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POST-COLD WAR AFRICA AND THE PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS: THE NIGER DELTA EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Contemporary Africa, particularly since the end of the Cold War, has been confronted with the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), which threatens human security and social life. In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the availability and unregulated use of SALW have influenced the dynamics of militancy, criminality, communal conflicts and violent electoral politics with implications for peace, security and stability. Based on a historical approach to data collection and analysis and the Marxist political economy theory, this article draws on the Niger Delta experience to revisit the debate on the spread of small arms in post-Cold War Africa. It examines small arms proliferation in the Niger Delta in the broader context of the political economy of small arms trade, highlighting how three interconnected factors of the transatlantic slave trade, oil-palm trade and the crude oil trade of the post-Cold War had historically shaped the dynamics of arms proliferation in the region. The main argument is that while demand and supply dynamics are not mutually exclusive in explaining arms spread, the Niger Delta experience raises questions of continuity and change in the international political economy of small arms trade, arms control and arms proliferation rather than the imperatives of domestic demands. These findings suggest that policies of SALW control must pay attention to supply dynamics while also addressing the motivations for demand.

Key Words: Small arms, arms proliferation, arms control, arms trade, supply-side analysis, Demand-side analysis

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Introduction

The literature on small arms proliferation in post-Cold War Africa has tended to emphasize the linkage between the *New Wars* and the dynamics of arms spread. For Kaldor (1999; 2013), the nature of funding war efforts, the nature of combatants and the goals they seek distinguish the new wars from the conventional warfare, which is organized, sponsored and fought by regular state armies. Akin to the greed and grievances theorization, Kaldor's argument suggests that dependence on resource predation for financing war activities and rebellion including arming conflict is central to the acquisition and proliferation of sophisticated weaponry in post-Cold War Africa. Badmus (2010:323*)* captures this dialectics in the context of the Niger Delta when he describes political rebellion in the region as "oiling the guns and gunning for oil." Indeed, the tendency towards conflict entrepreneurship rather than collective liberation struggle by insurgents, warlords or rebels is intricately bound to the evolution and escalation of warfare, violent conflicts and the rising demand for Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) by the non-state actors. In other words, the political economy of conflicts underpins the internal structural imperatives of the demand for weapons by warlords, rebels and insurgent groups rather than supply-side dynamics (Collier and Hoeffler 2004). Furthermore, this proliferation dynamics has been made more problematic in the sense that the end of the Cold War witnessed a dramatic and structural shift in the nature of warfare from interstate armed conflicts to civil wars and terrorism in which the main actors have been non-state armed groups and SALW have been the primary means of combat (Boutwell, Klare and Reed, 1999).

Interestingly, accessibility to, and demand for weapons raise important questions of arms supply and arms transfer, suggesting that both demand and supply are not mutually exclusive in explaining the proliferation of SALW. At the same time, there is no doubt that the end of the Cold War marked an important phase in the destabilizing impact of SALW spread and diffusion in the African continent. Nevertheless, the privileging of demand in existing scholarships overlooks supply-side dynamics and its impact on arms proliferation and insecurities in Africa that predated the Cold War. Since precolonial times, Africa has encountered the influx of European guns, which has recently been compounded by the complexities and forces of

economic globalization. More specifically, the spread of firearms as items of export trade in Africa has been influenced largely by the European intrusion in Africa through the slave trade, colonialism and Cold War politics. More importantly, the legacies of thesehistorical conditions and structures of domination and oppression have also influenced Africa's current arms control architecture in such a way that they pose serious challenges for effectiveness and legitimacy with implications for further proliferation (Grip, 2015). Unfortunately, as Grip (2015, p.79) has observed, "Almost across the board, recent studies of small arms proliferation and policy in Africa seem to have disengaged from historical data and analysis."

This article contextualizes the Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region in small arms proliferation, highlighting the limitations of the demand-side analysis in our understanding small arms spread in post-Cold War Africa. It situates SALW proliferation in the Niger Delta region within the context of the international political economy of arms transfer. The aim is to interrogate how three interrelated factors of the transatlantic slave trade, oil-palm trade and more recently, the crude oil trade of the post-Cold war have historically shaped the supply dynamics of small proliferation and the character of arms control in the region.

