

Interrogating the Nexus between Irregular Migration and Insecurity along 'Ungoverned' Border Spaces in West Africa

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Abstract

The 'coloniality', porosity, and 'ungovernability' of borders in West Africa, have engendered undocumented migration, in which most people engage to visit their kin and for economic reasons such as herding, farming, fishing, hunting, and trading. This occurs concurrently with human smuggling, human trafficking, gun-running, terrorism, and money laundering. The rise in these cross-border criminal activities and the resultant insecurity have put irregular migration into the mainstream of political and academic conversation, generating national, regional, and global concerns. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the nexus between irregular migration and insecurity along 'ungoverned' borders in West Africa, based on a review of relevant literature on migration, security, and governance in scholarly journals, books as well as relevant reports, newspaper, and media accounts. The overarching question which this raises and is tackled in this paper is: How does the coloniality and porosity of ungoverned borders in West Africa engender and/or entrench cross-border insecurity? Addressing this question suggests the need to provide sufficient governance mechanisms that involve both state and non-state actors in order to reduce the ungoverned spaces in this part of Africa.

Keywords: Ungoverned Spaces, Irregular Migration, Terrorism, Insecurity, West Africa.

Introduction

West Africa covers a physical area of 4.7 million square kilometres, which is more than twice the size of Western Europe. Its 6,000-kilometre coastal arc stretches from the north of Angola in Southwest Africa to the south of Western Sahara in Northwest Africa and to the Atlantic Ocean in the west.¹ The vast stretch of the region underscores its security vulnerability within the limits of the available resources, competence and capacity of the countries of the region.²

Some areas in parts of these territories remain inadequately governed. This is coupled with the large expanse of borders and frontiers that have numerous unpoliced bush paths, which transforms such portions of the borders into ungoverned spaces. In West Africa alone, a total of 35 international boundaries, that are very porous exist.³ The borders of West Africa have also continued to engender undocumented migration, cross-border crimes and regional instability owing to the lack of appropriate mechanisms for monitoring such movements and illegal activities.⁴

Yet, scholarly works on migration in West Africa often focus on South-North migration. The numbers, however, suggest that, only a small share of West African migrants actually go to the global North. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), an estimated 41 million international migrants moved within, from or to Africa in 2017, indicating that 79 percent of all international migrants residing in Africa were born in Africa.⁵ The 2019 Report of International Organisation for Migration (IOM) too shows that African migration is predominantly intra-regional, with 21 million (53.2 per cent) of the 39.4 million of African-born migrants residing in the continent.⁶ It has also been reported that the number of international migrants in Africa rose from 15.1 million in 2000 to 26.6 million in 2019. The West African share of all international migrants residing in Africa in 2019 was 28 percent.⁷

All 15 ECOWAS member states are both emigration and immigration countries. This owes to the emergence of free labour migration in the post-colonial period, on which was weaved a complex grid of relations and inter-dependences over the ‘artificial’ borders inherited from colonialism.⁸ Porous borders are however considered to be a major immediate factor behind increased irregular migration in the region, leading to insecurity in countries like Nigeria; because, the movement of people is largely untracked.⁹ In turn, irregular migration and other activities like human smuggling and human trafficking, drug trafficking, arms and ammunitions smuggling, and money laundering seem to have deepened insecurity in West African countries.¹⁰

Not many recent studies on migration along ungoverned border space in West Africa have, however, actually interrogated the nexus between undocumented migration and the security challenges it could pose. Most of the existing studies by De Haas, Shaw, Adepoju,

Adebusuyi, and others have rather focused on the socioeconomic and cultural aspects of such migration, and the way in which it is beneficial to the integration and development of the ECOWAS region, whilst few have interrogated migration-security nexus through the prism of ungoverned border space.¹¹ The significance of cross-border networking involving undocumented migrants to the West African identity integration is underscored.¹² The cross-border migration of Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants along the Nigerian-Ivorian corridor has consistently promoted processes of intercommunity development and regional integration.¹³ Because the migratory behaviour of these people in this corridor has led to the harmonisation of otherwise ‘distinctive dual identities within the transnational social space,’ Adebusuyi suggests that ‘related cross-border networking pattern[s] should be promoted in order to attain the goal of a borderless ECOWAS sub-region.’¹⁴ Given the inadequate scholarly attention given to the security implications of irregular migration in West Africa and the respective countries of the region, this article aims to examine its impact on security in that region. Differently stated, the article examines the nexus between irregular migration and insecurity along ‘ungoverned’ borders in West Africa, based on a review of relevant literature on migration, security and governance in scholarly journals, books as well as relevant reports, newspaper and media accounts. The overarching question which this raises and is tackled in this paper is: How does the coloniality and porosity of ungoverned borders in West Africa engender and/or entrench cross-border insecurity? To what extent and with what result does this relate to insecurity? This question is addressed through the prism of the theory of *ungoverned spaces*.

