



Cross Border Crime and Escalation of the Liberia and Sierra Leone Conflicts

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Abstract

The paper assesses the role of cross border crime in escalating the Liberia and Sierra Leone conflicts. The article shows how the warlords exploited the weak state structures on the borderlands to entrench a terrorizing war economy fueled by cross border crime. The study argues that the Liberia and Sierra Leone conflict aided transnational destabilizing activities on the borderlands and vice-versa, the illicit border trade that was catalysed by the conflicts was key in dragging and broadening the conflicts across the Mano River region. The paper adopts a qualitative historical method to validate findings from library research and eyewitness accounts that show how the warlords capitalize on the small arms trade, Diamond/Drug trafficking and Mercenaryism to nourish and escalate the conflicts and contagiously debilitate the West African region.

Keywords: Boundary, Borderlands, Cross Border Crime, Liberian Conflict, Sierra Leone Conflict, West African Collective Regional Security.

Introduction

Cross border crime is an offence that has an international dimension. The phenomenon constitutes a major threat to national, regional and global security and stability. The act implies crossing at least one national border before, during or after the act. Cross border criminal acts always undermine the global quest for integration and severely distort the socio-economic fabric of the affected nations and contiguous countries.¹ In West Africa, cross border crimes were mainly crimes of economic sabotage until events of the post-Cold War period and the outbreak of the Liberian Civil War in 1989 which changed the trend and introduced a hyped regime of illicit border transactions on the borderlands.

The cross-border incursions that sparked the Liberian and later the Sierra Leone civil conflicts presented the most serious security challenges to the stability of the West African region since the attainment of political independence. From thence, the menace of the conflicts that emblazoned the Liberia, and Sierra Leone borderlands had become a central facilitating factor in the illicit trafficking of light weapons/ammunition, mercenaryism, drugs and diamond smuggling. These illicit activities

¹ B.M Barkindo, and A Lipede (eds) An overview in, Human Trafficking and Economic Crimes Across Nigeria's International Borders (Ibadan, Spectrum Book Ltd 2007) p. XV.



had affected the socioeconomic and cultural conditions on the borderlands and precipitated a dangerously new dynamism in illicit border activities and conflicts in the West African region.

At the start of the conflicts, the national institutional structures manning the borders of the two states were wrecked by a long period of neglect and insensibility to the needs of the borderland communities. Worst still even the welfare of the security apparatus manning the border was also abandoned by the state's leadership. This neglect has the widest implication on the national security interest of the states. Therefore, throughout the duration of the conflicts, the cross-border criminal activities that stem from gun running, mercenary activities, drugs and diamond trafficking thrived unhindered and were central in paving the way for the prolongation of the conflicts making them intractably difficult to resolve and violently contagious.

The Liberia, Sierra Leone Border

Generally, the border is a complex notion and a reality that constitutes a space for shared interrelationships. Like most African boundaries the Liberia-Sierra Leone border is a colonial construct that represented a scythe across cultural areas. The colonialist who draws these frontiers are notoriously known for erecting boundaries that often divide putative ethnic groups under the fake guise of carrying out a civilizing mission. The African imperial colonizers and their apologists argued that erecting barriers across traditional territories comes with abundant economic opportunities for both the borderland societies and their respective states. They claim that, in spite of the socioeconomic obstacles of erecting frontiers, borders situated in economically viable zones, like the Liberia/Sierra-Leone borderlands offer unlimited economic, political and social opportunities for the border communities and their respective states.

Quite to the opposite, African border experiences have proven that in times of active conflicts, boundaries drawn across contiguous cultural areas portends the serious problem of being interactively contagious. In particular, the lessons from the Mano River conflict on Liberia, and Sierra Leone frontiers were out-rightly debilitating, contagious and disruptive. The conflict and the changes precipitated thereof have caused a serious security dilemma in cross border relations between the communities inhabiting the Liberia Sierra Leone borderlands and their respective states, which, clearly outweigh the taunted economic advantages.