The article proceeds in six main sections, beginning with the introduction. Section two reviews the broad literature on the social determinants of small arms proliferation, interrogating the arguments of the relationship between the post-Cold War and SALW proliferation in Africa. The rest of the sections addresses the questions of methodology and change and continuity in small arms transfer and arms proliferation rather than demands in the Niger Delta based on the historical analysis of spread associated with the slave trade, oil-palm trade and the crude oil trade of the post-Cold war.

Literature Review

The literature on small arms proliferation is broadly divided into demand and supply-side perspectives. Supply-side analysis focuses on the manufacture and trade in small arms and the resultant policy interventions often seek the regulation and control of production, management of stockpiles, effective policing of borders and containing and reducing illicit trafficking and flows.

The predominant view is that small arms exports or transfers are of critical importance in understanding and addressing availability and proliferation dynamics including the issue of recirculation (Stavrianakis, 2016; Erickson 2015ab; Feinstein, 2011; Lumpe, 2000; Boutwell, Klare, and Reed, 1995; Laurance, 1992; Singh, 1995; Klare, 1999; Wood and Peleman, 1999). Muggah and Sang (2013) underscore this critical element of domestic supply in Africa when they argue that rather than international transfers accounting for diffusion, increasing domestic production capacities of African states and non-state actors must be taken seriously. Indeed, these emergent critical actors in Africa constitute the enemy within. In other words, Muggah and Sang (2013, 422) argue that "weapons and ammunition made in Africa are increasingly being used by Africans."

On the other hand, the demand-side perspective emphasizes reasons for the acquisition of weapons. And when issues underpinning motivations are disaggregated and analysed in the existing studies on Africa, such factors as state fragility, predatory role of rebels, criminality, safety and protection imperatives, and underdevelopment have been highlighted. Most prominent articulation of this view in the Niger Delta include Badmus (2010); Watts (2008); Abubakar (2007); Hazen and Horner (2007); Ikonta (2006); Ajakorotu and Okeke (2006; Ibeanu and Mohamed (2006); Ikelegbe (2005; 2001) Ibeanu (2002; Okonta and Oronto (2001). These studies are important in their focus, especially in highlighting the motivation structures of arms acquisition by militant and criminal groups, and other non-state actors in the region. Nevertheless, they tend to reinforce the prevailing view that conceives and presents small arms in the Niger Delta as a new or emerging security threat of the post-Cold War world driven by demands. This kind of analysis affects our understanding and approach to tackling small arms (Grip, 2015), not the least because it ignores the wider historical and international context of supply dynamics of SALW spread in the region. This article fills this gap in the literature by analyzing how historical dynamics of supply rather demand is crucial to understanding the challenges of small proliferation in the Niger Delta.

Theoretical framework for analysis

This article draws on the Marxist political economy approach to explain the historical determinants of supply-side dynamics of small arms proliferation in the Niger Delta, highlighting the point that the post-Cold War era marked a phase in the continuous spread of SALW in the region, which began since precolonial times. Rooted in Marxian dialectical materialism, the political economy approach emphasizes the primacy of economic factor in the understanding of social life because it underlies and shapes the emergence, nature and character of other institutions of society. But, the decisiveness of the economic system in the evolution of the social, political and cultural structures does not in any way suggest it works in isolation of the latter. Indeed, the dynamic character of reality implies that the economic, political, social and cultural systems are interdependent in complex ways. Central to the foregoing, is the view that political economy studies social phenomena from a holistic point of view, basing explanation not only on economic forces but also including political, social, cultural and historical variables (Ake, 1981).

The relevance of the political economy approach to this article lies in its comprehensiveness and dialectical logic. It helps to analyse SALW proliferation in the Niger Delta within the context of the logic and dialectics of the international political economy in terms of how specific historical conditions and relationships of exploitation shaped the supply of weapons in the region by European states as far back as the 15th century. In fact, preindustrial economy of Europe in the 16th century generated contradictions that led to the evolution of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Britain was the leading European state in the importation of slaves from Africa, particularly West Africa, where the Niger Delta featured prominently. Some estimates suggest that British vessels transported millions of African slaves making up about 26% of the total transported slaves from the West African coast between 1662 and 1807 (Siddiqui, 2020). Most of these slaves were shipped to the Caribbean and were forced to work on plantations rather than as domestic servants (Siddiqui, 2020).