The article is structured as follows. The next section conceptualises the notion of ‘ungoverned spaces’ while pointing out realities that question commonly-held narratives that suggest that, insurgency pervades the African continent. The third section discusses borders and the links with irregular migration in West Africa. The fourth section examines irregular migration within West Africa and the security challenges it poses. It also provides some details of the casualties of, abductions and the damages caused by Boko Haram and their attacks on people in West Africa. Section five concludes, and also provides some recommendations.

Conceptual and theoretical framework: The ‘ungoverned spaces’

Although the theory of ungoverned spaces is derived directly from failed state theory, the theory flows remotely from the philosophical foundations of social contract theorists, particularly Thomas Hobbes.¹⁵ A 21st century study sponsored by RAND Corporation identified four main variables that describe the extent to which territories are ungoverned: the level of state penetration of society; the extent to which the state has a monopoly on the use of force; the extent to which the state can control its borders; and whether the state is subject to external intervention by other states.¹⁶ With the rapidly expanding ungoverned territories, some territories of modern state system seem to be degenerating into Hobbesian pre-social and pre-political state of nature where life is solitary, short, brute, and nasty. Yet scholars like Menkhaus, Onwuzuruigbo, Lloyd, Whelan, Mitchell, among others have not agreed on what exactly constitutes ‘ungoverned spaces.’¹⁷ The ‘space’ in the concept provides room to broaden the concept, to include territorial land, outer space, cyberspace, maritime and airspace.¹⁸

For purposes of this article, ‘ungoverned space’ relates to land territory. The discussion in the paper may, however, touch on and apply other forms of such spaces. Still, ‘ungoverned spaces’ suggests an area that is experiencing a vacuum in political order, and requires either the insertion of new or the positioning of prior structures of governance.¹⁹ It refers to physical territory and the non-physical spaces in which effective state sovereignty and control is either absent or exists only partially.²⁰ Ungoverned spaces are described as areas of limited government control or territories of violence and insecurity, where states cannot exercise their full sovereignty.²¹ Others view ungoverned spaces to constitute those areas where state authority is contested by tribal, sectarian, or clan-based governance.²² In this sense, contested spaces or spaces of contestation can be considered as aspect of ungoverned spaces. These spaces are often characterised by limited government presence in terms of inadequate facilities and infrastructures including security infrastructure. Most of the border communities are considered too far away from the hinterlands or centre of state activities that they are marginalised from the state’s limited resources. Yet the focus has been on ‘forests of failure’ rather than trees.²³

Ungoverned spaces could also be areas characterised by persistent insurgencies, such as parts of the Sahara and of the Horn of Africa. However, it is worth emphasising that, insurgency

and/or conflict in most of the spaces in the parts of Africa cited here is not as generalised or widespread as the impression given in some literature and the media²⁴ —that it covers whole countries, regions or the entire African continent. Labels such as ‘conflict-ridden continent,’ ‘unstable Africa,’ ‘continent doomed by chaos,’²⁵ have become all too common a cliché that attempts to generalise localised and specific pockets of conflict in Africa. But insurgent groups like Al-Shabab in the Horn of Africa’s Somalia, for instance, only dominates the rural southern and central parts of the country.²⁶

Further, on the notion of ungoverned spaces, the Afghanistan/Pakistani borderlands is portrayed as an area characterised by multiple forms of government, where legal authority and state structures overlap, compete with one another and, sometimes, interpenetrate.²⁷ This multiplicity is depicted in the simultaneous presence of competing claims to authority from feudal warlords, religious militants, tribal chiefs, insurgents and state-sponsored local militias.²⁸ Only pockets of insurgency, in localised spaces, exist in the cited areas and most of the others where it occurs. Despite this, ungoverned spaces are often considered key threats to national and international security. And the international community is increasingly marking out such spaces for external interventions (by both armed and humanitarian groups and agencies).²⁹