Cross Border Crime on the Liberia, Sierra Leone Borderlands

Historically West African governments at all levels (colonial and post-colonial) have always considered borderlands as “reserve areas that can be incorporated into the active national space at any time in the future.”² The Liberian and Sierra Leone governments belong to these categories of states. Evidently, the two neighbouring countries have consistently neglected their border regions in national development schemes since the tumultuous creation of the boundary in 1860.³

Although, the inhabitants of the Liberian-Sierra Leone border had existed as a cultural entity on the land for centuries before the creation of the boundary. The sudden erection of the boundary and its attendant controls has created a hindrance in the pattern of their age-old relationships. Additionally, the inability of the respective governments to provide the communities with basic infrastructures like roads, bridges, electricity, pipe-borne water, schools and hospitals has also created the need to

² C. Abayomi Cassel, *Liberia: History of the First African Republic*, Fountain Head Publishers, USA, 1970, p. 315.

³ C. Abayomi Cassel, *Liberia: History of the First African Republic*, Fountain Head Publishers, USA, 1970, p. 315.



devise strategies that will ensure the social, economic and security survival of the borderland communities. Hence, in the bid to circumvent the restrictions imposed by the border on their age-old pattern of relationships, the border communities employed the instrumentality of the traditional social networks that bind them into a familial and occupational entity to circumvent the hindrances imposed by the border.

Using bush paths, and paddle canoes via official or the many illegal porous entries along the boundary, the local and migrant resident communities on the borderland connive with visiting smugglers to maintain their age-old trade and commercial interactions. Businessmen and community members alike continue to straddle with goods and services across the many porous border entries along the Mano River. Initially, the cross-boundary transactions that took place were mainly geared towards fending for the daily survival needs of the communities. However, the persistent neglect of the border by the governments of the two countries created a void in the welfare, economic and personal security of the border inhabitants. This gap was gleefully filled by the non-state actors involved in clandestine illicit trade on the border prior to the outbreak of civil conflicts in the two countries.

The Liberian Crisis and Escalation of Border Crime on the Liberia- Sierra-Leone Boundary.

For decades, the tension that trails the creation of the Liberia-Sierra Leone boundary had continued to impair state relations between the two countries, but on the other hand, relations between the border inhabitants were maintained in its pristine state of age-old fraternity. However, by 1985 the tense but cordial pattern of relation between the two states took a dive to the lowest ebb when the Liberian renegade General Thomas Qoinwonkpa staged a cross border incursion on Liberia from Sierra Leone via the Manor River crossings. Interestingly, despite the danger it portends, the issue only attracted a shocking but lacklustre response from the governments of the two countries. The lacklustre approach continues to be displayed by the governments in spite of the political imbroglio that engulfed Liberia in the aftermath of the 1979 rice riot in Monrovia.

Of course, the cross-border criminal activities that were taking place at the time were largely economic crimes that had little bearing on the overall national security of the two countries. However, the attack by Qoinwokpa should have reawakened the consciousness of the countries' policy makers to consider a review of their border security and the phenomena of Cross border crime on their common boundary.

All of that however quickly changed, when the rebel movement the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), launched a military insurgency on Christmas Eve December 24th, 1989. The attack which this time was staged from Cote D'Ivoire was an unprecedented challenge not only on the Liberian forces manning the border town of Butuo in Nimba county but also on those deployed across all of Liberia's contiguous borders. The December Butuo attack compromised the sanctity of the border, and the security of Liberia and made all of Liberia's contagious border regions zones of conflict. This was made clear by the vicious circle of wars and unending violence that later intractably engulfed Liberia and its neighbours.

Apparently, the choice by the insurgents to ignite the conflict via cross border aggression exposes both the security vulnerabilities in the borderlands and the utility of the criminal networks that spawned the borders in enhancing the war efforts. Throughout the war years, it was the clandestine



flourishing illicit border trade in small arms, Diamonds, Drugs and Mercenarism were the major channels and life wire that helped nourished and prolonged the conflicts.

The Liberian border aggression sparked a mobile conflict that spread across West African regional borders. Sustained by the proceeds of cross border crime the conflicts also created a mass wave of refugees and internally displaced persons who maraud the region in an oscillating fashion. The wars and the refugee conundrum gave rise to the illicit cross border activities that dominated economic transactions on the Liberia-Sierra Leone border creating fear and tension across the Mano River. These cross-border activities facilitated by the war economy on borderlands also threatened the fragile regional security and stability of other West African states.

