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БЕЖЕНЦЫ В ТРАНСГРАНИЧНЫХ КОНФЛИКТАХ: НА ПРИМЕРЕ СЬЕРРА-ЛЕОНЕ (1991–2002)

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Аннотация. Проблематика виктимизации беженцев в принимающих государствах Западной Африки представляет особую актуальность в контексте изучения гражданских и межэтнических войн в странах региона. При этом вопросы, связанные с участием различных групп беженцев в актах вооруженного насилия в отношении местного населения и их ролью в поддержании региональной экономики конфликтов, не получили широкого освещения в зарубежной и отечественной литературе. Предлагаемая статья, в которой данные вопросы рассматриваются применительно к Гражданской войне в Сьерра-Леоне (1991–2002), является попыткой частично восполнить этот пробел. С целью выяснить, подтверждается ли устоявшееся представление о западноафриканских беженцах как исключительно жертвах гражданского противостояния, ситуация в стране изучается на разных этапах войны и с позиций интересов различных внутри- и внешнеполитических сил. Существующая научная литература по теме впервые анализируется с точки зрения указанной проблематики, а также вопроса о том, в какой степени опыт Сьерра-Леоне может быть использован при изучении более широкого круга региональных конфликтов. Роль беженцев в экономике трансграничных войн оценивается через призму теории Уильяма Рино и Дженифер Хейзен в рамках функционального подхода к гражданским конфликтам как динамичному явлению, в ходе которого могут меняться первоначальные намерения и роли участников. Постепенное вовлечение части беженцев в военное и политическое противостояние и незаконную деятельность в конечном счете превратило их из пострадавшей стороны западноафриканских конфликтов в дестабилизирующий фактор не только для принимающей их Сьерра-Леоне, но и для всего региона. Статья подготовлена на основе материалов Специального суда по Сьерра-Леоне, отчетов международных правозащитных организаций и документов госструктур заинтересованных стран.

Ключевые слова: беженцы, гражданская война, Сьерра-Леоне, Западная Африка, трансграничные конфликты, сети поддержки конфликта.

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Refugees in Trans-Border Conflict: The Case of Sierra Leone, 1991–2002

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Abstract. The victimization of refugees in the recipient communities has been broadly explored, especially in the context of West African civil wars, however the role refugees had in armed violence against local population and in the maintenance of the regional conflict economy requires further research. In this article, the author examines matters of refugee involvement in a civil war ravaging the recipient country based on the case of Sierra Leone conflict (1991–2002) and role that Liberian refugees played at the outset and different periods of war. The primary aim of this study is to determine the extent to which the role refugees played in the Sierra Leone conflict went beyond the traditional perception of refugee victimhood, the transformation of their involvement in war and the influence of the various regional and extra-regional forces. The existing academic literature on conflict in Sierra Leone is evaluated in accordance with the topic in focus and the extent to which this national experience can be applied to a broader set of regional wars. The role of refugees in trans-border economy is appraised in the theoretical framework of conflict support networks elaborated by William Reno and Jennifer Hazen using the functional analysis methodology treating civil wars as dynamic, with shifting intentions and roles of parties considered. Overall, the article provides additional angle in appraisal of the conflicts in West Africa and the cases of refugees' involvement in these wars. The Liberian refugees had a changing active role in the conflict, gradually getting entangled in hostilities, illicit actions and violent entrepreneurship, turning from the victims of regional wars with their grievances into the destabilizing force for the recipient state of Sierra Leone and the entire region. The article is based on the materials of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, reports of international humanitarian organizations and documentation of the relevant state structures.

Keywords: refugees, civil war, Sierra Leone, West Africa, trans-border conflicts, conflict support networks.

The civil conflicts in Africa have become a determining feature for the continent in the wake of the Cold War and collapse of the external commodity markets. African conflicts of this era generated a tremendous outflow of refugees into neighboring countries escaping the control of rebel groups or undisciplined governmental armies. West Africa became one of the primary zones for such refugee crises due to the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. As has been emphasized by researchers, civil wars “earned West Africa the unenviable notoriety of being the most volatile sub-region on the continent in the 1990s”¹.

The victimhood of the refugees that left Liberia and Sierra Leone for neighboring countries has been in focus of both scholars and reports of international human rights organizations. It seems particularly relevant, however, to discuss the active role that refugees played in the civil war violence and especially the operation of the trans-border conflict support networks, their establishment, functioning and transformation. The particular national case that is examined here is of the civil war in Sierra Leone (1991–2002) which was heavily intertwined with the operation of trans-border conflict support system based in neighboring Liberia and the extraction of diamonds and other conflict minerals found in Sierra Leone itself. This country also was a major destination of thousands of refugees escaping war in neighboring Liberia that broke out in 1989. This inflow significantly contributed to the outbreak of conflict in Sierra Leone proper in 1991 and had a major influence on the crisis. Many Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone were heavily involved in violence on both sides of the border and largely composed several autonomous militias and rebel groups.

