this contribution, like several others in this section, shows how conflict continuities are embedded in the various ways that societies respond to competition and conflict.

De Bruijn and Bruls focus their contribution about the conflict in Mali on the new war ecology, in which wars are played out in entangled online and offline worlds. They examine the workings of social media platforms in these wars, viewing them as a warscape where everybody can make or assume narratives about the underlying social dynamics, thereby becoming a participant in the continuation of the war. In these social media narratives, the dynamics of long periods of social challenges and violence, of “duress,” also lead to an offline normalization of violence. Consequently, past conditions of violence mediated through social media influence how people navigate the present.

This is also shown in Berckmoes and colleagues' contribution that focuses on how experiences of mass violence are passed on to the next generations in the form of specific teachings and learnings between parents and other caregivers and their children. These domestic “pedagogies of peace and conflict” differ significantly between Rwandan communities and Banyamulenge refugee communities in Rwanda, as they perceive the present differently and anticipate different challenges in the future. Notably, children in both communities seem to significantly challenge the caregivers' teachings, whether these are explicit and consistent or occasional and passed on in silence.

The ultimate question our contributions seek to address, then, is how, through narratives of past violent conflict, people make and remake conflict continuities. If anything, the articles show a continuous tension between process and structural factors that feed conflict continuities:

while past conflict requires efforts to create “repetition,” the mobilized past can also come to serve and be experienced as a “frozen frame” along with other conflict factors.

Conclusion

In this special section, we challenge the conventional focus on causes or consequences of violent conflict, instead showing how past conflict may serve to generate new conflict, thus blurring traditional chronology. In addition, rather than highlighting structural factors and external actors, we foreground the psychosocial dynamics of conflict, particularly as they affect the social relations and worldviews of the people who experienced mass violence and their descendants. Building on five diverse case studies from across the African continent, we contend that conflicts reorganize social relations, often reproduced through cultural narratives. Narratives of past conflict are remembered, reiterated, and reproduced in families, communities, and national-level politics, and embody a generative force for new conflict and struggle, sometimes through, again, violent means. In this way, conflict legacies inform altered worldviews rooted in past violence, thus contributing to new outbreaks of violent conflict in reworked forms.

■ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The introduction to this special section has been inspired by the year-long collaboration between researchers of the Collaborative Research Group “Conflict Continuities” hosted by the African Studies Centre Leiden, Leiden University. Special thanks go to the participants in the two workshops organized in January and September 2024: Bruno Braak, Luca Bruls, Rijk van Dijk, Tycho van der Hoog, Alliance Mango Kubota, Juul Kwaks, Ngozika Obi-Ani, and Catherina Wilson.

■ NOTES

1. See also, ACLED Conflict database (<https://acleddata.com/conflict-index/>, accessed 20 February 2025) and the Stockholm Institute for Peace Research Yearbook 2024 (<https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2024/02>, accessed 20 February 2025).
2. The quote is derived from Karl Marx’s earlier work, where he comments upon the rule by Louis Napoleon, nephew of the more famous Emperor Napoleon I.
3. The special section was initiated as part of the Collaborative Research Group (CRG) “Conflict Continuities” at the African Studies Centre Leiden, chaired by Lidewyde Berckmoes. Participants in the CRG contributed ideas and their own work in progress regarding the conceptualization presented here. Those who participated in the two workshops organized to develop this section, some of whom present work in this special section, are officially recognized in the acknowledgements of this introduction.

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