Cross border Arms Trafficking, Mercenarism and Escalation of the Liberia-Sierra-Leone Conflicts

Most low-level armed conflicts are technically intra-state conflicts nourished by the skills offered by mercenaries and the steady supply of crucial military logistics. The two phenomena are essential ingredients and services necessary in prosecuting intra-state civil wars. Often the coaxed irregular combatants involved in these wars lacked both the skills and resources needed to maintain the tempo of the national suicide missions they called liberation. The only edge they have is that of excessive brutality. Because most of the combatants only employed gorilla-styled insurgencies to maintain the terrorizing edge needed to consolidate their territorial gains. On the issue of obtaining military supplies and services, the leadership of the irregular combatants rely mainly on cross border destabilizing transactions in small arms, ammunition and mercenaryism to facilitate and sustain the war enterprise.

In West Africa for example, the localized conflicts that engulfed the region in the 1990s were typically supplied with arms that originated from outside the region by sophisticated regional and international criminal networks.⁴ Although regional arms networks also play important roles in this enterprise, however, their involvement is mainly sought when direct supplies from producers to the belligerents are problematic or in the case of an arms embargo. In such cases, indirect supply through neighbours has proven advantageous especially where similar tension is common across long and porous borders between the states. The weapons so obtained are then recycled within the proximate conflict areas as exhibited in the aggression that sparked the Mano River mobile conflicts that engulfed Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire in a brutal fashion.⁵

Similar dynamics also played with respect to the regionally based mercenaries made available for hire in the proximate conflicts. These categories of combatants are often released for combat engagement because of the failed mechanism adopted in ending the conflicts. The failure is hinged on several connected reasons. First, the colonial legacy that fractured the African societies meant that the salient grievances likely to precipitate conflict in the societies are interlinked and related to the nature of the states, therefore are difficult to be addressed comprehensively. Secondly, the resolution mechanisms supported by the international community are lacking in local participation, hence, the peace so desired is likely to be ineffective especially when the local grievances of the

⁴ Niel Cooper and Micheal Pugh, 'Transformation of War Economies; A Regional approach', Journal of International Peace Academy, Vol. 30, 2003, p. 456.

⁵ Prosper Addo, 'Cross Border Criminal Activities in West Africa: Options for Effective Response'. Kofi Annang International Peace Training Centre, Accra Ghana, 2006, p. 6.



majority populations are ignored. Thus, when such processes are followed by similar-fashioned disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs, the programs are also likely to be flawed and in-comprehensive. As notably witnessed in the Mano River conflicts, these flawed processes often make some of the demobilized combatants available for engagement in other theatres. The proximate nature of the combat terrain means that the now commoditized army of combatants only needs to cross the frontier to partake in other combat engagements. These ex-combatants i.e. RUF, NPFL, ULIMO and members of other groups operating in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea were continuously hired to fight in other conflicts across West Africa. Hired for a pittance, these mercenaries recruited from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea, constituted the most potent threat to the collective security of West Africa. The borderless conflict they engendered threatened the whole region and facilitated the illicit trafficking of the small arms and light weapons that circulated around the region moving from conflict to conflict as one ends and another begins.⁶

According to figures released by the President of the ECOWAS commission, about eight (8) million illegally obtained small and light weapons circulating in West Africa most of which were used in the Liberia and Sierra-Leone conflicts.⁷ These weapons that were illegally smuggled into the region by clandestine arms merchants are now on the loose and were the ones used by the dissident forces and rough governments in the region to perpetrate carnage and cause instability, particularly in the Mano River sub-region. Most of these Arms came alongside the rebellion from the Gaddafi led regime in Libya (who also offered training and other logistics to the belligerents) or were obtained clandestinely from European mercenary groups and arms merchants.

Though, some of the weapons used were manufactured locally and distributed using the extensive regional trading networks, the bulk of the arms and ammunition are actually smuggled into the sub-region by international arms merchants who effect deliveries either directly by air or sea when convenience allows. The merchants also use facilities of neighboring rough states to effect delivery of their merchandise which they then trafficked by land across the porous borders to the conflict areas.

Indeed, the arms embargo imposed by ECOWAS and the United Nations greatly hindered the ability of the rebel forces to acquire arms freely especially those considered as medium-range weapons. However, the embargo regime did not diminish or destroy the capacity of the rebels to obtain high calibre weapons. Medium-grade weapons and other military ordinances continued to find their way into the conflict zones via the neighbouring states of Cote D'Ivoire, Guinea and Burkina Faso.

