

Comparative Analysis of Armed Conflicts in Africa: A Study on the Republics of Mali and Cameroon

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Abstract

The work made use of secondary data and adopted conflict theory, this study revealed that various African nation-states faced challenges to include but not limited to trans-border crimes, sickness and diseases (like Malaria, Ebola, Polio); poverty, human trafficking; military intervention in politics, desert encroachments, to mention but a few. Majority of the states in the sub-region were colonial creations, Mali and Cameroon were for instance colonized by France before being granted independence. The sovereignty of both countries were however, at different times challenged by internal armed conflicts orchestrated either by ethnic militia and secessionists or religious extremists like the Tuaregs in Mali and the Ambazonian boys in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon. The similarities and differences between the two armed conflicts are examined. The paper concluded that the armed conflicts have negative impacts on each of the states, its economy, social infrastructures and the continent at large. Some recommendations to forestalled future and amicably resolve such or similar conflicts were outlined.

Keyword: Africa, Mali, Cameroon, Conflict, ECOWAS & AES

Introduction

Africa is one of the continents of the world with multiple sovereign nation-states. For easy descriptive purposes, those countries were grouped into southern, central, northern, eastern and western Africa sub-regions, with a political umbrella, the African Union as the cover for all the countries in sub-region. Most of the countries on the continent were colonial creation, owing to the scrambling for Africa and the 1884/85 Berlin Conference. This conference legitimized the partition and subjugation of hitherto peaceful, developing and prospering ethnic nationalists scattered across the African continent.

Hamidu (2017) observed that the colonial created states in Africa were done hastily and without regard to ethno-religious, socio-cultural and economic differences or aspirations of the people. This explained why in just few decades after political independence, those neglected and perceived insignificant differences grew-up and manifested in the form of inter-ethnic conflicts, political differences and other forms of instabilities or quest for secessions, abound all over the continent. While the activities of the past or former colonial masters like Portugal, Italy, Britain, Germany, France, among others share in some of the blame, successive African leaders in and from the various states also share part of the blame due to poor administration, non-inclusive governance, corruption, sectionalism, primordial

interest, sectionalism, among other causative agents. These affected infrastructural development, social harmony, economic growth, and glorified ethno-religious differences, ultimately serving as a fertile ground for misunderstanding and conflicts. This paper examined these in the light of armed conflicts in Mali and Cameroon Republics

Methodology

This study relied more on qualitative data, by exploring published material or literature from text books, academic journals, periodicals and other internet materials. The contents of the said materials were reviewed and their contents analyzed before applying them accordingly into various parts of this paper.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Conflict Theory because it is an important and related theory in explaining some possible causes of conflicts in human society. Several social scientists and observers (Bakrania, (2013), Boye, (2014), Francis, (2013) & Oyeshola, (2005)) emphasized that social conflicts were traced back to the idea of Karl Marx (1818-1883), the greatest German theorist and political activist. To the Marxists, the conflict approach emphasizes a materialistic interpretation of history, a dialectical method of analysis, a critical stand towards existing social arrangements and a political programme of revolution or reform.

Marx divided history into several stages, conforming to a broad spectrum in the economic structure of society. The most important stages in Marx's argument were feudalism, capitalism and socialism. For Marx, the central institution of capitalist society is private property, the system by which capital (money, machines, tools, factories, and other material objects used in production) is controlled by a small minority of the population. This arrangement leads to two classes: the owners of capital (the bourgeoisie, elites/rich), and the workers (the proletariat, labourers/poor), whose only property is their own labour which they sell to the capitalists. Capital owners are seen as making a profit by paying workers less than their work is worth, and thus, exploiting them. Economic exploitation leads directly or indirectly to political oppression; hence, conflict becomes inevitable.

The term conflict can be seen as a struggle over values and claims to scarce resources and power in which the opponents aim to injure, neutralize or eliminate their rivals. Conflict is an interaction involving human beings; who may be violent or non-violent (that is, in terms of physical force), dominant or recessive, controllable or non-controllable, insoluble, under various set circumstances that warrant it. Contextually, especially in the Malian and Cameroonian sense, conflict should be seen as any situation of violence either against certain authority or an action against feelings of oppression by certain groups or individuals against another. This would naturally go a long way to destabilizing existing law and order and ends up in the perpetration of crimes, violence and disruption of social harmony both locally and internationally.