The assessment of significance Liberian refugees had on the war in Sierra Leone is largely linked to the theoretical approaches to this conflict in general. The analysis of war causes in Sierra Leone, its nature and outcomes has recently centered on the dichotomy of universalist and particularistic explanations. Universalists indicate the exploited and peripheral character of Sierra Leonean economy dependent on mineral resources and agricultural exports (namely neo-Marxist and dependency approaches).² Other, predominantly Western scholars, point to the institutional weakness and corruption of All People's

¹ *Sesay A., Ukeje C., Gbla O., Ismail O.* Post-War Regimes and State Reconstruction in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Oxford, 2009. P. 36.

² *Collier P., Hoeffler A.* Greed and grievance in civil war // Oxford Economic Papers. 2004. Vol. 56. № 4. P. 563–595; *Basedau M., Wegenast T.S.* Oil and Diamonds as Causes of Civil War in Sub-Saharan Africa under what conditions? // Colombia Internacional. 2009. № 70. P. 35–59.

Congress (APC), the ruling party prior to the war³. Finally, a group of Western researchers examines the Sierra Leone conflict from the standpoint of the features of warlord politics and economics along with neopatrimonialism and interdependence of rebel movements from neighboring states⁴. This includes trans-border networks, the role of resource commodities in their operation and the balance of bargaining power swayed by the unrecognized rebel factions and their regional and international counterparts⁵. The last one is especially crucial for addressing the issue of refugee involvement in conflict violence as an important element of trans-border conflict support networks.

All universalist approaches (especially the neo-patrimonial one) attract criticism from scholars claiming the unique character of the war in Sierra Leone and pointing out that excessive generalization leads to faulty conclusions⁶. These scholars believe that circumstances of Sierra Leone are different from those of other West African countries experiencing civil wars. Some claim that the conflict was primarily caused and later fueled by incursion of National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and Charles Taylor combatants acted as a destabilizing force⁷. Liberian refugees are also considered a destabilizing force for Sierra Leone in this context. Other scholars believe the long-term social inequality and domestic radicalization of youth to be the primary breeding ground for the civil war rebel movements⁸. Nevertheless, the incursion of Liberian refugees also fits the pattern of exacerbating social climate leading to violence, especially in the rural areas. The given article addresses on the above-mentioned discussion and provides a separate assessment of internal and external aspects of the war. The author examines the role refugees from neighboring countries, primarily Liberia, played in the Sierra Leonean conflict, its outbreak and further development.

ORIGINS OF THE CIVIL WAR CRISIS

The exploration of the role refugees played in the Sierra Leonean war requires examination of the preconditions for the crisis. According to the universalist narratives, the prerequisites for the emergence of hotbeds of conflict in West Africa had emerged throughout the second half of the 20th century. By the beginning of the 1990s, it was also affected by the aggravation and change in the nature of civil conflicts common to the entire continent. Some historians note the significance of the end of the Cold War and the accompanying trends for these processes. Eleonora Lebedeva cites the end of the Cold War as the main reason for Africa's relegation to peripheral interests of major global powers that transformed the character of regional conflicts⁹. This trend concerning West Africa is also indicated by Tatiana Denisova who noted a decrease in American political presence in the post-Cold War region¹⁰. Jenifer Hazen

³ Adebajo A., Rashid I. *West Africa's Security Challenges: Building Peace in a Troubled Region*. Boulder; London, 2004; Keen D. *Conflict & Collusion in Sierra Leone*. New York, 2005.

⁴ Richards P. *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth & Resources in Sierra Leone*. Oxford, 1996; Reno W. *War, Markets, and the Reconfiguration of West Africa's Weak States* // *Comparative Politics*. 1997. Vol. 29. № 4. P. 493–510; Hoffman D. *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*. Durham, 2011; Hazen J. *What Rebels Want: Resources and Supply Networks in Wartime*. Ithaca, 2013; Денисова Т.С., Костелянец С.В. Трансформация африканских повстанческих лидеров: из «полевых командиров» в «большую политику» (на примере Сьерра-Леоне) // *Контуры глобальных трансформаций: политика, экономика, право*. 2020. Т. 13. № 3. С. 214–231.

⁵ See: Reno W. *African Weak States and Commercial Alliances* // *African Affairs*. 1997. Vol. 96. № 383. P. 165–185; Hoffman D. *Op. cit.*; Hazen J. *Op. cit.*

⁶ Reno W. *War, Markets, and the Reconfiguration...* P. 493–510; Abdullah I. *Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone* // *Democracy and Terror: The Sierra Leone Civil War*. Dakar, 2004. P. 41–65; Rashid I. *Sierra-Leone: the Revolutionary United Front* // *A Journal of the Center of Complex Operations*. May, 2016. P. 190–216. URL: <https://cco.ndu.edu/News/Article/780201/chapter-8-sierra-leone-the-revolutionary-united-front/> (access date: 09.03.2020).