It is on record that, after the official close of voluntary disarmament in 1996, the ECOMOG's rapid deployment force (RDF),⁸ discovered some heavy armament in the custody of the warring factions. A huge catch of weapons was particularly discovered in Alhaji Koroma's Monrovia residence and more catch of heavy long-range weapons were seized from the NPFL's stronghold of Nimba county. Generally, the weapons seized during the cordon and search operations are weapons that cannot be considered as small or light weapons. Therefore, obtaining delivery of such arsenals in an embargo

⁶ B. Festus Aboagye, *ECOMOG A Sub-Regional Experience in Conflict Resolution Management and Peacekeeping in Liberia*, Accra, SEDCO Publishers, 1999, p. 50.

⁷ Addo, 'Cross Border Criminal Activities', p. 6.

⁸ Ahmad Dahiru Aminu, *The Role of Cross Border Crime in the Escalation of the Conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone 1989-2005*, M.A. Dissertation, University of Abuja, 2012, p. 138.



regime requires not only the money or resources to purchase them but also the services of transnational criminal syndicates and the active collaboration and support of neighbouring states.

In 2005 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that in 2002/2003 the Taylor led regime in Liberia had received several deliveries of arms from merchants who carefully but daringly affronted the renewed UN Security Council's arms embargo on Liberia. It was stated in the report that; 'In 2002 and 2003 for example, Cote D'Ivoire received several deliveries of military equipment, while Liberia received 49 deliveries in 2002 and 25 deliveries in 2003.'⁹

The criminal arms trafficking syndicates that operate in Liberia also ensured the steady supply of weapons to the belligerents involved in the Sierra Leone war. When asked about how the RUF got most of its weapons, the Immigration Commander in the Jendema alleged that: 'Most of the arms came from Liberia through Burkina Faso, to Koindu, Sierra Leone,... other arms and ammunitions comes direct from Guinea to the place called Yenka in Sierra Leone where the Guineans are up to this minute.'¹⁰ He further added that the criminal networks kept the conflict area steadily supplied with arms, ammunition, and other military logistics in exchange for diamonds, gold and other forest base resources like rubber and timber etc. It was the activities of these dubious and over-ambitious post-Cold War veterans that notoriously undermined the states of Liberia and Sierra Leone and further threatened the entire West African sub-region.

The involvement of African veterans in the business of Arms trade was a serious challenge to the security of the continent. Because of their contacts, expertise and knowledge of the African terrain and the smuggling routes the African war merchants have made the war business a sophisticated issue. The veterans collaborated with East European arms merchants to enhance their illicit cross border trade. The collaboration introduced a new dimension to African conflicts because in addition to the arms they helped to supply, the veterans were also offering their active services to the insurgent groups a situation that greatly changed the combat capacity of the else-while gorilla-styled movements and slowly altered the military balance in most of the conflict zones. A BBC program "Talk About Africa" reported that, the cost and effect of the activities of these merchants of war is consequentially humungous, as African mercenaries and their collaborators:

...carried out their exhaustive commerce by facilitating illegal arms sales to make ends meet, studies show that such arms have continued to flow in from steady sources in the former Soviet republics. From sales of 2-3 billion dollars during Cold War, private arms sales are estimated to have exceeded 25 billion dollars in 1996... of course it is not only in respect of arms circulation alone that these Mal-integrated veterans constitute a menace to African state security, but they are also known to have offered their professional skills for hire by becoming mercenaries.¹¹

Another factor that played a prominent role in the proliferation of arms during the Liberia and Sierra Leone conflicts was the covert arming of militias by some ECOMOG contributing countries and the alleged clandestine arms/ammunition transaction between some rebel groups and individual

⁹ Addo, 'Cross Border Criminal Activities', p. 6.

¹⁰ Oral Interview with Mr. Mohammed Sheriff Konteh, Sierra-Leonean, Commander, Sierra Leone Immigration Services Jendama, Sierra Leone/Liberia Border, Mano River Entry point, on 04/07/2009.