Following the above conceptualisation, the notion of ungoverned spaces is conceived from two main perspectives. First, as areas of limited government control or state sovereignty. Second, as contested political spaces (not necessarily due to state incapacity) that transform into territories of violence and insecurity or frontiers of cross-border crimes and transnational terrorism.³⁰ In line with the former, ungoverned spaces are zones that lay beyond the reaches of the central government.³¹ In other words, spaces are considered ungoverned if they lack strong state control and if the social practices there defy state regulation. This view holds that, the more remote such areas are, the more vulnerable the inhabitants are to the lure of violent radicalisation and extremism. Even terrorist and insurgent groups like Al-Shabab and Boko Haram have leveraged on the weakness and limited reach of state institutions in such spaces to recruit and radicalise the local populace.³² This makes ungoverned spaces to be ‘safe havens’ for terrorists, where they can move freely, recruit, train, indoctrinate, radicalise and plan attacks. The spaces also provide the terrorists with access to weapons, avenue to launder money, and the ability to engage in illegal smuggling to generate income.³³

Ungoverned spaces, therefore, may have serious implications for peace and security as far as irregular or undocumented migration is concerned. This is because, this kind of migration makes use of areas, borders or frontiers that constitute unpoliced bush paths, as seen earlier.

The root causes of ungoverned spaces and fragile states in developing countries cannot be disassociated from the developed countries.³⁴ This is because of the contribution of the latter to the persistent state weaknesses in the South. The weaknesses are occasioned by the legacy of colonialism, by which colonial borders that were not coterminous with ethnic boundaries were created.³⁵ Against this backdrop, the notion of ungoverned spaces is employed in this paper so as to examine, first, whether or not there exists spaces beyond the control of the state on the borders and borderlands of West African states and, second, how this implicates irregular migration and security in the region. Hence this question, which is addressed in the following sections, can be asked. What is the connection between irregular migration and insecurity in West African border areas?

Irregular migration across West African ungoverned border spaces

International migration is the movement of people across borders to reside permanently or temporarily in a country other than their country of birth or citizenship. The migration can be regular/documented or irregular/undocumented. Irregular migration occurs outside the regulatory frameworks of origin, transit and destination countries. It is also called undocumented migration because it entails movement without any or all of these relevant or prerequisite travel documents. Irregular migration has become much more complex than the above conceptualisation. A migrant may be regular at the point of entry but becomes irregular once his/her documents or permitted stays expires. The implication being that irregular migration can be at the point of entry, transit, stay, or exit. However, irregular migration is difficult to quantify because it is not documented and thus it is often estimated based on deportation/repatriation and arrest records in the receiving countries.³⁶

In West Africa, migration is a consequence of history, conflict and war, tensions over land and property, human rights violations, epidemics or disease outbreaks, natural disasters, climate change and food insecurity.³⁷ The long, porous nation-state borders in the region only facilitate these movements. The borders are uncontrolled for the most part, making them ungoverned spaces or ‘unpoliceable’ by national governments. This raises the likelihood of

the borders becoming facilitators of significant levels of irregular migration. Such migration may also be propelled by the fact that, some nationals of the respective countries in West Africa do not possess travel documents. Because of this, the irregular migrants are considered 'illegal' by the authorities in destination countries. The migrants also tend to leave their countries without appropriate exit documents, besides exiting their own countries through routes other than officially designated border posts.³⁸ Significant border crossings thus occur irregularly because some migrants do not use official border crossings.

Given the various cross-borders movements including, the irregular crossings and continuous flow of seasonal migrants—herders and farmers—it is difficult to generate accurate estimates of the number of migrants in each West African country today. Seasonal migrants like herders and farmers are more likely to originate from Sahelian countries (such as Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Sudan) that face food shortages caused by recurrent droughts. During some of the years in which the droughts occurred in these areas (i.e., 1968, 1972, 1974, 1982 to 1985, and in 2012), people were temporarily forced to migrate from the Sahelian countries. Besides this, countries like Niger face multiple migration-related challenges, because they are at the crux of a range of migratory movements including, the temporary migration of Fulani herdsmen searching for greener pastures; the cross-border trafficking of children to work in gold mines; refugees on secondary movements; and migrants in transit who rely on the informal economic sector for survival, mostly around the Niger city of Agadez.³⁹ The point to underscore here, however, is that the levels of migration in West Africa are higher than official figures suggest, because those figures do not capture undocumented migrants.⁴⁰ And that, as the undocumented migration seems to appear across the long unguarded porous borders in the region, it increases the likelihood of turning these areas into ungoverned spaces.