⁷ Bangura J. *Understanding Sierra Leone in Colonial West Africa: A Synoptic Socio-Political History* // *History Compass*. 2009. Vol. 7. Iss. 3. P. 583–603.

⁸ Abdullah I. *Op. cit.* P. 49–50; Rashid I. *Op. cit.* P. 194.

⁹ Лебедева Э.Е. К югу от Сахары: страны АЮС в меняющемся мире // *Свободная мысль*. 2012. № 7–8 (1634). С. 68.

¹⁰ Денисова Т.С. *Первая гражданская война в Либерии: региональный аспект* // *Конфликтология* / *nota bene*. 2017. № 4. С. 9.

discusses the transition from civil conflicts that are fueled by external forces for ideological reasons to the emergence of a new type of rebel groups that refer to commercial and economic activities as the main source of subsistence support¹¹. African researchers also note the general weakening of African statehood during this period due to the economic and debt crisis, which predetermined the emergence and strengthening of non-state actors¹². At the same time, the cross-border character of these African wars is often stressed in the neo-patrimonial analytical framework. With regard to the conflicts began in the 1990s in West Africa, it relies on an established tradition of exploring them with the emphasis on the interconnectedness of regional processes. In some works, these wars are even considered as fragments of a single regional conflict¹³ and “part of a wider complex of disputes among states and among their leaders and of geopolitical interests”¹⁴. The flows of refugees and their various forms of engagement in these conflicts only contribute to this interdependence.

The war in Sierra Leone had matured in parallel with the events of the civil crisis in neighboring Liberia¹⁵. The country was experiencing a systemic economic collapse, political stagnation and an increase in inter-ethnic problems. Sierra Leone became the scene of a confrontation between several internal and external players, which led to a large number of victims. In the presence of common regional prerequisites and features, the civil conflict in Sierra Leone was distinguished by its own characteristics, which gave rise to discussions among researchers about the primacy and importance of foreign and domestic causes. A significant part of analysts adopting the particularistic approaches considers the conflict in this country to be the result of a number of domestic issues, such as the decline of statehood and autocracy, the rise of lumpen culture and youth resistance as well as the predatory plundering of resources by the authorities of the APC regime¹⁶. Some scholars in principle deny the internal causes of the civil conflict in Sierra Leone, referring exclusively to the harmful Liberian intervention¹⁷. However, despite the importance of these causes, multiple researchers consider this war rooted in the historical past of Sierra Leone with the social, economic and political polarization of society inherited from the pre-colonial and colonial periods¹⁸. Having unique features, the situation in Sierra Leone differs from the Liberian one. As Ibrahim Abdullah claims, rebels in Sierra Leone emerged from lumpenized political youth resistance subculture that was shaped by the single party APC regime stifled all legal forms of opposition¹⁹. Hence, the resulting rebel movement, Revolutionary United Front (RUF) had borrowed revolutionary rhetoric from multiple sources but failed to establish relations with rural communities due to the violence and looting by its lumpenized fighters. Thus, the RUF did not share the electoral success of former rebel movements in neighboring countries (mainly NPFL in Liberia) and failed to get its representatives elected to the parliament in the wake of the conflict²⁰. This situation created several niches for the armed refugees to take and generally shaped the character of the crisis. At the same time, the war in Sierra Leone was apparently an extremely significant fragment of the conflict processes that had developed in West Africa by the 1990s.

Another precondition shaping the conflict and refugee role in it was the fact that Sierra Leone remained one of the poorest countries in the region, and its significant mineral raw materials and agricultural resources were exported in unprocessed form (coffee, cocoa beans, diamonds, bauxite, etc.) and controlled by foreign corporations, leaving most of the lumpenized urban and rural population impoverished. In 1971, the SLST (Sierra Leone Selection Trust) diamond mining company transferred

¹¹ Hazen J. Op. cit. P. 22–23.

¹² Adebajo A., Rashid I. Op. cit. P. 11.

¹³ See: Hoffman D. Op. cit. P. 27.

¹⁴ Welz M. *Africa since Decolonization: The History and Politics of a Diverse Continent*. New York, 2021. P. 222.

¹⁵ Bokeriya S.A., Mansur A.T. Mandates in the success of a peacekeeping missions: a case study of Liberia // *Asia and Africa Today*. 2018. № 7. P. 47–52.

¹⁶ Abdullah I. Op. cit. P. 46.

¹⁷ Bangura J. Op. cit. P. 597.

¹⁸ See: Tom P. *The Liberal Peace and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa: Sierra Leone*: PhD Dissertation. St Andrews, 2011. P. 153.

¹⁹ Abdullah I. Op. cit. P. 49.

²⁰ Ibid. P. 46.