¹¹ BBC Talk about Africa Programm, 18th August 1999, quoted in the Magazine, 'CEDCOM: Conflict and Development Watch,' Vol. 1, No. 2, August 1999, p. 9.



commanders of some ECOMOG contingents. For instance, in 1992, the newly formed anti-Taylor-led NPFL outfit, the United Liberation Movement ULIMO faction was armed with weapons supplied by the Nigerian and Guinean contingents. This allegation was confirmed by the belligerents when spiralled internal fighting because the struggle for leadership and control of resources led to a split in the movement in 1994. Each of the movements' factions made open allegations that its rival group is supported and armed by one ECOMOG contingent or the other.¹²

The rebels further alleged that some individual commanders and Peacekeepers are also involved in the arms trade, claiming that the trade prospered because rough elements within ECOMOG ranks also partake in the lucrative diamond business to make quick cash. The situation was equally the same with respect to the Peacekeepers' conduct in the Sierra Leone crisis. The Kamajor's, Donso's and other civil militia groups were all armed by the Nigerian and the Guinean contingents. The Kamajors were trained by the Nigerian contingent, first at Bo-water side in Liberia and later at Zimmi-Bo Kakuwa and other locations in Sierra-Leone.¹³ Not only that, the RUF had also accused some ECOMOG contributing states of helping the ECOWAS 'constituted' governments of Sierra Leone to employ the services of mercenaries. This may sound hard to believe, but the fact that Guinea, Nigeria and to some extent, Ghana had maintained their military commitments to the Sierra-Leonean governments even with the glaring presence of the foreign mercenaries is a pointer to the fact that, even if they were not involved in the process of engaging the mercenaries, they tolerated their presence and activities.

It is a fact that the Sierra Leone government and military were weak and thus, susceptible to external penetration by criminal forces, but the fact that the governments of Guinea and Nigeria had particularly extended civil, diplomatic and military assistance to Sierra Leone should have strengthened the country and erased completely the question of employing the services of the mercenaries. Therefore, when the government of Sierra Leone announced that it had gone ahead to engage private mercenaries to help it execute the war, it became clear that the government had the backing of ECOWAS to sign on to the engagement of the mercenaries.

Against all regional conventions, the government of Sierra Leone signed an agreement with the South African and British-based mercenary outfit the Executive Outcome; Sand-line International; Gurkha Security Guards and Branch Energy which ceded the task of providing security around the diamond mining fields of Kono, Tongo, Koindu etc to the mercenaries. This was done despite the presence and active participation of ECOMOG in combat operations around these areas. The implication of the Sierra Leone government's decision was largely regarding the ECOWAS sub-regional framework on collective security and the question of sovereignty.¹⁴

It is no secret that mercenaries are known all over the world to hardly adhere to any norm, creed or ideology, their loyalty is largely based on the material benefits envisaged to accrue to them in carrying out the supposed task of providing security or the execution of the war. But if events became circumstantially different due to changes in governments as was the case in Sierra Leone their loyalty goes with it. Obadare Ebenezer commented on the potent danger mercenaries have for conflict-ridden and weak African states in the following words: 'As soon as the control of the vital resources, changes hand, mercenaries current' loyalty' to legitimate' governments in Africa may best

¹² Aminu, 'The Role of Cross Border Crime,' Pp. 136-138

¹³ The kamajor militia subsequently fought alongside the Nigerian contingent in Sierra-Leone. Ibid. p. 140.

¹⁴ Aminu, 'The Role of Cross Border Crime,' p. 142.



be regarded as convenient.’ It is in this sense that mercenaries constitute a distinct threat to democratic stability in Africa.¹⁵ Sadly, mercenaries and arms trafficking had become very prominent in both the Liberian and Sierra-Leonean conflicts, creating a complex relationship between mercenaries, gun running, the protractness of the conflicts and the entrenchment of the political economy that sustained the civil wars.

The fact that both Liberia and Sierra Leone are rich in extractable natural resources makes the self-financing element of the rebellions and the patronage of both local and organized mercenaries to not only be handy but assured. The soldiers of fortune who respected no frontier have played a visible role in the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone as well as in the other affected contagious countries of Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea. With respect to Liberia for example, mercenarism began surfacing in the Liberian war from the start of the conflict when the NPFL leadership crossed into Liberia in the company of Burkina Faso's National Army regular commandos; element from the Sierra-Leonean RUF and several French mercenaries who all joined sides with the rebels purely for material rewards. And as the factional fighting raged, more and more foreign nationals especially Guineans and Sierra-Leoneans continued to join the war effort in the hope of partaking in the lucrative business of war economy and the massive looting of personal and public properties.