Background of Mali and Cameroonian Armed Conflicts

Conflict can be described as the crisis or upheavals that ensue as a result of sharp and contentious disagreement over certain vital issues. To Oyeshola (2005), there is conflict when there is a sharp disagreement or clash, for instance, between divergent ideas, interests or people and nations. Conflict therefore is universal yet distinct in every culture. It is common

to all persons yet experienced uniquely by every individual. It is a visible sign of human energy and often the result of competitive striving for the same goals, rights and resources.

The above description of conflict affirms that human beings can hardly exist without one form of conflict or the other. Conflict can be categorized in to inter-personal; intra and inter-institutional, societal, national and international conflicts. There are also violent and non-violent conflicts, which in another word is refereed to armed and non- armed conflicts (Nuhu and Hamidu, 2017). The armed conflict is the concern of this study.

Armed conflict refers to the resort to use force and arms in pursuit of incompatible interest and goals by different groups. It involves the use of weapons (light or heavy) that has the potential to cause destruction of lives and properties. Mbaegbu, (2018) noted that ample evidences of armed conflicts abound in Africa; however, Mali and Cameroon which are the focus of this paper will be briefly explained.

Mali

France's colonial rule and political hegemony was established in Africa since the 1884/1885 Berlin conference. Most of the federating colonies under the France authority began to be were clamouring for self-determination especially after the Second World War. In January 1959, Soudan joined Senegal to form the Mali Federation, which became fully independent within the French Community on 20 June 1960. The federation collapsed on 20 August 1960, when Senegal seceded. On 22 September, Soudan proclaimed itself the Republic of Mali and withdrew from the French Community. Ngachoko (2012) argues that the Federation of Mali became fully independent from France on 20 June 1960 (after an agreement on power transfer signed on the 4th of April), but socio-political cracks were already growing. Disagreements between Modibo Keita (French Sudan) and Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal) became too great, and the federation was dissolved on 20 August (Humphrey and Mohamed, 2005). A new Republic of Mali was created on 22 September 1960; (Senegal uses the date 4 April 1960, which was the date that independence for the Federation was agreed with France).

Mali has long been considered a good and stable "democracy" in the Sahel even if it faced some particular difficulties to maintain its sovereignty throughout all of its territory (Ngachoko, 2012). The northern part particularly has been marked by troubles on the part of the minorities, especially the Tuaregs; who constitute a nomadic group of approximately 1.3 million people crossing "southern Algeria, southwest Libya, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali" as noted by Cline, (2007: 891). The Tuaregs together with other tribes such as the Arabs and Peuls make up northern Mali. These tribes neither agree with Bamako nor with the full idea of full secession from Mali as observed by Ngachoko (2012). The Tuaregs mainly practice a moderate but conservative Sufi Islam and the allegations of Wahhabi preaching are completely new and far from being proven (Cline, 2007). Therefore, the suppositions regarding the evolving threats of terrorism in the current Mali crisis need to be nuanced as reoccurring instances (Zounmenou, 2012 and Harding, 2013).

Tuaregs' first uprising was between 1962 and 1964. The Malian government troop completely crushed the Tuaregs rebel within a year (Alvardo, 2012). This crushing of the Tuaregs of northern Mali affected their socioeconomic activities which were later followed by draught recorded in the area in the 1970s. The second Tuaregs' crisis was in June 1990 when police station were attacked in Menaka which further led to serious armed conflict between the Tuaregs and the Malian army, where many lives and properties were lost. At this

time, the Tuaregs seem to be well equipped and prepared until Algeria brokered a pact in April, 1992. As a result, northern Mali enjoys certain leverages which also gave room to the uprising of many groups. However, in 2012, the security situation in the Sahel region became even worse with the emergence of irregular insurgencies in northern Mali. On 6 April 2012, the Tuareg rebels of the *Movement National de Libération de l'Azawad* (MNLA) and some jihadists from both Ansar Dine and the *Mouvement pour l'unicité et le djihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* (MUJAO) declared the northern Mali an independent state. The insurgents benefited from both the regional context of the collapse of the Gadhafi's regime and the military coup that ended what used to be a stable regime of Amadou Toumani Touré (Alvarado, 2012: 1).