51% of its shares to the government of the country, but this did not lead to a sharp increase in the welfare of the population²¹. The purchase prices for artisanal alluvial diamonds (major revenue source for rural subsistence) were reduced in order to extract greater short-term benefits from the difference between buy and sell prices. Smuggling of this type of raw materials to Liberia, as well as gold and agricultural products, increased again, especially in the 1980s, creating the foundation for the trans-border shadow economy that later grew into conflict support networks. In addition, in the 1980s, the Sierra Leonean Stevens (1971–1985) and Momoh (1985–1992) regimes, at the request of the IMF, conducted partial privatization of agricultural land, which allowed to increase taxes on the population, and, as a consequence, this led to further impoverishment. The debt burden on the country increased and the national currency of the Republic of Sierra Leone was devalued 50 times from 1978 (after the detachment from the British pound-sterling exchange rate) until 1987²². Like the neighboring countries, at the turn of the 1980s Sierra Leone experienced economic consequences from the global fall in prices for certain types of raw materials. The global decline in iron prices had led to the closure of large mines in Marampa, pushing more rural workers towards poverty and black market²³. American intelligence agencies noted economic weakness as the main vulnerability of the Momoh regime as early as 1986²⁴.

As a result, the country's leadership began to spend more on servicing the public debt than on all social welfare programs²⁵. The measures taken by Momoh and his entourage to limit inflation and free currency conversion contributed to further transfer of economic activity into the black market. In response the regime imposed an economic emergency and sent the army to the diamond mining enterprises to combat smuggling. This step caused not so much a reduction in smuggling, but rather an increase in the corrupt income of the armed forces officials involved in the patronage of the black market. This laid the foundation for a nexus between the shadow economy and violent entrepreneurship of the army and later non-governmental armed groups. In April 1990 the government carried out an expulsion operation of 10,000 residents of Kono District involved in artisanal diamond mining, which strengthened the army's control over the black diamond market and weakened the intermediaries connected to the former Stevens regime that previously ensured the interests of the authorities on the ground (non-military shadow economy operators who owed their position to being informal clients of the pre-existing ruling clan, earning their income from supervision of diamond extraction and sharing with hierarchical superiors)²⁶. This has widened the ranks of those dissatisfied with the policy of President Momoh and reduced the number of those interested in maintaining his power. At the same time, the representatives of the armed forces themselves, according to CIA reports, were also annoyed by the lack of funding for modern weapons procurement, building new barracks and raising salaries, which contributed to their further demoralization²⁷. Thus, they got economically more dependent on other types of activity.

All these problems weakened the state institutions in Sierra Leone prior to the rebel incursion from Liberia. Hence the dissatisfaction of a significant portion of population with the policies of the APC regime opened an opportunity for alternative non-state actors and violent entrepreneurs in the loosely controlled border areas with the participation of refugee groups. As I. Abdullah notes, the association with foreign powers like Libya for the rebels was not based on close ideological affiliation rather than the combination of circumstances mainly derived from the interior situation²⁸. However, it can be seen

²¹ Keen D. Op. cit. P. 49.

²² Kamara F.S. Economic and Social Crises in Sierra Leone: The Role of Small-Scale Entrepreneurs in Petty Trading as a Strategy for Survival 1960–1996. Milton Keynes, 2008. P. 127.

²³ Fanthorpe R., Gabelle C. Political Economy of Extractives Governance in Sierra Leone. Washington, 2013. P. 19.

²⁴ CIA. Directorate of Intelligence. Sierra Leone: Dim Prospects for the Momoh Regime. April 23, 1986. P. 2–3 // URL: <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP86T01017R000707180001-7.pdf> (access date: 09.02.2020).

²⁵ Keen D. Op. cit. P. 51.

²⁶ Reno W. Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone. Cambridge, 1995. P. 155–156.

²⁷ CIA. Directorate of Intelligence. Sierra Leone... P. 3–4.

²⁸ Abdullah I. Op. cit. P. 50.

that the long-term economic decline and the Liberian support were rather conditioned on the external background.

The war in Sierra Leone indeed does not always fit the generally outlined patterns of regional conflict, but there are several aspects that allow considering it as part of a broader regional set of trends. Firstly, the effect that the declining natural commodity prices had on West African economies and the social fabric of regional societies is fully applicable to Sierra Leone. Secondly, the end of the Cold War and the advent of commercialized conflicts in Africa in early 1990s are also relevant for Sierra Leone with its abundance of natural resources which became a major catalyst of the war. Thirdly, RUF rebels indeed were heavily involved in Liberian affairs and enjoyed strong cooperation with Charles Taylor and some interested foreign powers. And finally, the circulation of armed intruders, unarmed refugees and all the intermediary stages between these two groups created the conditions for emerging trans-border grey zone dominated by violence, shadow economy and non-state quasi-authorities. Therefore, the further analysis of the particular role that predominantly Liberian refugees played in the Sierra Leonean war allows conclusions that will largely be valuable while considering an overall impact of refugees on conflicts in Africa.