This rapidly increasing irregular migration in West Africa is due to the fact that migratory patterns have changed overtime in the wake of high levels of youth unemployment, population growth, climate change, natural resource depletion, land scarcity, declining real incomes, and public sector cutbacks in response to structural adjustment programmes (in Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo, for example).⁴¹ The majority of migrants in West Africa are not highly educated and tend to work in the informal sector as traders, artisans, and farmers, and thus, are usually irregular migrants because they may be ignorant

of the regulation.⁴² Besides students, another category of migrants that are commonly found in the ECOWAS region are the unemployed and unemployable migrants who tend to be beggars and destitute, and hence, are often irregular migrants because they cannot afford the documents.⁴³ Others are categorised as criminals because they constitute drug pushers, foreign exchange racketeers, armed robbers and smugglers and are prohibited migrants under the law and as such deliberately avoid documentation.⁴⁴ These categories of migrants constitute the greater percentage of irregular migrants in West Africa.

To sum up, the picture painted in the foregoing discussion of increasingly complex migration dynamics including significant levels of undocumented migration across the undermanaged porous borders in West Africa underscores the heightened probability of these spaces being ungoverned. Irregular migration thrives in these spaces which raises security concerns in West African ungoverned border spaces.⁴⁵ In most West African states, ungoverned spaces are mainly the remotest fringe, peripheral or marginal areas bordered by different intra-regional and extra-regional countries with little or no state presence.⁴⁶ No doubt some of the West African countries have variously adopted temporary policy of border closure and securitization (in contravention of ECOWAS protocols) but lack the capacity to effectively police the borders. For instance, Nigeria has not been able to police her verse borders resulting in laundering of currency, smuggling of goods, movement of arms, and trafficking of drugs and persons across borders. Similarly, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso and Guinea-Bissau have not been in of their borders fuelling cycle of violent conflicts in that ungoverned borderlands of West Africa.

Irregular Migration, Ungoverned Border Spaces and Security Challenges in West Africa

A major possible immediate contributing factor to high levels of insecurity in West Africa is its ungoverned and porous borders, where migration is largely untracked. For example, the porosity of Nigeria's ungoverned borders has made it possible for influxes of undocumented migrants from neighbouring countries such as Benin and Niger.⁴⁷ These migrants, who are mostly young men, are some of the perpetrators of violent crimes in Nigeria.⁴⁸ Also, terrorists and cross-border criminal gangs may blend in with undocumented migrants whenever they cross borders. In other words, terrorists often leverage on the movement of undocumented migrants to migrate untracked, unnoticed and unsuspected to various West African

countries.⁴⁹ In some cases, large expanse of these borderlands are contested by various terrorist and militant groups, or even under the control of trans-border criminal networks and international terrorists. Given the porosity of these ungoverned territories, small arms and light weapons (SALW) are easily moved without restriction and sold cheaply in some crisis-ridden areas of the region. This contributes to further threats to peace and security in the region.⁵⁰

Even the privileges enshrined in the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement have been abused by some citizens of the region.⁵¹ That is, the opportunities provided by ECOWAS Protocol are abused by cross-border criminals. Owing to this, the incessant incidents of trans-border armed robbery (such as the networks of *Shina Rambo*, *Hammani Tidjani*, militant herders, etc.) and the proliferation of arms and drug trafficking have been largely responsible for insecurity in the region.⁵² The porosity of borders in West Africa as a result of the weak border security system in those (ungoverned) spaces has resulted in easy movement of weapons from other countries in the region into Nigeria and vice versa. Nigeria has approximately 70 percent of about 8 million illegal weapons in West Africa.⁵³ Thus, the proliferation and availability of SALW has enabled militant and criminal groups to have easy access to them.⁵⁴

The magnitude of the proliferation of such weapons in West Africa and respective countries becomes more evident when considered from a continental point of view. Out of the 640 million small arms illegally circulating globally, it is estimated that 100 million are in Africa. Of these, about 30 million are in sub-Saharan Africa, with 8 million in West Africa alone. Further, an estimated 79 percent of the small arms in Africa are in the hands of civilians.⁵⁵ The uncontrolled circulation of such weapons has a destabilising effect on West Africa. Some consequences of this and illegal access to the weapons include organised crimes. This contributes to higher incidences of armed robbery, maritime piracy, natural resource smuggling, kidnapping, terrorism, militancy and communal conflict.⁵⁶ The circulation or proliferation of the SALW, therefore, not only poses major security challenges but is increasingly undermining peace and security in the region.