Earlier on, in January 2012, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) was ready to engage in the rebellion that began as a quest for independence and ended up in multiple insurgencies since the MNLA made temporary alliances with the Islamists groups like Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) and AD (D'Almeida 2012).

In February, it became clear that ethnicities were being instrumentalized by the different armed groups which made it possible to establish links between those groups and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) regarding logistical support (Avoine, 2012). However, it was the *coup d'état*, of March 21st, 2012 that facilitated the process through which the insurgents almost won against the Malian army in merely two months as revealed by Alvarado, (2012: 4). This culminated in the independence of Azawad, in northern Mali, on the 6th of April 2012. Many lives were lost, properties destroyed and good governance was badly affected not only in Mali but in the sub-region. However, on the 11th January 2013, France launched military air and ground operations against rebels/insurgent targets in northern Mali after the sudden southward advance of AQIM, Ansar Dine and MUJWA. The French operation marked a shift in international responses to the situation to practical involvements (Arieff, 2013). This intervention brought the rebels' mission to an abrupt end; never the less, there are regrouping and pockets of attacks in and around Mali associated to the rebels.

Cameroon

Cameroon has had several international interruptions which seems to affects her and created the ground for armed conflicts. It is believed that several European traders visited Amba Bay freely until 1844–1862 when the British concluded trade treaties with various Amba Bay chiefs. Some British Baptist Missionaries established safer zone for freed slaves in this axis which was later named Victoria and in 1884 Britain established a protectorate in Amba Bay with Victoria as its capital. After the Berlin Conference, in 1887, the British handed over Victoria and its surrounding territory to the Germans who had occupied an adjacent small mudflat area in Duala east of Amba Bay. On their parts, the Germans undertook to expand the Kamerun protectorate through a combination of explorations, military expeditions and warfare with local communities. Owing to superior weapons, the Germans finally took control of Buea and Sasse which they named Einsiedel, Bojongo (Engelberg) and the regions from Tiko, through Bimbia, Victoria, Debunscha, Idenau to Bakassi by 1891 and in 1902 Buea was made the Capital of Kamerun among other conquests (Le Vine, 2004:6).

In 1914, as World War I raged Britain reclaimed the Amba Bay coastal area from Tiko through Bimbia, Victoria, Idenau all the way to the Bakassi Peninsula stretching inland to present-day Nkambe, and then further north to the Lake Chad areas. That whole strip of territory was then denoted as British Cameroons, which was administered as an appendage of Nigeria. In 1916 Britain and France signed a treaty known as 'the Simon-Milne Declaration', to respect the frontiers between the British Cameroons and French Cameroon. When Germany was finally defeated in 1918, she was compelled to sign the Treaties of Versailles in

1919, relinquishing control of all its colonies to the Allied and Associated Powers, including the territory known since 1916 as the British Cameroon. On 10 July 1919 Britain and France reiterated the boundary treaty concluded in 1916 and both undertook to administer their respective new colonial territories in accordance with Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant. British sovereignty over the Southern Cameroons was maintained until 1922 when Southern Cameroons became a Mandated Territory by the League of Nations as revealed by Anyangwe, (2010).

The British Cameroon's Administration Ordinance, 1924, as subsequently amended up to 1929, divided the British Cameroon into the Northern Cameroon (administered as part of Northern Nigeria) and the Southern Cameroon (administered as part of Eastern Nigeria). When the mandates system was transmuted into the trusteeship system in 1946 this arrangement was again provided for in the Order-in-Council of 2 August 1946 providing for the administration of the Nigeria Protectorate and Cameroons under British mandate (Mbile, 2011). Meanwhile, the boundary between the British Cameroons and French Cameroon was more exactly defined in an agreement signed by the Governor-General of Nigeria and the Governor of French Cameroon in 1930 and approved by Britain and France (Gardinier, 1963). In 1953 the Southern Cameroon's representatives in the Eastern Nigerian Legislature demanded from Britain a regional status for the Southern Cameroon with seat of government in Buea. The Order in-Council of 1954 established a Legislative House known as the House of Assembly of the Southern Cameroon, with an Executive Council was also established. The Southern Cameroon gained limited autonomy as a quasi-region within the Nigerian Federation. The first sitting of the House of Assembly of the Southern Cameroon met on 26th October 1954. Dr. Endeley emerged as leader of the Southern Cameroon. His official title was Leader of Government Business, the reason being that the Southern Cameroon a quasi-region and therefore only semi-autonomous.