ROLE OF THE MILITANT REFUGEES IN THE OUTSET OF THE CONFLICT

In order to more accurately assess their role, one has to consider the origins and character of refugees which had been crossing the border of Sierra Leone and especially those later took up arms. In the wake of the Liberian conflict outbreak and the conquest of the interior of the country by the NPFL rebel movement civilian population frequently had to flee from the combat areas. As Charles Taylor's support was initially driven by the reaction of ethnic groups repressed by the Samuel Doe regime (1986–1990), namely Gio and Mano, these groups primarily attacked those ethnicities perceived to be Doe's loyalists, in particular Krahn and Mandingo. In general, the processes that had been taking place in the country led to the outflow of about 500 thousand Liberian refugees to Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast by 1990²⁹. Sierra Leone became a major destination for these Liberian refugees at the initial stage of situation development and "generated over 400,000 refugees during its ten-year civil war, while hundreds of thousands more were rooted up from their homes in different parts of the country as internally displaced persons"³⁰. The policies of President Momoh were hostile to Liberian rebels and favorable to the ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group) peacekeeping operation, therefore the refugees had opportunity to organize against their enemies in the Liberian domestic context. The fraction of the Liberian refugees who settled down in the border regions of Sierra Leone consisted of trained soldiers and Doe regime loyalists which set the ground for further events in the area. In March 1991 Taylor considered it possible to strike at the support infrastructure of ECOMOG in Sierra Leone, taking advantage of the weakness of the Momoh regime and the discontent of the residents of the south-east of the neighboring country. It was under these conditions, with the support of Charles Taylor and a wide network of West African militants assisted by Libya (benefited from military preparation at its training camps and arms supplies flow from there throughout the conflict), that the RUF began its incursion into the Sierra Leone territory; governmental capability to resist was limited and any additional combatants who wanted to resist NPFL and its allies were welcomed.

Hence new anti-NPFL paramilitary groups emerged in Taylor's rear with the support of Guinea (viewing this particular warlord as an existential threat to its own and regional stability) and Sierra Leone, making it difficult for him to seize full control of Liberia. In early 1991, armed units of refugees appeared on the territory of Sierra Leone, ready to strike at the forces of the NPFL occupying the north-western part of Liberia³¹. The largest of them was the United Liberian Movement for Democracy (ULIMO), formed by former government soldiers and refugees of Mandingo and Krahn ethnic groups

²⁹ Human Rights Watch World Report 1990 – Liberia // URL: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/467fca281e.html> (access date: 05.12.2020).

³⁰ Sesay A., Ukeje C., Gbla O., Ismail O. Op. cit. P. 37.

³¹ Howe H.M. Ambiguous Order: Military Forces in African States. Boulder, 2001. P. 140.

who left the country during the fighting in 1990 and temporarily settled in Guinea and Sierra Leone. These forces established the organization on May 29, 1991 in Conakry, Guinea. Their first combat experience was an armed struggle on the territory of Sierra Leone against the RUF, and in February 1992, ULIMO continued to fight with the NPFL in Liberia³². This organization took control over the part of the north-western regions of the country along the border with Sierra Leone (interceding with Taylor's forces entering this country), deploying 1,500 fighters there. Also, about 300 soldiers fought on its side in Monrovia area. Throughout the conflict the number of fighters in this group was much lower than that of the NPFL, but the presence of trained soldiers from the Doe regime armed forces of Liberia made ULIMO a group distinguished by high combat capability and posed a significant threat to Taylor and his allies in Sierra Leone³³.

However, the reasons for such eagerness of the Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone, with military training and even without such, to take part in the hostilities was not limited to the settling of political scores, especially as the conflict developed. For many the conflict zone became increasingly insecure, so taking up arms was a viable option of protection and raising one's status. Moreover, the protracted border area was abundant with natural resources, predominantly diamonds, and at the same time it had traditionally been a hotbed of trans-border smuggling and criminal activities, and an outbreak of conflict led to an influx of inexperienced and underpaid combatants (the governmental troops included) into the area. The enlistment process into the Sierra Leonean (SL) army proved to be rather unscrupulous, leading to violence against civilians and establishment of conflict economy, in which the refugees could also take part³⁴.

The country was poorly prepared for the war (at its start there were only 1,500 troops in the ranks of the armed forces with the same number of reservists), which was also considered a failure of leadership³⁵. There were not enough fixed assets for conducting military operations, which was aggravated by corruption in the military that had developed before the war³⁶. Of the 2.6 billion allocated for the army in April-August 1991 most was embezzled by the authorities³⁷. In addition, the offensive of government forces was accompanied by violence against civilians and even refugees from neighboring Liberia opposed to the RUF and Taylor³⁸. This contributed to the necessity of their armed involvement in the hostilities to defend themselves and indicate their loyal status to the SL armed forces. Initially, the government promised to eliminate all the hotbeds of the uprising within six months, but was unable to do this. Since December 1991 RUF forces had begun to recapture territories from the authorities³⁹. All this weakened the government's control over the south-east of the country and caused disenchantment among the warring soldiers and officers as well as the local civilian population and refugees trying to protect themselves. ULIMO operations on both sides of the border became instrumental for the maintenance of pro-government presence in these rural areas and to complicate the traffic of arms and commodities between RUF and NPFL. As the fighting in both Liberia and Sierra Leone had intensified by 1993–1995, many refugees either moved on to safer areas or chose to return to their birthplace. Refugee fighters as well as civilians also got resented by the local population as they had to compete for limited resources and ULIMO fighters frequently got involved in looting. This led to their decreased presence in the conflict zone which was continually ravaged by war.