The audacity of militants operating in West Africa grew with the proliferation of weapons in the Sahara-Sahel region following the destabilisation of Libya. Libyan arms first obtained by

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other mercenaries have been transferred to groups such as Ansar Dine, Boko Haram and Movement for Unity Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), and Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA), thereby emboldening and enabling them to mount more deadly attacks on Nigerians and citizens of other West African countries.⁵⁷ At the core of this, is the AQIM's attacks on West Africa as well as the tactical weapons and ideological support it extends to groups such as Ansar Al-Din (AAD), Ansaru, Boko Haram, and alongside other sleeper cells across the region. Terrorist groups hitherto considered as domestic groups such as Boko Haram, AQIM, militant Fulani herdsmen, MOJWA, and MUJWA, have successfully launched transnational attacks or struck at international targets in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal.⁵⁸

AQIM and its affiliated sleeper cells are behind several cases of kidnapping and the murder of Western tourists, aid workers, and soldiers, as well as attacks on government targets, security posts, and foreign diplomatic missions.⁵⁹ AQIM's ties with Mali Islamists have equally emboldened such groups to mount audacious attacks. Mali slipped into instability after the March 2012 *coup d'état* that created a power vacuum and gave operating room for the Tuareg National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), backed by several Islamist forces – AAD, AQIM, and MUJWA – to take control of nearly two-thirds of the country.⁶⁰ The MUJWA Islamists remain a security threat in West Africa with a number of bomb explosions in Mali. The MUJWA have also expanded their attacks into neighbouring countries, demonstrated by the May 23, 2013 twin suicide bombing in Niger. No fewer than 26, mostly Nigerien soldiers, were killed and about 30 injured.⁶¹ In Nigeria, by 2013, Boko Haram insurgency had resulted in more than 13,000 deaths, displacement of many and the destruction of hundreds of schools and churches.⁶²

Additionally, the gradual cross-border infiltration and expansion of Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah into West Africa are emerging concerns.⁶³ AQIM has since assisted Nigerian affiliates especially Boko Haram to carry out kidnappings. AQIM and Boko Haram had equally relied on bank robbery to generate funds for their sustenance and operations. The emergence of Boko Haram explains the sharp rise in bank robbery in Nigeria in recent years. In 2011 alone, about 100 bank installations were attacked, and over 30 of these were attributed to Boko Haram.

Terrorism is the most fundamental cause of insecurity in Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The 2020 Global Terrorism Index ranked these countries 3, 11, 12, and 24 of most terrorised countries in the world, respectively. Nigeria, Mali, and Burkina Faso are the only West African countries that featured prominently in the fifty worst terrorist attacks in 2019. In the case of Nigeria, on January 28, 2019, Boko Haram attacked Rann, Borno State where at least 60 people were killed and dozens were reported missing. On April 29, 2019, Boko Haram attacked in Kuda left 30 people dead, and subsequently, on June 16, 2019, Boko Haram bombing killed 34 people in Mandarari. On July 27, 2019, Boko Haram attacked a funeral in Badu, Nganzai, Borno, claiming the lives of 70 people. In Mali, on January 1, 2019, the Dozo militia killed a total of 37 people in an armed assault and kidnapping in Koulogo. On March 23, 2019, Dan na Ambassagou opened fire on the villages of Ogossogou and Welingara in Mopti leaving 167 people dead, and subsequently, on June 9, 2019, Fulani extremist group murdered a total of 35 people in an armed assault in Sobane Da. On September 30, 2019, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) raided military camps in Boulikessi and Mondoro in Mopti which left 53 dead. In Burkina Faso case, on October 8, 2019, Muslim extremist group killed 30 people in an armed assault in Oulfare. On November 6, 2019, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) bombed Tapoa district leaving 37 people dead. On a Christmas Eve (December 24, 2019), the same group attacked civilians and raided Arbinda, Sahel claiming the lives of 57 people.⁶⁴