In 1958, the Southern Cameroon attained the status of a full region and became autonomous and fully self-governing. Dr. Endeley's official title accordingly changed to that of Premier "Prime Minister" as noted by Le Vine, (2004:6). In 1957, United Nations Resolutions 1064 (XI) of 26 February 1957 and 1207 (XII) of December 13, 1957 called on the Administering Authorities to hasten arrangements for Trust Territories to attain self-governance or independence. In 1958 the House of Assembly and the House of Chiefs called for complete separation from Nigeria and total independence. In 1959 the opposition party Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) won elections and John Ngu Foncha leader of the KNDP became the second Premier "Prime Minister" of the Southern Cameroon.

Furthermore, United Nations' resolutions 1350 (XIII) of March 13, 1959 and 1352 (XIV) of October 16, 1959 called on Britain, the Administering Authority to organize a plebiscite in the Southern Cameroon under UN supervision based on the following two 'alternatives': independence by joining Nigeria as one of the autonomous regions of that country or French Cameroon in a federation of two states, equal state in status (Mbile, 2011). In 1960, the Westminster Parliament in London enacted a constitution for the Southern Cameroon known as the Southern Cameroon (Constitution) Order in Council. The Constitution put in place a full-fledged parliamentary and ministerial system of government modeled after that of the United Kingdom. This constitutional measure was taken contemporaneously with the separation of the Southern Cameroon from Nigeria. The Southern Cameroon attained the status of a full self-governing territory though still a United Nations Trust Territory under Britain.

In line with United Nations decision, all Trusteeship Territories were granted unconditional independence but British Southern Cameroon was faced with a choice: attaining independence by joining the French Cameroon Republic in a federation of two equal states or joining Nigeria as one of its federated regions. The reason for this position was based on the 1959 Phillipson Report, which claimed that Southern Cameroon was not economically capable of sustaining itself as an independent state (Gardinier, 1963). The United Nations initiated discussions with French Cameroon on the terms of association of Southern Cameroon if the outcome of the plebiscite was in favour of a federation of the two countries. The plebiscite was precipitously organized and took place in 1961 Southern Cameroon had voted to join French Cameroon to form a federation that was full of grey areas (Chiver, 1966).

French Cameroon which took over virtually all powers in the federation was renamed East Cameroon and the Southern Cameroon were renamed West Cameroon. French advisors of President Ahidjo recommended the introduction of bilingual schools to educate and assimilate Southern Cameroonians in favour of French Cameroon. The aim was to slowly absorb the 'Anglo-Saxon' Southern Cameroonians into the francophone hemisphere. There were lots of internal challenges in the new federation. On 20 May 1972 a referendum was conducted with a favorable outcome for President Ahidjo. The whole process was in violation of Article 47 of the constitution of the federation which prohibited any attempt to change the federal form of the state. The name of the state was changed from 'Federal Republic of Cameroon' to the 'United Republic of Cameroon'. He then divided West Cameroon into two parts which he called 'North West and South West' provinces (Mbile, 2011).

On 6 November 1982, Ahidjo resigned and handed over power to Paul Biya who continued with the assimilation agenda. In February 1984, Biya changed the official name of the country from the United Republic of Cameroon to the Republic of Cameroon – the name that French Cameroon held before its unification with the Southern Cameroon; and in 1984, there was an attempted coup in the country which was crushed. From the mid-1980s, the break between the Southern Cameroon elites and the Francophone-dominated central government is becoming increasingly apparent. Political exclusion, one-sided economic exploitation, cultural assimilation were criticized more and more openly, French language and culture were glorified and to be forced on all the regions' institutions.

