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From Civil War to Political Parties: A Comparison of Insurgent Movements in West Africa, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire, and Their Metamorphosis Into Political Parties

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Abstract- The aim of this article is to look at the transmutation of former rebel groups into political parties in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire after long bloody civil wars that claimed thousands of lives in West Africa. One of the foci of post-conflicts transformation is peacebuilding that has many features such as the organization of free and fair elections in order to encourage the former belligerents to embrace multiparty elections as a way to settle grievances through democratic means for peace to return to these countries and by replacing insecurity with security and violence with peace as well as economic reconstruction, political stability and social justice. [t]he ability to hold a "transparent" election is held to be the real test of whether or not democracy has "taken root" in a former troubled society and is seen as a bulwark against further outbreak of war (Moran 2008, p. 1).

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I. INTRODUCTION

The termination of civil war and the promotion of sustainable peaceful coexistence through democracy between the former belligerents have been daunting tasks. The transformation that former rebel groups went through with some processes in the new democratic dispensation as an outcome to the end of the hostilities in the trilogy of post-war reconstruction in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire. Moreover, the trio of William Tubman of Liberia, Siaka Stevens of Sierra Leone, and Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire personalized the state by establishing a clientelist system under the one-party system that partly contributed to the civil conflict in their respective countries. Their political heirs proved incapable of sustaining the patronage system in the face of a collapsing economy.

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The paths to multiparty elections or democratization was dependant on the governing party that emerged victorious or controlling the seat of government at the end of the civil war. It is in this light that this paper looks at the balance sheet of the advent of democratization which is the version of the same in the three countries under review.

II. EXPLAINING THE CONTEXTS

War to democratization had taken place in Southern Africa. For example, in Angola, although initially the transition to political parties was difficult because of the intransigence of the Jonas Savimbi led National Union for the total Independence of Angola (UNITA), there was a more peaceful political transformation of the Mozambique National Renaissance (RENAMO) in Mozambique. However the death of Jonas Savimbi in 2002 facilitated the return to a peaceful settlement of the war between the ruling Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) (Wallenstein 2012, 212).

However, one of the lessons to be learnt about the framework of democratization in former war-torn countries is that holding multiparty elections alone is not enough to restore and consolidate peace. Untimely elections can be counterproductive as, seen in Liberia, which relapsed into another bloody civil war after the election of Charles Taylor (Harris 2012, 30). It is even harder for failed states such as Liberia and Sierra Leone when democratization is not carried out in a holistic manner by the allowance of enough time for the reconstruction of the country, as the Liberians first experienced a transition from civil war to democratization. In fact, democratization may be a difficult task to carry out because of the weak nature of the African state because

[i]n weak states, groups have to form, cohere and persuade their members to risk their lives with incentives of infrequently paid wages, loot, promises of future reward and protection from harm. War in this region [West Africa] is so dirty because governments and rebels alike can mainly offer looting plus negative sanctions (Ware and Ogunmola 2010, p.74).

Ruling parties and the political opposition can be seen to be juxtaposed in the above quotation to play the same roles in a democratic dispensation; or as Mbembe (2006, p.300) puts it, "War-time is not different from political time". Moreover, the role of the international community in the promotion of a peaceful end to the conflict, the support for dialogue, negotiation, and mediation by external actors/donors (who are mainly the sponsors of the peace) through their influence are paramount factors that may influence the democratization process. Also, the motivation of the belligerents to take part in the elections will determine the course of action during this period of transition.

However, it is important to highlight the fact that taking part in the election is not enough and accepting its outcome when it is free and fair is the most important concern that will favour a good transition towards the post-election period. If these factors are not taken into consideration they may eventually ruin the outcome of the elections as spoilers thwart the political and peace processes and ignite again the conflict by outright rejecting the results of the elections with the forerunner campaign slogan of "we win or we win" the forthcoming elections as a self-destructive strategy in the post-election period (Côte d'Ivoire).

The three case studies are selected not only because of their geographic location of being neighbouring countries but also because they experienced civil war and are suitable for comparison owing to the fact that they transited from internal conflict to democracy through the formation of political parties. They are also members of the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS). Peacekeeping operations allowed the belligerents to agree to the organization of multiparty elections.