³² Ibidem.

³³ CIA. Liberia: peace process unraveling as fighting intensifies. FOIA. November 1, 1992. P. 3, 5–6 // URL: https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001508385.pdf (access date: 19.03.2020).

³⁴ Atkinson P. Sierra Leone: an attack on humanitarianism // Relief and Rehabilitation Network Newsletter (RRNN). 1998. № 10. P. 3–4.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ Amnesty International. Sierra Leone: The Extrajudicial Execution of Suspected Rebels and Collaborators. AFR 51/002/1992. April 28, 1992. P. 4 // URL: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AFR51/002/1992/en/> (access date: 18.04.2020).

³⁷ Koroma A. Sierra Leone: The agony of a nation. London, 1996. P. 148–149.

³⁸ Leach M. Dealing with Displacement: Refugee-host Relations, Food and Forest Resources in Sierra Leonean Mende Communities During the Liberian Influx, 1990–91 (IDS Research Reports). Sussex, 1992. P. 48.

³⁹ Keen D. Op. cit. P. 91.

Overall, it has to be noted that the presence of Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone, apart from domestic RUF support and ECOMOG presence in the country, had greatly contributed to the outbreak of civil war and later to increased interdependence between the events and forces in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Even as RUF grew more powerful and independent of Liberian influence, refugee groups like ULIMO prolonged the necessity of cooperation between Taylor and Sierra Leonean partisans. Also, the poor management of the refugee presence (practical lack of thereof due to the degradation of the state institutions in the border areas) appears to have made them a destabilizing factor in the broad region, leading to further spillover of hostilities. The active role of the refugee rebels in combat was notable at the initial stages of the war in Sierra Leone, making an impact both on the course of the conflict and the relations among various social groups entangled in the war. Meanwhile refugee involvement motivation gradually moved from ethnic and political victimization to more mundane economic and security concerns.

INVOLVEMENT IN TRANS-BORDER CONFLICT ECONOMY NETWORKS

In these particular conditions of prolonged conflict in diamond extraction areas opportunities emerged for fighters on both sides to enrich themselves by plundering this territory and taking part in trans-border conflict economy. These economic relations have a broader scope than Sierra Leone and entail a separate academic discussion. It is the economic aspects of the activities of paramilitary groups within the framework of the civil wars in West Africa. They are considered the most significant when analyzing these conflicts from the standpoint of the school of "warlordism" and neopatrimonialism regional tendencies analysis (largely represented by William Reno in his concept of "warlord economy")⁴⁰. The cross-border nature of the economic activities sustained by irregular armed units within the framework of these conflicts was studied in most detail by Jennifer M. Hazen in her fundamental work "What Rebels Want: Resources and Supply Networks in Wartime" through the lens of "support systems"⁴¹. These systems imply economic ties between an armed group and an external regional intermediary that ensures the purchase and transit of resources extracted or received by the group, supplied to the world market, in exchange for an influx of financing and the supply of goods necessary for the continuation of fighting, including weapons. These support mechanisms did emerge in West Africa after the Liberian war got protracted (as NPFL failed to capture Monrovia in July-August 1990 and had to adapt to long-term conflict mode). The largest network of Americo-Liberian exiles in bordering states, Lebanese diaspora traders, several governments and rebel groups in neighboring territories and global shadow economy dealers provided support to Taylor's NPFL in Liberia (followed by his official elected government under the arms embargo and sanctions) as well as to the RUF in Sierra Leone. Their main regional counterpart was Burkina Faso leadership that oversaw a significant part of the shadow economic flows for these groups. The militant refugees were also incorporated into these structures of conflict economy.

The RUF uprising in Sierra Leone occurred mainly as a result of the support and active assistance of the NPFL in trans-border and supply system funding. The Front received limited income from participating in the Liberian conflict and controlling part of the territory of Liberia for Taylor, and then from the economic exploitation of rural areas of Sierra Leone, while the export of resources was also carried out through channels established by Taylor. The revenues and material benefits from these activities were accrued through a network of intermediaries with various degrees of connection to the Liberian warlord. The extraction of resources, their transportation across the border to friendly regional states for further resale (often bypassing international restrictions), purchase of weapons and essential goods with these funds and their delivery back to the controlled territory in the conditions of active hostilities, interference of external forces and an unstable organizational structure of the rebel movement proved very complex. Therefore, the implementation of these goals required an extensive infrastructure inside and outside the respective countries to ensure uninterrupted financing of military operations and resistance to external pressure.

⁴⁰ See: *Reno W. Warlord Politics and African States*. Boulder; London, 1998. P. 99.

⁴¹ *Hazen J. Op. cit.* P. 2.