Previously, between 2009 and 2012, the Boko Haram insurgency was responsible for the loss of more than 1000 lives in Northern Nigeria.⁶⁵ From 2009 to 2014, Boko Haram was responsible for the death of many and displacement of 2.3 million from their homes.⁶⁶ In 2011, the group carried out 115 attacks on villages, killing 550. Of the 2.3 million people displaced by Boko Haram insurgency from May 2013, at least 250,000 left Nigeria and fled into Cameroon, Chad or Niger. In 2014, Boko Haram killed over 6,600. Besides the killings, the group has conducted mass abductions, including the kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in April 2014 and 110 schoolgirls from the Government Technical Girls College in Dapchi, Yobe, on February 19, 2018. From March 2015 to August 2016, the splinter group was aligned with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant as a part of the Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP).⁶⁷ This partly explains why the Global Terrorism Index ranked Boko Haram as one of the world's deadliest or most violent terrorist groups in 2014

and 2015, killing more people than even the Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL).⁶⁸ As noted by Freedom Onuoha:

The implications of Boko Haram insurgency on regional security can be assessed from at least four dimensions, namely: the group's expansion in the form of recruitment, training, equipment and funding; its targeted violent cross-border attacks; transnational consequences of its operations; and a potential erosion of Nigeria's role as the de-facto leader of ECOWAS.⁶⁹

The MOJWA, an affiliate of AQIM, broke with AQIM in mid-2011 with the aim of spreading *jihad* further into areas of West Africa that were not within the scope of AQIM. On September 1, 2012, MOJWA took over the northern town of Douentza in central Mali, which had previously been held by a Songhai secular militia, the Ganda Iso in Northern Mali. MOJWA were also suspected of carrying out two car bombings in Niger on May 23, 2013.⁷⁰ The Nigerien government accused MOJWA of the kidnapping of American aid worker, Jeffery Woodke, on October 12, 2016.⁷¹

In the North of Mali, whose cross-border spread is facilitated by the ungoverned and porous borders in West Africa. Parts of West Africa, the Sahel, and North Africa are caught between the terrorist presence of the well-established AQIM and the new but quickly expanding ISIL.⁷² This has been made possible by the cross-border insecurity and the presence of ungoverned spaces in the region, as discussed in the preceding sections. For example, on October 6, 2015, there was an attack in the border region of Lake Chad where 11 soldiers were killed and 14 wounded in a pre-dawn cross-border infiltration. On the same day, 5 suicide bombers killed 33 people in a market in Baga Sola, a camp for Nigerian refugees. On November 1, 2015, two soldiers were killed at Kaika (Mali), and in an attempted suicide bombing at Bougouma (Burkina Faso), where two members of Boko Haram were neutralised and a third blew himself up, wounding 11 civilians. On December 5, 2015, three female suicide bombers killed about 30 people at a crowded market on the island of Koulfoua in Lake Chad.⁷³ The ungoverned spaces of the Malian borderlands and Sahara Desert coupled with the increasing number of terrorists and undocumented migrants seem to have worsened insurgency in the region.

Further, in Niger, on September 25, 2015, at least 15 civilians were massacred and stores were looted in a cross-border raid on a village of that country. On October 2, 2015, two

soldiers died and four were wounded in a Boko Haram attack on a village near the Nigerian border with Niger, in Niger's Diffa Province. On October 4, 2015, a policeman and five civilians were killed by 4 suicide bombers near the Nigerian border. Still near the same town of Diffa, two soldiers were killed by explosives while intercepting an attack on October 21, 2015. Diffa region hosts over 150,000 Nigerian refugees. At least 57 attacks occurred there from February to October 2015. On November 26, 2015, Boko Haram launched a cross-border night raid on Wogom village in Diffa province in which 18 villagers were killed.⁷⁴ The ungoverned borders of Niger and Nigeria, which experience a high rate of irregular migration and proliferation of SALW seem to have deepened insurgency in the region while terrorism seems to have, in turn, expanded the ungoverned territories of the Niger-Nigerian borders.