Liberia experienced two transitions from rebel groups to political parties culminating in multiparty elections. While the first experience at multiparty elections was short-lived with the victory and subsequent defeat of Charles Taylor by rebel groups, the second attempt in the post-Taylor era has been enduring with the re-election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2011. Sierra Leone survived the trauma of war to march steadily on the path and consolidation of democracy with the coming of the opposition to power and the re-election of Ernest Bai Koroma in 2012. The Côte d'Ivoire's course to democratization is similar to the two case studies mentioned earlier with the difference that the Ivorian passage from civil war to multiparty elections almost turned into the Zimbabwean situation, with post-election violence when Robert Mugabe refused to leave power after his defeat at the polls (Diamond 2002; Bracking 2005) or to the disputed elections results of the 2007 Kenyan scenario that led to violent ethnic massacres and ultimately resulted in a power sharing arrangement between the incumbent President Mwai

Kibaki and the nomination of Raila Odinga as the Vice-President (Bangura 2000; Mitton 2009).

III. LIBERIA'S CASE STUDY

The case of Liberia is a good example of a failed transition from internal war to democratization as the country transited twice from conflict to democracy in 1997 after the First Liberian Civil War (1989-1996) with the election of Charles Taylor and in 2005 when Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected President in the aftermath of the Second Liberian Civil War (1999-2005). This shows that the first transition to a multiparty election civil conflict went into a lull of only three years before the outbreak of another violent episode in the history of Liberia.

IV. THE METAMORPHOSIS OF CHARLES TAYLOR'S NATIONAL PATRIOTIC FRONT OF LIBERIA INTO NATIONAL PATRIOTIC PARTY

Charles Taylor started his rebellion in December 1989 against the Samuel Doe government from the Western part of Côte d'Ivoire. The National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) controlled most of the Liberian territory until it was stopped by the Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) from taking over the capital Monrovia. In the countdown towards the organization of multiparty elections the NPFL metamorphosed into a political party, the National Patriotic Party (NPP) led by Charles Taylor, the United Liberation movement of Liberia ULIMO-K led by Alhaji Koromah became the All Liberia Coalition Party (ALCOP), and Gorges Boley led the Liberia peace council which was transformed to the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) (Lyons 1998, 181).

V. THE EMERGENCE OF CHARLES TAYLOR AS CIVILIAN PRESIDENT

The end of the first Liberian Civil War ushered in a new opportunity for Liberia to organize multiparty elections under the supervision of the international community. Taylor's campaign slogan was reminiscent of the recent and endemic violence that had predated the multiparty elections. The slogan of the NNP candidate was "he killed my Ma, he killed my Pa, but I will vote for him" (Ankomah as cited in Outram 1999, 169). Although Charles Taylor renounced the use of violence to conquer power the psychological effect of his threat to go back to war if he did not win was a decisive factor of intimidation in the 1997, as Liberians decided to vote for peace in an election that the international community adjudged to be free and fair, by casting their votes for the former warlord (Ware and Ogunmola 2010, 76). Moreover, Charles Taylor was the only former rebel leader who had the wherewithal to carry on waging war in case of his defeat at the polls

(Outram 1999, 169). Charles Taylor was unambiguously expressing his ambition to rule Liberia either through the barrel of the gun or through the ballot box (then the new option available since the rebellion proved abortive). Charles Taylor was elected and the NPP had the majority in the National Assembly. Charles Taylor had a leeway to finance his campaign due the plundering of the resources of the parts of Liberia under his control (Bangura 2000, p.573) in contrast to his main political opponents (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Alhaji Kromah, and Dr Togba- Nah Tipoteh). This is in addition to Taylor's warning and threats to resume the civil conflict as well as the ethnic division of the Liberian society that he used to achieve his ambition by scoring a "stunning 75 per cent of the votes" (Bangura 2000, p.572). After his election, Taylor reiterated that his cardinal policies would be the renaissance of Liberia through national reconciliation and unity, the respect for human rights as well as economic liberalization whereas the new President reorganized the armed forces and the bureaucracy with his NPFL members in a clear violation of the Abuja Peace Accords (Outram 1999,170).

VI. THE END OF AN ERA IN LIBERIA: CHARLES TAYLOR'S EXILE IN NIGERIA

The election of Charles Taylor had not really settled many issues that were overlooked during the Abuja II Peace Accord. For example, the poorly handled issues of disarming and demobilization of former combatant programmes that were thwarted by Taylor's NPLF would resurface later on as one of the causal factors of the Second Liberian Civil War, as some of the former warring factions would challenge successfully Taylor's presidency forcing the former warlord into exile in Nigeria (Itano 2003, p.1).