Furthermore, the slaves were violently secured, using weapons introduced by the European traders. Another contradiction was that while the slave trade contributed to the economic prosperity, capital accumulation, industrial transformations and the rise of Britain, it resulted in the depopulation, death, and the proliferation of small arms and violence in West Africa including the Niger Delta (Siddiqui, 2020). Yet, the dynamics of firearms proliferation and its associated violence did not end in the Niger Delta with the abolition of the inhuman trade in 1807. Rather, they were consolidated during the era of the so-called legitimate trade in palm oil and palm kernel and intensified with evolution of the crude oil economy in the 1970s. This is because small arms continue to play a significant role in the different trade. In the era of the crude oil economy, Transnational Oil Companies established their own Police security systems and armed them to protect their facilities. These security outfits like the Shell and Agip police has its own logic of arms proliferation.

Data sources and method of analysis

This article relies extensively on secondary data sources: books, journal articles, reports and the internet. It pays particular attention to historical data, especially in relation to statistical analysis of slave imports from the Niger Delta based largely on Inikori's 1977 work. Indeed, by relying on historical data and adopting the historical method of data analysis, the article provides better insights into how the changing dynamics and dictates of the global economy impact arms spread in the Niger Delta. This is particularly the case, for example, in relation to understanding and analyzing what the end of the Cold War means for SALW supply, control and its ineffectiveness in the Niger Delta, given the centrality of the oil economy to Nigeria as well the role and activities of Transnational Oil Companies in its extraction and production in the region. Yet, the end of the Cold War did not necessarily translate into the end of history as Fukumaya (1992) has argued. Instead, the rise and proliferation of non-state-groups, the privatization of violence as well as the supply of small arms by states and non-state actors for profit and socio-political reasons became one of the central elements and features of post-Cold War politics with negative implications for small arms spread and global collective security. What this suggests regarding the historical method of data analysis as Anikpo (1986, p. 37) has argued is that "the regularities

and internal consistencies that point to specific explanatory principles are brought to sharper focus" in understanding a social phenomenon. Beginning from the slave trade era to the oil palm period and crude as detailed in the analysis in the subsequent sections, the regularities of the intersection of small arms supply and proliferation are historical realities that define the Niger Delta experience in small arms availability and the nature of control policies in the region.

Slave Trade, Small Arms Control and Arms Proliferation in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is widely known for its rich deposits of oil and gas. As the hub of oil production in Nigeria, the region also suffers from internal and external contradictions of oil politics, underdevelopment, violent conflicts, environmental degradation and mercantilist activities of Transnational Oil Companies. By its geographical location, the Niger Delta is interspersed with creeks and rivers that are linked to the Atlantic Ocean, making it one of the important centres of international shipping and commerce in Nigeria. It is against these backgrounds, particularly the strategic geographical significance that the phenomenon of slave trade and the externalities of small arms and violence it generated in the region can be analytically appreciated.

It has been noted by studies that between the 15th and 19th centuries, the transatlantic slave trade integrated Africa, especially West Africa, into a global military and economic context, mainly through the transfer of European firearms to Africa in exchange for slaves (Grip, 2015:80, see also Dike, 1956:5-6; Inikori, 1977:362-368). In fact, five firearms were supplied by the European traders to the coastal slave traders in West Africa in exchange for a human being, and most of the weapons were also of poor quality (Inikori 1977:354). Accordingly, political economy motivations defined the triangular transatlantic trade between Africa, Europe and the Americas as human beings were considered mere commodities to barter for European mirrors, handkerchiefs, walking sticks, drinks, padlocks and particularly guns. This was true of the Niger Delta and most African slave trading states of Ghana, Sierra Leone, Angola and Senegambia. Although the Niger Delta whose transatlantic trade ports of Bonny, Degema and Calabar was a late comer to the transatlantic slave trade, it became the most important centre of transshipment by volume (Inikori, 1977:349).