During the renewed conflict that followed the 1996/97 disarmament and elections in Liberia, mercenary activities intensified with more foreign nationals getting involved in the war enterprise. A fighter narrated his experience on the desperate mercenary recruitment by Taylor and his RUF supporters to beef up their strength to wade off the LURD attacks: ‘I was at smell camp... in Caldwell, mosquito went into the camp to get people to fight for Taylor... he took them (Sierra-Leoneans) from the camp to go and fight. They will give you US \$ 150 dollars with a bag of rice... put you into the truck straight to the front line.’¹⁶

Charles Taylor and the RUF were not the only ones involved in the criminal business of cross border mercenarism, the LURD rebel group also engaged the services of some of these soldiers of fortune the bulk of whom were from Sierra Leone and Guinea. Most of them are from tribes whose traditional lands span the Sierra Leone-Liberia border. The fighters mainly recruited in Sierra Leone pass through Freetown and Conakry to the Guinea border to join the LURD rebellion. While some joined the fight as patriots’ others were sent

On a contract basis, paid from US \$200 to US \$300 each. In October 2001, several Liberian dissidents who had formerly served in the "Special forces" of the Sierra Leone Army left Zimmi in the southeast of Sierra Leone to join the LURD in Guinea.... LURD forces also received reinforcements from Liberians exiled in Cote d'Ivoire. In fact, it was these additional fighters that helped shifted the military balance... and provided a fresh force of highly motivated and experienced men who motivated the new LURD incursion. “Most of the Special Forces combatants were indeed citizens of other West African

¹⁵ Obadere Ebenezer, ‘CEDCOM, Conflict and Development Watch,’ News Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 2, August 1999, p. 10.

¹⁶ Oral Interview with, Mr. Sukor Kromah, Sierra Leonean Ex-Combattant, ULIMO, Kamajor, CDF, and LURD, at Bo-water Side, Liberia, July 4, 2009.



countries, I myself is a Sierra-Leonean but had been involved in the Liberian war from 1992.¹⁷

This testimony by General Molace was corroborated by the report of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in its February 2005 report. UNMIL reported that; 'as of the 15th of February 2005, 612 foreign combatants had officially entered the Liberian DDRR program (308 Guineans, 242 Sierra Leoneans, 50 Ivorians, 7 Nigerians, 4 Malians and 1 Ghanaian). Out of this amount, 485 were adults while 127 were children.¹⁸

Interestingly, most of these categories of mercenaries were drawn from the border land areas, and their services were paid for by agents of these warring groups whose activities sprang across the border. This trend was what helped to escalate the conflicts and portended great danger to the stability of the border regions and by implication threatened the national and regional security of West Africa.

The Effect of Drugs and Diamond Trafficking on the Liberia and Sierra Leone Conflicts

Most literature amplified grievance factors as the *raison d'être* for the insurgent rebellions that engulfed the West African States of Liberia and Sierra Leone between 1989 and 2003. Although the above can be said to be an uncontested fact judging from the histories of Liberia and Sierra Leone. However, as we had stated earlier the element of greed that dominates the character and conduct of the conflicts has left no one in doubt as to the degree to which reckless pursuit of personal enrichment by the leadership of the warring groups undermined the exaggerated grievance view and the advocated revolutionary motives of the conflicts. The looting and plunder of public and private property during the war and the pillage and rampant abuse of personal rights and property by the belligerents are not only unprecedented in the history of conflicts in West Africa but also expose the driving motives and motivations which kept the flame of the conflict raging.