Effort to solve these challenges amicably became difficult hence the people of Southern Cameroon resisted through strikes, public peaceful demonstrations and the current Ambaboy's armed conflict with the security forces; consequent upon the 1st October 2017, declaration of independent state named Ambazonia. The government of Cameroon sent in forces, and large-scale fighting broke out. On November 30, 2017, the President of Cameroon declared war on the Anglophone separatists. This marked the start of a very violent confrontation between Government forces and armed separatists. The conflict started in Manyu Division where the Ambazonia Defense Force operated and spread to other counties like Lebialem, Fako, Momo, Bui, Ngoketunjia. Several different armed factions have emerged such as the Red Dragons, Tigers, ARA, Seven Kata, ABL amongst others. Several Villages and towns have been burned down such as Kwa-kwa, Kembong, Tadu in NSO and Muyenge (Anyangwe, 2010).

Causes of Mali and Cameroon Armed Conflicts

Deducing from the foregoing, Northern Mali and North-West and South-West regions, Cameroon armed conflicts seem to be created; nurtured and sustained by almost similar circumstance, ranging from internal political uncertainties, sectionalism, segregations, fear of

dominations, poverty, ignorance, marginalization etc. Corroborating with the above, Boye (2014:1055) described some general causes of conflicts in most African countries thus:

It has generally been known that poor governance, economic decline, disparities in opportunities and access to resources, state repression, socioeconomic inequalities among groups, low education and low income levels, social service decay, huge unemployment and deep poverty are associated with social uprisings, political tensions, civil unrest and intra-state conflicts.

In his view, Francis (2013:5) opines that the Malian armed conflict was caused by a number of factors, where he stated thus:

In effect, poverty, bad governance, marginalisation, the exclusion of large sections of the Malian populace from the political and economic processes and the failure to address fundamental grievances by the ruling and governing class in Mali created the breeding ground for Islamist extremists to gain a foothold and organise profitable criminal enterprises that became mutually beneficial to all stakeholders. At the outbreak of the Malian crisis the country was already on the verge of implosion because of the collapsed nature of the state; the effect of decades of bad governance and the ineffective political and economic management of the state; and the role of the corrupt ruling and governing élites in subverting state institutions to serve their vested interests and regime survival, especially during the personalised rule of President Touré. Both the Tuaregs and the diverse Islamist groups were united in their fight against their common enemy, the government of Mali.

In agreement, Humphreys & Mohamed (2005); Bakrania (2013) and Cissoko (2011) argued that cultural and historical peculiarities of Mali explain the origins of conflict. The motivations of rebel groups in northern Mali relate to the regional exceptionalism of the north and to grievances arising from entrenched economic and political marginalisation. Furthermore, histories of ineffective governance, weak state structures and corruption have all contributed to insecurity in northern Mali. In Cameroon, socioeconomic, political, cultural and lingual dichotomy, where the North-West and South-West regions were neglected or marginalize over the years, caused lot of disharmony and suspicions, as well as the blatant glorification of the French language at the detriment of the English. This social and lingual belittlement/debasement became unacceptable to the people in the marginalized regions, hence the outbreak of armed resistance which claimed lives, especially women and children as revealed by Song, (2018) and Tah, (2019). Fallacies at both horizontal or vertical levels and other bureaucratic bottle necks in meeting some agreements, Hamidu (2020), noted were also reasonable factors. These caused armed conflicts in the two separate states, which have claimed several lives and properties, as well as making the state insecure.

Similarities between Mali and Cameroon Conflict

There are certain similar incidences between the two country's armed conflicts, which can be explained thus:

Heterogeneity: Most, if not all African countries, have several internal languages, tribes or cultures. For instance, both Mali and Cameroon like other African countries are heterogeneous and multi-lingual societies. The local languages are meant for local

communication; however, there is one official language, which is mostly the language of the ex-colonial masters. To this end, both Mali and Cameroon uses French. While the heterogeneity remains, the official language is more glorified as state official language than the other native ones.