There were also serious doubts that the elections would usher in a new era of peaceful coexistence between Liberians that would silence the cannon completely (Tanner 1998, 135-137). Moreover, Tanner (1998, 137) argues that the collapsed infrastructure, quasi inefficient and inexistent bureaucracy, the inability to resettle the internally displaced, and the high rate of illiteracy were signs that the organization of the general elections was precarious and ill-timed. In addition, the lack of a democratic culture encapsulated by the True Wig Party (TWP) policy of one party political system and the election timetable proved to be unrealistic as it was postponed many times, as well as the failed security reform sector, were evidence that Liberia was not ready for the 1997 elections. If that was the case, why did the elections hold despite the fact that the above analysis points to the opposite?

The decision to hold the elections by all means had some external factors due to the involvement of the international community that believed that multiparty

elections would open a new vista of democracy and the reconstruction of Liberia.

VII. EXTERNAL ACTORS IN POST-CONFLICT TRANSITION TO DEMOCRATIZATION

The role of the external actors was very important in seeking an end to the Liberian conflict. The prolonged presence of the Nigerian contingent in the ECOMOG was having serious financial drawbacks on the already battered economy.

The UN and ECOWAS played foremost roles in obtaining a ceasefire between the belligerents through the Abuja Peace Accords and the organization of the 1997 elections (Pastor 1999, 129) that paved the way for the first post-war election in Liberia. However, the consolidation of democracy by the former warlord was hypothetical. The rebel groups of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) led by Sekou Conneh, an in-law of President Lansana Conté of Guinea-Conakry, and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) launched insurgencies against Taylor's government. After the exit of Charles Taylor, general elections were organized in 2005 and were adjudged to be free and fair by the international community and observers. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of the Unity Party (UP) defeated Georges Weah, a soccer star, of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC); and this paved the way for the economic and social reconstruction of Liberia (Dennis 2006; Harris 2006; Sawyer 2008). Sekou Conneh of the LURD established the Progressive Democratic Party (PRODEM) and became the presidential candidate and scored a paltry 0.6% of the total votes (Harris 2006, 373).

VIII. SIERRA LEONE: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RUF INTO A POLITICAL PARTY

Contemporary rebels, who deliberately use terror as an instrument of war, are aware that their atrocities have alienated them from the society (Bangura 2000, p.573).

Bangura sums up above some of the factors that played against the successful transformation of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) from a terror group into a victorious political party. Furthermore, the act of violence committed by the RUF by plundering the mineral resources in the territory it controlled and by taxing his victims estranged it from the rural dwellers (Bangura 2000, p.573). The metamorphosis of the RUF into the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUFFP) after the long years of an atrocious civil war that attracted the attention of the world by its brutal character singled out the Sierra Leone war by the chopping off of the limbs of its victims (Ware and Ogunmola 2010; Ogunmola 2013). The transformation of the RUF into a political party did not really have any positive impacts among the population because of the violence that was the hallmark of the rebellion. Berdal and Ucko (2009) argue

that the political reintegration of the RUF was flawed on several major premises. First of all, Berdal and Ucko (2009, p.6) point out that the RUF lack a viable political program in addition to the high level of uneducated members among its rank and file, the division and greed among its leaders, and the lack of a deep and practical knowledge of the working of a political party were detrimental to its political transformation in a post-war multiparty setting. Berdal and Ucko (2009, p.6) suggest that a sustainable settlement should have been holistic regarding the grievances of the rebel group because it was an aberration to have allowed the RUF seek elective political posts after the atrocities that the rebellion had committed was untenable. Furthermore, Berdal and Ucko (2009, p.6) point out that it was expedient to neutralize the spoilers in the leadership of the RUF and insulate the rank and file from the control of its leaders. The lack of security after the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) was also a setback as the government relied on the international community for the success of the whole programme. Also, Mitton (2009, p.179) shows that in spite of effectively "fielding 203 parliamentary candidates for the 2002 election", the performance of the RUF was dismal, which was a chronic and recurring occurrence during its short-lived political experience. Furthermore, the RUF was incapable of winning any seats and it scored a paltry "2.2 per cent of the parliamentary vote and 1.7 per cent for its presidential candidate" (Mitton 2009, p.179). It was glaring that the RUF lacks political credibility to win any election due to its antecedents. Eventually, the RUF merged with the APC (Mitton 2009, p.179). As the countdown to the general elections was getting closer, both major political parties, The Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All People's Congress (APC) used the services of the ex-combatants of the RUF and the West Side Boys during these elections (Christensen and Utas 2008, pp.521-522).

The RUF was ill-prepared to face the challenges of a peaceful political transition as it failed woefully to mobilize its supporters who knew how to use arms and ammunition, but were unable to use effectively the ballot box. The electorate did not forget the reign of terror the RUF perpetrated in the areas under its control during the civil war.