Firearms such as the cannon guns had been introduced into the Niger Delta by the Portuguese traders in the early 15th century. However, the quantity of firearms brought into the region was small in comparison with the era of trans-Atlantic slave trade. It was not until the second half of the 18th century that a large quantity of firearms was exported to the Niger Delta, exports that were directly connected to the transatlantic slave trade. Inikori's study (1977:362) of British official export records suggests that the quantity of firearms imported from England into West Africa in the late 18th century ranged "between 283,000 and 394,000 guns per year." Inikori (1977:362) further notes: "between 1796 and 1805, more than 1.6 million guns were imported into West Africa from England alone." Furthermore a comparative analysis of the import of firearms from Europe amongst the slave trading states of West Africa shows that the Bonny trading area of the Niger Delta was the highest importer of weapons during the late 18th century as a result of the transatlantic slave trade. As Inikori (1977:358) puts it, "not only did the Bonny trading area import more guns absolutely than other parts of West Africa, but also, it imported far more guns for every slave exported." More specifically for Bonny, at least 16,000 slaves were estimated to have been exported annually (Watts, 2008:63b). The countries that were involved in the slave trade in West Africa include: Britain, Portugal, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and the USA.

With regard to the nature of international firearms control during the era of the transatlantic slave trade and its implications for weapons proliferation, it is noted that European arms control system was characterized by limited export control. It was also generally weak, a weakness that was influenced primarily by politics and trade (Grip, 2015:85-85). This was well illustrated by the double standard role and contradictory activities of Portugal in relation to Firearms control during the period under consideration. For instance, by the 16th century, Portuguese arms control legislation forbade the sale of firearms to non-Christians based on politico-religious reasons (Kea, 1971). This law, perhaps, may have influenced its limited supply of firearms to Coastal West Africa at the time, the seizure of smuggled firearms off the coast of Benin as well the stoppage of Spanish arms trading ship in the region (Kea, 1971:186). Paradoxically, however, it was the Portuguese that armed several fortified trading stations with firearms in the region with a view to protecting themselves from possible attacks from other European and African rulers

(Kea 1971:186). Ostensibly, therefore, this action was taken by the Portuguese to protect their commercial interests in the slave trade. Similar observation has been made of Britain by Inikori (1977:339):

> In the eighteenth century, it was a regular practice for the government in England to prohibit the exportation of firearms and ammunition in war-time. But, because these dangerous commodities formed the backbone of English trade to West Africa at this time, the merchants in the trade regularly petitioned the government in times of war to grant them special licences which made West Africa an exception to the general law.

In fact "one way of circumventing the export control by British merchants was by framing the exports as if they would not constitute a military threat to the exporting state, while being economically important"(Grip, 2015:86). The implication of this is that the pressures mounted by the 'merchants of death,' many of whom were based in Bristol and Liverpool at the time, were the main motivations for the British government's relaxation of its own legislation aimed at regulating the weapons trade. This again emphasizes the fact that the key challenge to effective compliance to international small arms agreements by states lies in balancing the trade-offs between normative aspirations and economic and strategic interests. In other words, it speaks to the point that when market and politics meet norms of arms control, the former tends to take precedence. British weak regulation of firearms was also evident in the failure of the 1890s embargo on firearms to check the export of firearms into West Africa even after the slave trade had been officially outlawed (Nwokeji, 2010:196).

More broadly, the overall weakness of international firearms control measures during the period is amply demonstrated in the ineffectiveness of the Brussels Act of 1890 to checkmate weapons flow to the coastal communities in the Niger Delta and West Africa as a whole. It should be noted that in July 1890, 13 European states including the Congo Free State,Persia, the USA and Zanzibar adopted the 'Convention Relative to the Slave Tradeand Importation into Africa of Firearms, Ammunition, and Spirituous Liquors'otherwise called The Brussels Act (Grip, 2015:91). The primary objective of the Brussels Act of 1890 was to combat slave trade as well as restrict "the importation of firearms from the middle of the Sahara to present-day Namibia and

Zimbabwe, especially with regard to the breech-loadertechnology, gunpowder and ammunition" (Grip, 2015:91).

However, while the Brussels Act was adoptedto prevent further slave trading activities following the ban of slave trade in 1807, the timing of the Act tends to suggest that its motivations were purely imperial than humanitarian (Grip, 2015:91).This is because different motivations and agendas of the state parties that conflicted with the goals of the Act impeded its effective implementation. For example, "while the Act required effective guarantees for certain exports to sub-Saharan Africa, flint-lock guns and gunpowder were exempted from the regulation"(Beachey, 1962:712). Yet, gunpowder was very crucial to the execution of the slave trade as the records of the firearms imported by Bonny from Britain indicate (Inikori, 1977: 353). Furthermore, in the Niger Delta, firearms continue to flow into the region in the 19th century, not the least, because like the slave trade, weapons continued to be an indispensable factor in the conduct of the legitimate palm oil and palm kernels trade that replaced the slave trade, as evident in the arms acquisition patterns of the War Canoe Houses and Palm oil merchants. On the whole, it can be concluded that "in spite of the Brussels Act, the small arms supplies to Africa continued" (Grip, 2015:91).