The largest system, facilitated until 2000 by the Burkinabe and Ivorian authorities with the participation of France and Libya provided for the activities of the NPFL before and after Taylor came to power in 1997, the operations of the RUF and their allies inside Sierra Leone. An alternative system was provided by Guinea and was directed to the patronage of ULIMO, then ULIMO-K⁴² as separate rebellion groups of refugees from Liberia, opposing both to Taylor's regime and Sierra Leonean non-state actors. Both systems relied on exchange of raw materials and agricultural produce for arms and other materials essential for combat and subsistence via respective neighboring states.

The existence of such trans-border conflict economy transformed the nature of combat in rural Sierra Leone as parties to the conflict were interested in access to conflict economy revenues and shaped their actions accordingly. Sierra Leonean military junta in power in 1992–1996 (National People's Redemption Council, NPRC) officially led by a former Sierra Leonean military officer Valentine Strasser⁴³ was unable to eliminate the RUF threat and after the first military successes, it gradually began to lose territories. Some Sierra Leoneans initially supportive of Strasser's coup in the hope of a quick end to the war became disillusioned with his regime in a short time. The mobilization carried out by Strasser (raising the ranks from 5,000 to 15,000 soldiers) did not contribute to improving the combat capability of the army, as 1,000 of the recruits were boys from 7 to 15 years of age⁴⁴. The new soldiers (in many cases of refugee origin) lacked military training and discipline, which affected the quality of combat operations and the treatment of civilians. The armed units involved in the fight against the rebels continued to suffer from a lack of funding, fuel, provisions and medical supplies⁴⁵. This was supplemented by the lack of management experience in governance the country by the young military officers, unresolved socio-economic and debt problems as well as doubts about the legitimacy of the new regime (especially after the beginning of the purges by Strasser of his associates who participated in the 1992 coup). In addition, after Strasser had come to power, virtually all restrictions on the armed forces were lifted, which caused discontent among the civilian population⁴⁶. Cases of looting and violence practiced on the territory of the country by the army and its allies from ULIMO had become more frequent⁴⁷. Thus, the balance of power between the rebels and the central authorities began to shift unfavorably for the latter. The most combat-ready government unit, the "Tigers", was concentrated on the armed struggle for control of the diamond deposits, protecting the base in diamond-rich territory Daru and the vicinity of Freetown from the RUF, and in other places did not provide serious resistance to the rebels⁴⁸. In other cases, according to eyewitnesses and researchers, the government forces and the rebels on the ground agreed to avoid direct armed clashes, alternately looting specific villages and buying weapons⁴⁹.

At the same time due to the inability of the authorities to protect the population of the country from the RUF and unruly government troops local self-defense forces, known as kamajors, began to emerge, and their relations with armed Liberian refugees varied from cooperation to resentment (because of the

⁴² Predominantly ethnic Mandingo and Muslim faction led by Alhaji Kromah opposed to Krahn-dominated ULIMO-J faction led by Roosevelt Johnson that splintered in 1994.

⁴³ NPRC consisted of disaffected combat officers protesting the combat conditions and lack of adequate support by the Momoh regime that overthrew it and attempted to optimize both the national army and state apparatus prior to internationally demanded transfer of power to President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah elected in 1996.

⁴⁴ Amnesty International. Sierra Leone: Prisoners of War? Children Detained in Barracks and Prison. AFR 51/006/1993. August 11, 1993. P. 1–2 // URL: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AFR51/006/1993/en/> (access date: 18.04.2022).

⁴⁵ Reno W. The Business of War in Liberia // Current History. 1996. Vol. 95. Iss. 601. P. 211–215.

⁴⁶ Kandeh J.D. What Does the "Militariat" Do When it Rules? Military Regimes: The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Liberia // Review of African Political Economy. 1996. Vol. 69. № 9. P. 395.

⁴⁷ Peters K., Richards P. Jeune combattants parlant de la guerre et de la paix en Sierra Leone // Cahier d'Etudes Africaines. 1998. Vol. 38. № 150–152. P. 595.

⁴⁸ Shearer D. Exploring the Limits of Consent: Conflict Resolution in Sierra Leone // Millennium: Journal of International Studies. 1997. Vol. 26. Iss. 3. P. 850.

⁴⁹ Amnesty International. Sierra Leone: Human rights abuses in a war against civilians. AFR 51/005/1995. September 12, 1995. P. 11 // URL: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr51/005/1995/en/> (access date: 10.04.2021).