Similar Colonial Masters: It is a known fact that Africans were colonized by European countries like France, Britain, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Italy, etc. France was however one of the colonial masters of both Mali and Cameroon for some years, before their independence (beside that of Cameroon with lot of intrusions). The two countries therefore use French and other colonial legacy material like currency, belonging to the same socioeconomic union, among others.

Similar Missions: The missions of the two armed groups in both Mali and Cameroon respectively were basically the same; that is, to liberate their regions and people from the other parts of the state, either due to perceived marginalization, socio-political, religious or language reasons. **State and Non-state Actors:** The armed conflicts in the two countries were between state and non-state actors. The military represent the state while the rebels fighters, represent the non-state actors in the conflicts.

Stronghold of the Rebels: In the Mali armed conflicts, the northern part of the country remains the stronghold for Tuareges fighters; in the Cameroonian armed conflict, the Ambazonian boys' had their strongholds in North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon. Each of these regional strongholds serves as areas of operations for the insurgents/rebels, causing destruction of lives and property within and sometimes across the immediate strongholds.

Neglects: Both northern Mali and the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon dwellers/indigenes claimed total neglect and marginalization for long by successive administrations if compared to other regions of the same country in terms of political appointment/opportunities, allocation of resources, structural development and other considerations. Hence, a reason they claim for their uprising.

Ambush of the Military: In the two countries' armed conflicts, there were some ambushes against the military and other Para-military operatives by the rebels. Consequently, both countries lost significant numbers of trained and experienced soldiers in the fight against the armed groups. In Mali for instance, there were several instances where the army came under intense fire and were ambushed and some soldiers died, others allegedly disappeared or purported to have joined the insurgents. Equally, the Malian army equally suffered several defeats in the hands of the rebels leading to massive loss of equipment's and personnel (Keenan, 2012). There were similar experiences in North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon republic, where the Amba boys attacked security operatives.

Destruction of Public Property: The armed conflicts in the two countries have direct effects on public and even international property. Government or public property and institutions like schools, military establishments, game reserves, monuments and other historical places with international recognitions were captured and destroyed by the insurgents, especially in Mali and in the various territories under their control in the two countries (Lawal, 2024).

On African Continent: Both Mali and Cameroon are countries in Africa and they are engaged in the conflict on African territory. Arguably, both conflicts were boosted by events on the continental stage such as Libyan uprising and the dethronement of Gadafi's regime.

This made arms to be floating in and across African, reaching the hands of several civilians/rebels to carry out their activities in the various states (Mbaegbu, 2018).

Coup: Coup is an unconstitutional way of changing government; it was a common practice in most African countries in the past. Like other countries, there were military coup d'état on 19 November 1968 in Mali; where a group of young officers staged a bloodless coup and set up a 14-member Military Committee for National Liberation (CMLN), with Lt. Moussa Traoré as Chairman, another ones in 2012, 2020 and 2021 (Lawal, 2024). Also in Cameroon, on 6th April, 1984, there was a case of coup when the palace guards attempted to overthrow President Paul Biya, and other attempts but they were all crushed.

Factions and Synergies: In the armed conflicts in several African countries, there are usually more than one fighting groups. They may start as one but later breakup or another will come up for one reason or the other. In Mali, there was National Movement for the Liberation of Azawa (MNLA); Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) and AD among others. These groups have developed personal and business ties with communities in northern Mali on pragmatic, ideological, and ethnic grounds. The three groups also appear to coordinate their actions and share personnel (Arieff, 2013 and Harding, 2013). In Cameroon, there are also some factions and other coordinated groups as well in operations.

Displacement of Persons: In the two countries' armed conflicts, there was displacement of the indigene/citizens and non- citizen in and around the trouble spots. For example, many civilians left northern Mali to Bamako, some villages/states in Algeria; others left North-West and South-West regions Cameroon to Yaoundé, some villages/states in Nigeria etc. This affected educational system and other social services from the troubled spots and in the claimed safer places, as well as the neighbouring countries (Adekailyaoja, 2024).