Both Liberia and Sierra-Leone are rich in extractable natural resources like Alluvial diamond, solid minerals like Iron Ore, Bauxite and forest resources including Agro allied products and illegal narcotics. These resources were always pursued by insurgent groups not only to finance the war effort but also to sustain the supremacy of their leadership and maintain the fighting machinery. To this end, the rebel leaderships were aided by the patronage and services of criminal syndicates who controlled the sophisticated networks of international crime and possessed the financial muzzles, skills and connections to sustain the business even under the most severe and intense international pressure and scrutiny. Fahnbulleh captured the situation in the following account, regarding the early stages of the NPFL's incursion into Liberia: Unscrupulous businessmen had been brought in by the leadership of the NPFL to trade in Iron Ore, rubber, logs and diamonds. Millions of dollars accrued to these businessmen and to the leadership of the NPFL.¹⁹ To buttress the above Ambassador William Twaddell, the then acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs submitted in a testimony given before the U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee on Africa that: 'Charles

¹⁷ Oral Interview, with Mr. Fodey Fadikai commonly known as General Molace, Guinean Ex-Combattant, ULIMO, and LURD, he presented his many demobilization identity cards as proof, at Bo-water Side, Liberia, July 4, 2009.

¹⁸ The Mission report, The three phased disarmament process in Liberia downloaded from: www.unmil.com/liberiaDDRR, p2.

¹⁹ H. Boima Fahnbulleh, "ECOWAS and Liberia: Analysis of an Intervention" *Journal of Africa World review*, Millennium issue, 2000, Pp. 17-18.



Taylor has as much as USD 75 million a year from the Sale of diamonds, timber products, Iron Ore and rubber to markets in Belgium, France and Malaysia'.²⁰

As indicated, these illicit activities are successfully carried out largely because of the involvement of the highly entrenched international criminal syndicates who use their moles in some of the highly refutable multinational corporations to carry out their nefarious transaction. As demonstrated earlier, in some cases the cartels sought and obtained the active connivance and collaboration of individual actors within some of the international agencies (military contingents and humanitarian aid groups) who were supposedly deployed to settle the conflicts to channel their criminal merchandise.

For example, the outbreak of fighting in Monrovia on April 6, 1996, was alleged to have emanated from a trade dispute between members of the ULIMO J rebel group based in Bomi Hills (Bonn County) and some elements within ECOMOG. The same can be said of Sierra-Leone as alleged by an eyewitness:

The RUF combatants obtained some of their ammunition and food via Guinea and in some instances, they were supplied by the Guinean contingent in Sierra Leone who traded with them in a trade by barter style. Also, other logistics like 'arms came via Liberia from Burkina Faso and Libya.... Largely Diamond and Cocoa which the rebel's export... went to Guinea for ammunition and food. Certainly, the RUF got some of their ammunition from the Guinean Contingent.²¹

The witness also alleged that the diamonds which were traded for arms supplies and other logistics were mostly looted diamonds that go directly to South Africa.

... there was a time I was in Kono, I was conscripted by the rebels... and in Mabruka where I was held, there was an old Airfield which they extended... I was there when a chopper came, either from Liberia or Ivory Coast, you will not believe that it was this organization which was stopped by Kabba not to operate in Sierra Leone anymore... the World Food Programme WFP... I saw the diamonds with my naked eyes, a lot of diamonds were brought in from Kono... that was the day I saw Mosquito Sam Bokarie! At that time Foday Sankoh was in Nigeria.²²

Clearly, the free flow of illicit diamonds and other commodities across the Liberia and Sierra-Leone borders had greatly helped to flame and sustain the conflicts, thus, making it extremely difficult for the international community to achieve its desire for peace in the region. This scenario is more troubling because alluvial diamonds were amongst the easiest commodities that were trafficked across borders. The commodity is mined in many places along the Liberia Sierra-Leone border including locations like Lajo, Dambala, Bendaja and Mano River Kongo on the Liberian side and on the Sierra-Leone side the commodity is chiefly mined in Gbaa, Gofor, Gorahun, Gissiwulor, Koindu Buedu and Zimmi etc. These diamonds can be smartly hidden and smuggled easily, therefore, even low-ranking members of the rebel groups were involved in the mining and

²⁰ National Patriotic Front of Liberia, CDR Working Paper, p. 6.

²¹ Oral Interview with, Mr. Mohammed Sheriff Konteh., the Commander, Sierra Leone Immigration Services at Jendama Entry point, Sierra Leone/Liberia Border, on 04/07/2009.

²² Ibid.



trafficking of diamonds. So also, were members of other agencies including the UN and ECOWAS as contained in the testimony above. The involvement of some senior members of some of the organizations who were charged with the responsibility of controlling the conflict or aiding and services to the victims of the conflicts had no doubt tempted others especially the low-ranking officials to vigorously pursue the same enriching goal by participating in the business.