involvement of the latter in looting and violence)⁵⁰. The kamajors began to act as a de facto independent irregular armed force that significantly influenced the course of hostilities, and in July 1994 renewed the demands to the government forces and ULIMO to leave their territories. The discontent of the kamajors leaders forced the government in July-August of the same year to disarm 800 ULIMO fighters and send them to Liberia, which complicated the relations of the Sierra Leonean authorities with this organization⁵¹. The reason for such resentment was the de-facto cooperation between Liberian rebels-refugees and pro-government forces in exploiting the economic potential of the border zone mineral wealth as well as in looting the population inhabiting the area. These acts were perpetrated by rank-and-file soldiers pretending to act as rebels while looting in order to gain surplus income (and being branded as "sobels"). Similarly, ULIMO officers arranged the terms of conflict economy cooperation with the RUF fighters and were also heavily engaged in such activities, procuring material wealth from the local civilian population. Hostility of the armed part of Liberian refugees towards the RUF and Taylor forces did not prevent them from engaging in illicit commercial relations with these parties to the conflict. Hence, according to the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone ULIMO fighters were willing to sell their arms to the RUF and NPFL in the wake of the Abidjan Peace Accord of 1996 which promoted their disarmament⁵². Further on, parts of ULIMO de-facto supported the 1997 military coup in Sierra Leone that effectively aligned itself with the RUF. Thus, the original ethnic and political grudges that motivated Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone to take up arms were gradually substituted with commercial motivation for involvement in violence.

Overall, it appears that the fraction of Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone turned to be active participants of the trans-border conflict economy that emerged in West Africa in 1990's. ULIMO rebel movement became the major unit consisting of such refugees and directly involved in the fighting for the access to the mineral wealth of Sierra Leone. It was co-opted in the support networks that primarily sustained the government of Sierra Leone and were derived from cooperation with Guinean and Nigerian forces involved. As was noted, Guinea looked to contain the Taylor and RUF destabilizing forces that threatened its resource-abundant border regions, while Nigeria was initially closely affiliated with the Doe regime overthrown by Taylor and later viewed him and his allies as challenging Nigeria's regional influence. Hence Guinea was active in supporting anti-Taylor and anti-RUF movements, Nigeria dominated in the ECOMOG peacekeeping efforts and both actively supported A.T. Kabbah as the internationally recognized president threatened by RUF and its Liberian allies. Nevertheless, the prevalence of warlord commerce over the specified aims of war victory had even occasionally pushed the Liberian refugees from ULIMO to cooperate with RUF and Charles Taylor. This has put these refugees in a more protected category of those present in the conflict zone and enabled them to attain the benefits of war even as most of the civilian population had a stark disadvantage. As such they became an important element of the conflict support network.

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The given article encompasses the discussion on the significance of refugees in African regional conflicts and crises by examining their role in the events that predated and accompanied the civil war in Sierra Leone. Based on the analysis of the causes and course of the war as well as the dominant theoretical approaches to this conflict a conclusion is reached that Liberian refugees played a very prominent role in the conflict spilled over into Sierra Leone, most importantly those who took up arms and established their own militias and rebel groups. At an early stage this was due to ethnic and political grievances, but later their motivation shifted to the matters of economic subsistence and security provision.

⁵⁰ Okano H. Politics of Human Network in African Conflicts: Kamajor/the CDF in Sierra Leone. Bamenda, 2019. P. 352.

⁵¹ Amnesty International. Sierra Leone: Human rights abuses... P. 8.

⁵² Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone. Case № SCSL-2003-01-T. The Prosecutor of the Special Court V. Charles Ghankay Taylor. Thursday, 26 April 2012. 11:00 a.m. Judgement. Trial Chamber II. P. 49645 // URL: <http://www.rscsl.org/Documents/Transcripts/Taylor/26April2012.pdf> (access date: 17.07.2020).

The adherents of universalist neo-patrimonial approaches (primarily Reno and Hazen) to the study of West African civil wars appear correct on the issue that the refugee influx is a crucial part of trans-border shadow economy and violence zone and essential element of external causes of war. While Sierra Leonean historians (i.e. Abdullah, Rashid, Bangura) with particular emphasis on domestic causes of conflict also appreciate the socioeconomic crisis that led to the conflict and was exacerbated by Liberian newcomers.

The particular Liberian refugees' involvement in combat on both sides of the border and their relations with the changing governments of Sierra Leone, local population and other armed groups at times was critical in determining the general course of events. The major conclusions include the significance of refugee movement for the spread of regional instability (in case if the state structures there are unable or unwilling to closely monitor the conditions created for the incomers who may get involved in criminal activities, violence and shadow economy in order to survive and address their grievances). The outbreak of war in the recipient country may incentivize the refugees to take up arms on behalf of the parties to the conflict in order to overcome the vulnerability of their position and become powerful players in the new context.

In Sierra Leone the relations between Liberian newcomers and the recipient population deteriorated and forced the refugee groups to be reliant on the protection of the side of the conflict they fought for. But most importantly, these refugee groups became a significant element of the trans-border conflict support networks as they acted as a source of revenue (looting them made up a sizeable share of the earnings by the rank-and-file soldiers and rebels) and active participants of conflict economy (when refugee-composed armed units fit in the broader support networks or get engaged in trade across the enemy lines). Involvement in these networks shifted their motivation away from ethnic grievances and self-protection towards violence profiteering. Thus, the role of refugees in local and trans-border conflicts in Africa is contradictory and worthy of continued examination.

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