On-going: As at the time of undertaking the study, it is supposed that the conflicts in northern Mali has been partially silenced by local and foreign soldiers from France, and as both the authorities and rebels were able to sign peace deal on Saturday 20th June 2015, after many concessions brokered by Algeria. There are however still some uncertainties/apprehensions and attacks as other Jihadists groups have infiltrated the Tuareges. In Cameroon conflict, there was no peace agreement yet; as the condition which the North-West and South-West regions gave was that their region should be addressed as the 'Republic of Ambazonia' is not agreed upon by the authorities in Yaoundé, so the war in both states are still on-going.

Dissimilarities between Mali and Cameroon Conflicts

Having discussed some similarities above, it is pertinent to outline some of the dissimilarities between the armed conflicts in Mali and Cameroon Republics.

Different Regions: Mali and Cameroon even though are on the African continent, they belong to different sub-regional grouping or geopolitics. Mali for instance is from West Africa while Cameroon is in the Central Africa. This regional bloc also has impact on the states behaviour and obligations.

Ethno-religious: In the armed conflicts in Mali, the armed group took ethno-religious form. The campaign or struggle for liberation graduated from ethnic to religious phenomenon; the people were urged to have a separate state for their people and religion. This made the fighters to get more fighters on jihad mission, hence the fighter were referred to as 'Jihadist rebels'; basically because their intention and actions were to liberate northern Mali and give it

a sovereign ethno-religious status. In Cameroon armed conflict, the perpetrators are called rebels or separatists, but the authorities labelled them 'terrorists'. English language was their binding factor and not religion; so, the independence of the North-West and South-West regions is their ultimate desires and aspirations.

One and different Colonial Masters: Mali was colonized by France until she got independence. France culture and language, educational system and other institutions were easily assimilated. Cameroon on its parts was or did have different colonial masters; Germany, Britain and France all have influences on the Cameroonian state and people. This made the state and people to have multifarious socio-cultural, educational, administrative system. These obviously have impacts on national cohesion, stable democracy and developments

Porous Border Management and gravity of the conflict: National and international boundary and borders in most African states are poorly managed and supervised by relevant authorities. This makes states vulnerable for the import and exports of arms and ammunitions, trafficking in persons, securing of mercenaries by rebels, to carry out their activities (Nuhu and Hamidu, 2017). Mali and Cameroon, like other African states' border paradigm security is poor which do enable aliens and other likeminded rebels to come in or support crisis against the state. Unlike the one of Cameroon, the proximity of Mali to Libya, Algeria and the ocean around, makes it easier for the armed groups to execute their programme with modern and sophisticated weapons at the disposal of the insurgents/ rebels. Hence, the Malian armed conflict is grievous than that of the Cameroon.

Use of Mercenaries: In the two armed conflicts, there are noticeable presences of foreign mercenaries in the Malian armed conflict where some Jihadists from other countries came to support their likeminded brotherhood. Similarly, there was the presence of foreign armies who came to offered technical assistance or participated to help defend the territorial integrity of Mali. In that of Cameroon however, at the time of undertaking the study, there was no noticeable/visible presence of foreign mercenaries either on the part of the separatists or the state.

Degree of Colonial Masters' Involvement: The level of external intervention in the armed conflicts defers. In the Mali, there was the physical and visible intervention by her former colonial master France and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Al-jazeera, 2013). France for example directly intervened in Mali with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in one way or other; as many ECOWAS and even non- ECOWAS neighbours were both directly and indirectly affected by the conflicts across the borders in terms of refugees; closure of borders and other socio-economic challenges (UN, 2013). In that of Cameroon however, there were no immediate and direct intervention by France and other external bodies, perhaps because it is viewed as internal affairs or the conflict has not lasted long enough.

Jihadism and Separatism: In the Malian armed conflict, it is clear that religious philosophy and inclinations played a significant role. The fighters see their fight as Jihad, that is, a holy war against infidels or un-Islamic culture, systems and structures. This made it easier for other likeminded groups to support the insurrections both in kind and in cash (Lawal, 2024). In the Cameroonian conflict however, religion was not prominent; the separatists' fighters were only united on the basis of liberating their North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon from French region and speaking dominance.