Diamond smuggling and trade also proliferated due to the relative ease with which illicit miners and smugglers trafficked the commodity across borders to the bristling-ready local and international markets that trade in the germ stones. At any time of the day or night, there are always ready buyers of the germs in Monrovia. The Broad Street and Bush Road Island enclaves of the dubious Indian and Lebanese traders stood ready to trade in the commodity even when there was active fighting taking place nearby. And, when there is a big catch of multiple-carat diamonds, they are ready to take the risk of travelling to any part of the Liberian or Sierra Leone jungle no matter the huddles to trade in the commodity.²³

Although not officially sanctioned by the Liberia, and Sierra Leone governments or the ECOMOG high command, the illegal participation of the dubious traders and soldiers in diamond and other contraband products was not effectively curtailed or punished. Hence, the proceeds from the trafficking of drugs, diamonds and other minerals continue to play a significant role in protracting the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Although hard drugs like Cocaine, heroin and other sedative stimulants were not prominent in the rebel criminal cross border enterprise during the conflict period in Liberia and Sierra-Leone, however, Indian hemp or Jamba as it is commonly called was prominently visible.

Jamba, Grass, or Cannabis amongst its many names is consumed by almost all combatants engaged in the war from all sides including ECOMOG soldiers. The substance is cultivated almost freely in Sierra Leone, where it was highly consumed even before the war. The lawlessness created by the war almost decriminalizes the production and consumption of the substance and most dangerously facilitated the trafficking of the drug across the border to Liberia, where Jamba smoking becomes a household act because of the war.

Throughout the war years, Cannabis was recklessly abused by teenagers, youth and even the elderly, who simply considered it as a recreational drug like common cigarettes. The child conscripts who formed a good percentage of the combatants had also become cannabis users, and when the grass was in short supply the combatants emptied bullets to use the gunpowder as stimulants. The impact of the abuse of drugs can be best adjudged by the rebel's combat conduct.

Therefore, the level of social calamity cross border trafficking inflicted on the National Psychic of Liberia and Sierra Leone during the war years is tragic and debilitating. More so, the long years the wars had raged in both Liberia and Sierra Leone and the threatening contagion they caused on the fragile West African sub-region exposed the grave dangers of cross border crimes, especially during periods of active conflicts.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in this research, the Liberia and Sierra Leone conflicts became intractable because the belligerents controlled the borderlands and used the transnational criminal networks that

²³ Aminu, 'The Role of Cross Border Crime,' p. 149-150.



straddled the border to keep the war machines supplied. However, internal grievances and distortions in the state system of justice characterized by monopoly and dominance of state political and economic structures were the issues that instigated the conflicts. It was cross border crime that provided the conduit that complicated the conflicts and intricately dragged them with contagious consequences for the West African region. As shown in the paper, the Liberia and Sierra-Leone conflicts lacked any ideological linings or support, rather, they bore glaring evidence of a growing exploitative enterprise sustained by the enormous benefits presented by the breakdown of law and order, or the political economy of war catalyzed by 'cross border crimes.

Indeed, the conflicts were instigated, supported and planned abroad with the active collaboration and involvement of Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Libya, but once launched, the wars were then funded by the massive looting and sale out of Liberia's valuable resources (especially by the NPFL combatants), and the notorious enterprise of conflict Diamonds in Sierra-Leone. This alluded to the fact that the conflicts were fueled by the economic benefits they offer. Had there not been avenues for the purchase of cheap armaments and the facilitating criminal enterprise of cross border crime which aided the massive looting and sale of the extractable natural resources used to finance the conflicts, the conflicts could have been unnecessary and or would have been easy to control.

Therefore, as have posited, the conflicts in West Africa and especially that of Liberia and Sierra Leone were caused by multiple factors and catalyzed by the hostile conspiracy of neighbouring countries. However, the conflicts were kept alive and debilitating by the easy access to cheap supply of military hardware, and the greedy leaders of the rebellions who blindly and brutally sought wealth and power at the detriment of their country and peoples. It was the combined agency of the above elements aided by the notorious enterprise of cross border crime that helped escalate the Liberia and Sierra Leone conflicts.

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