IX. CÔTE D'IVOIRE: AN OVERVIEW OF A HYBRID GROUP: RDR/FRCI

The case of Côte d'Ivoire is different from the two preceding ones. The challenge to the government by the opposition was a hybrid as it has a political and a rebel face. The former President (Laurent Gbagbo) signed the loi d'amnistie Amnesty Law that was voted by the National Assembly 179 for and 2 against and 1 abstention on August 23 2003 which allowed Alassane Ouattara and Henri Konan Bédié to run for the planned

presidential elections (Kadet 2012, 257). The journey to the multiparty presidential elections started with the Ouagadougou Political Agreement (APO) after many failed (Accra I and II, Lomé, Linas Marcoursis, Pretoria) attempts at a peaceful resolution of the Ivorian conflict. The peace Accord was consolidated by the Second Amnesty Law of April 12 2007 (Kadet 2012, 257). Although the constitutional mandate had expired in 2005.

The Gbagbo government accused the Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR) of Alassane Ouattara many times of being allegedly supported by Burkina Faso and Liberia under Charles Taylor to be the sponsors of the rebellion that started in September 2002 as the failed coup attempt which led to the division of Côte d'Ivoire between the north controlled by the rebels of the Mouvement Populaire de la Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI) and the south under the government. Meanwhile the situation in the south-west remained convoluted as two other rebel groups, the Mouvement Patriotique du Grand Ouest (MPIGO) and the Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix (MPJ) were unable to exert firm control of the area. The core leaders of rebels such as Koné Zakaria, Cherif Ousmane, Gaoussou Koné, Koné Messamba alias Jah Gao, Ousmane Coulibaly alias Ben Laden, Tuo Fozié, that were renamed Forces Nouvelles (FN) when the three rebel groups merged, and afterward, Forces Armées des Forces Nouvelles (FAFN) would resurface virtually a decade later. These are the same who emerged as the principal officers of the Forces Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire (FRCI) that joined the RDR to fight Laurent Gbagbo Forces de Défense et de Sécurité (FDS) after the post election crisis because he refused to accept his electoral defeat by Alassane Ouattara in second run of the Ivorian presidential elections in 2010. It is believed that Alassane Ouattara renamed the FN as the FRCI to challenge militarily the forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo in order to claim his mandate (Banégas 2011; Djereke 2012). Themnér and wallenstein (2012, 569) point out that [s]everal months of electoral difficulties, interferences and alleged tampering unleashed a wave of violence and the rebel group active in the earlier phase of the conflict-which retained control over northern Ivory Coast-began marching south.

The FRCI was supported in the final offensive against Laurent Gbagbo's last bastion by the French peacekeeping Mission in Côte d'Ivoire La Licorne and ONUCI. Incidentally, the lead political voice of the MPCI, Guillaume Soro, who became Laurent Gbagbo, third Prime Minister during the lingering crisis and cycle of violence (2002-2011) by the virtue of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement (APO), became Alasane Ouattara Prime Minister; subsequently the Speaker of the National Assembly. Simply put, the FRCI was the military arm and the RDR was its political machine. It is argued that Laurent Gbagbo's refusal to recognize the election of Alassane Ouattara favoured Guillaume Soro who had

profited from the crisis when the elected candidate used the former rebellion to remove Laurent Gbagbo from power. This alliance between the RDR and the FN made the threat of external military intervention unnecessary (Charbonneau 2012, 519-520). Thus, the battle of the ballot boxes became the battle of the cannon which resulted in the defeat of the pro-Gbagbo forces and the emergence of Alassane Ouattara in an election marred by violence, argument and counter arguments over its outcome, as well as divided armed forces amid increasing waves of insecurity.

X. CONCLUSION

The transformation of the rebel groups in the three countries reviewed shows that it is important to take into consideration the spoilers that might thwart the processes of democratization. Many parameters need to be weighed against the transformation of rebel groups before a former insurgent organization can take part in an election in a post-war period. The socio-economic chaos and psychological trauma that RUF plunged Sierra Leone into did not augur well for its political metamorphosis, as the polls revealed. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, the RDR/ FRCI faced a discredited government that was crumbling under economic and political sanctions of the international community and the major powers. It appears that if the transition of former rebel groups to political parties might have damaging consequences if the elections are hurriedly organized and if the electorate sanctions it for its atrocities. The fact of the matter is that these countries are still at the pre-democratic phase. The advancement of multiparty and democracy in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire depend on many parameters as argued in the paper such as the active involvement of the international community in the peace processes, the willingness of the former warring parties to embrace the peace processes.

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