Arrest of Leaders: In the Malian armed conflicts, there were no clear records that the insurgence leaders were arrested and prosecuted in the court of law. In the Cameroonian conflict however, the defendants had been arrested in Nigeria in January 2018 and deported back to Cameroon. The long list of charges included rebellion, complicity in terrorism, financing terrorism, revolution, insurrection, hostility against the state, propagation of fake news and lack of identification. The court also ordered the 10 to pay a fine of 250bn CFA francs (\$422m; £359m) to the government for civil damages and 12bn CFA francs for court costs. Among the 10 who were convicted was Sisiku Ayuk Tabe, the leader of the so-called Governing Council of Ambazonia - the name separatists was given to Cameroon's Anglophone North-West and South-West regions. A leader of Cameroon's separatist movement, Sisiku Ayuk Tabe, and nine of his followers have been given life sentences by a military court in the capital, Yaoundé (BBC NEWS, English Service 6:00am, 20 August, 2019).

Civilian and Military leadership: In Cameroon, the political leaders had been civilians or democratic government, under President Paul Biya for several decades. In Mali however, the government is headed by military junta, following coups and counter coups (Lawal, 2024). Hence, their approaches to the armed conflict differed significantly.

Withdraw from Regional Cooperation: Mali was a member of ECOWAS together with Niger and Burkina Faso for several years. However, they all withdrew their membership of ECOWAS due to the sub-regional group's frowning at military coups and threatening military intervention in those countries. Those countries also accused ECOWAS of being used by France to keep them perpetually underdeveloped. They on the other hand, on 16th September, 2023 formed another international organization called Alliance of Sahel States, or *Alliance des Estate du Sahel* (AES) (Adekaiyaoja, 2024). In that of Cameroonian, there was no news that Cameroon de-member herself from North African Countries Associations, nor formed another or a rival association.

Conclusion

As the conflict theorists posits, conflict is bound to occur or is caused by irreconcilable differences and other factors; as we have seen in this paper, together with it attendant negative effects. The armed conflicts in Mali and Cameroon have caused significant losses of manpower; destruction of ecology, schools, good governance and political stability of not only the respective states but the region at large. Across the continent, conflicts have become major features as cold be seen in Sudan, Somalia, Libya, among other many African states, whose immediate and remote causes can be or are attributed to the irregular creation of colonial boundaries on the continent, the differences inherent in some culture and cultural practises, perceived oppressions and marginalization, uneven distribution of states resources by successive political leaders, etc, which could not be reconciled or resolved amicably.

Recommendations

To ameliorate such conflicts within the Africa continent, the under-listed becomes imperative.

- I. Each nation-states' national government should ensure that each parts of its nation/ethnic nationalities are represented in the government and equitable distribution of dividend of democracy is strictly adhered to;
- II. Internal conflicts in every African nation, Mali, Cameroon Nigeria and others for example should be managed amicably before it degenerate in to something complex;

- III. The Jihadists and separatist/secessionists should love their states, respect the sacredness of human life/ human rights and avoid the massacre of innocent and defenceless civilians in the villages/country side;
- IV. State authorities and the citizens of each nation should avoid sentiments and prejudice but team up to stand against any unconstitutional and unconventional attitude by person or group of persons perceived to pose threat to the nation's stability and development as peace and security is the sine qua non for man's survival and all round development;
- V. National and international conventions, agreements and pacts should be strictly adhered to by each party in the conflicts and the monitoring agency should be proactive in detecting and sanctioning any party breaking the agreements;
- VI. National and regional armed forces like ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and African Union forces should be well equipped and re-trained to handle insurgents and rebel armed conflicts in the region;
- VII. International community are to support the regions and sub-regional initiatives with all the logistics to curb insurgents and militia armed groups in the region;
- VIII. Head of states and governments of Africa should be warned and encourage each other to develop their respective states and provide the necessary materials for all her citizen in line with U.N and A.U Charter/protocols; and,
- IX. UN and other members of the international communities should diplomatically and bilaterally intervene in the Cameroonian armed conflicts to save lives, facilitates the amicable resolution of the conflicts or the freedom of the English speaking region.

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