Nigeria, is by far the most affected by terrorism as the dominant form of violence in recent years. Boko Haram and ISIL, both of which operated in Nigeria included two particular groups that were responsible for half of the deaths attributed to terrorism worldwide in 2014.⁷⁵ In March 2015, a breakaway group of Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIL and called itself the ISWAP. Boko Haram has been connecting West and Central Africa through its violent activities. The group has taken advantage of weak state control of the borders between Niger and Nigeria to move fighters and weapons across countries.⁷⁶ All the accounts in the foregoing go to show that, the presence of ungoverned spaces in the border regions of West Africa might serve as facilitators of the cross-border spread of terrorist activities and the accompanying insecurity which has spread across states in the region. Also, the recent escalation in the rampaging and menace of undocumented Fulani migrant groups or armed Fulani herdsmen from Guinea, Senegal and Gambia to Nigeria, Niger, and Ghana provides another example of insecurity posed by irregular migration in West Africa.⁷⁷ From 1996 to 2006 about 121 people lost their lives in Bauchi and Gombe States in Nigeria, as a result of conflicts between pastoralists and farmers. In Northern Ghana, such conflicts have led to the destruction of crops, and farmers have suffered huge losses.⁷⁸

Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso too experience cross-border raids and attacks based on pastoral disputes between cattle herders and settler farmers.⁷⁹ Some of these herders are involved in criminal activities, as they reportedly invaded some places in Lagelu Local Government of Oyo State (Nigeria) and stole goods and cash worth 500,000 Naira.⁸⁰ Unsurprisingly, the

2015 Global Terrorism Index ranked Fulani militia as the fourth deadliest militant group in the world, with a record killing of about 1,229 people in 2014.⁸¹ The conclusion therefore is that, the irregular intra-regional cross-border migration seems to have been enhanced by the presence of ungoverned spaces especially on the border zones and, consequently, worsened the security challenges in the West African region.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that there has been historically large human mobility along West African large expanse of ungoverned border spaces. However, more of these movements are undocumented and may pose security challenges. Irregular migration along these ungoverned border spaces could facilitate terrorism and contribute to the proliferation of, among other things, human smuggling and human trafficking, money laundering, drug trafficking, and trafficking and trade in SALW. West Africa is thus confronted with possible serious security challenges, which appear to flourish because of the ungoverned spaces in the cross-border areas of the region. The article therefore concluded that the irregular intra-regional cross-border migration seems to have been enhanced by the presence of ungoverned spaces especially on the border zones and, consequently, worsened the security challenges in the West African region. But it also argued that the root causes of ungoverned spaces, fragile states, porous colonial borders, and security challenges in West Africa cannot be disassociated from the developed countries.

The insights that this article casts on issues of cross-border migration is that, borders can be a source of both negative and positive outcomes, suggesting that, borders need to be managed or properly governed as a resource which can unleash cooperation, development and security. In West Africa, the existence of informal networks of cross-border irregular migration which have predated colonialism, survived colonialism and post-colonial bordering and re-bordering are a resource which may need to be effectively managed to enhance cross-border security, given that these networks have easily fallen into the hands of criminal elements, which seem to have created ungoverned spaces. The implication of this is that, confronting the issues of insecurity in the West African region is just as much the responsibility of cross-border state collaboration as it is of the cross-border collaboration of non-state actors such as migrants, among others. It is suggested that, such an approach could contribute towards reducing ungoverned spaces in the cross-border regions of this part of West Africa. But, the challenge

still remains of how these non-state actors could be mobilised such that, they successfully collaborate with state-led cross-border security initiatives. This is an area which provides an avenue for further research and should chart a clear trajectory of how the state and non-state actors in the ungoverned spaces in the borderlands of West Africa could effectively and successfully work towards the enhancement of security in the region.

Notes

1. Pham, *Securing strategic gulf*, 23.
2. Musah, *West Africa: Governance*, 31.
3. Lamptey, *Rethinking border management*, 7.
4. Omilusi, 'Transnational threats and security,' 11.
5. Achieng and El Fadil, 'on African migration?' 3.
6. Abebe and Mugabo, 'Migration and security,' 146.
7. Hovy, Laczko and Kouassi, 'African migration: trends,' 18.
8. Yaro, *Migration West Africa*, 9.
9. Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro, 'Security challenges in Nigeria,' 81.
10. Hazen and Horner, *Small Arms, and Insecurity*, 14.
11. De Haas, *myth irregular migration*, 8; Shaw, *Migration in Africa*, 16; Adepoju, 'Migration West Africa,' 37.
12. Adebuseyi, *Migration and Regional Integration*, 41.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Taylor, 'Thoughts on ungoverned spaces,' 7.
16. Rabasa and Peters, 'Understanding lack of governance,' 15.
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