The cumulative impact of this weak regulation of firearms trade, which was underpinned by profit motivations, commercial and strategic calculations, was the export and widespread diffusion of arms into the coastal states involved in the slave trade with little or no consideration of human security and its moral ramifications. And besides the weak prevailing international systems of firearms control in the 18th and 19th centuries, which encouraged unaccountable arms transfer, some of the major effects of the transatlantic trade on arms control and availability in the slave trading and slave gathering states of the Niger Delta need to be highlighted.

The transatlantic slave trade underlined the militarization of both the slaving states and non-slaving communities in the region. In slaving city-states like Bonny, Nembe, Elem Kalabari, Okrika and Andoni, individual local coastal slave merchants acquired more firearms to enable them capture more slaves violently (Watts, 2008b:70). This in itself reinforced "the slave-gun

cycle theory according to which the states and individuals or groups of individual slave gatherers bought more firearms to capture more slaves to buy more firearms…." (Inikori, 1977:351).

It has been stated earlier that Bonny's volume of importation and acquisition of firearms and gun powder far exceeded any other slave trading states in West Africa. The mutually reinforcing statistical correlation between armed violence and armed kidnapping of slaves in the context of Bonny may be attributable to the following reasons. First, as Dike (1956:25-29) has argued, the population of Bonny was largely made up of slaves of Igbo origins rather than freeborn. King DappaPepple of Bonny, for instance, was of Igbo descent. To this end, when the population of Bonny is taken into consideration as comprising primarily of slaves as well as the fact that Bonny was the leading market for the sale of slaves in the Niger Delta, the dynamics of the higher level of firearms importation seems inevitable. This is because slaves must be acquired, secured and protected, and this required weaponry. Second, the higher level of firearms flow into Bonny may be due to the fact that the indigenous slave merchants in Bonny were involved in local firearms trading in the region as well. As Jalloh and Falola (2002:53) have noted, "the coastal merchants were not only dealers in captives; they were also large-scale traders in textile, in firearms …."

What this means is that Bonny emerged as the centre of both intraregional supply and the importation of firearms in the Niger Delta. Third, Bonny may also have acquired more arms to defend its spheres of influence in the transatlantic slave trade market, especially the hinterland markets in order to secure its preeminent position in the inhuman trade. Bonny's wars with the Andoni between 1702 and 1708, and again in 1846, were directly related to the struggle by Bonny to access the hinterland slave and palm oil trade routes of Ndoki and the Ibibio, which the Andoni controlled (Enemugwen, 2000:108-109). Bonny also fought with Kalabari within this period (Jones, 1963). These wars were also incited by the European slave traders because they provided an opportunity for capturing of more slaves (Enemugwen, 2000:108).Finally, weapons that passed through the Bonny seaport did not necessarily end up there. One of the major destinations of the arms imported into Bonny was Arochokwu, a state notorious for violent kidnapping, capturing and trafficking of slaves that were sold primarily in Bonny.

Similarly, as in the slaving city-states, the slave trade fueled the acquisition of firearms in slave gathering states like the Aro community in the hinterland, which were the main supplier of slaves to the coastal state of Bonny. It enabled the Aros who were the major interior middlemen to arm hired professional warriors of Igboland such as the Abam, Abiriba, Awharwfia and Edda to capture more slaves for export. It also enabled the Aros to resist and defend themselves against their neighbouring communities, which were raided to capture slaves (Dike 1956:39). Yet, the communities from which slaves were captured also acquired weapons in order to defend themselves effectively against the invasions and onslaught of dreaded slave-gathering states like the Aro. Paradoxically, therefore, the slave trade contributed immensely to the militarization of both the slave states and slave gathering communities in complex ways that weapons procurement emerged as a central defining feature of the affected coastal communities in the Niger Delta and the hinterlands.

Indeed, by its very nature, slave gathering was inherently a violent enterprise. It often provoked inter-territorial conflicts in different ways that make the features of militarization very complex. In the second half of the 19th century, the Aro long juju, for instance, was transformed culturally into an instrument for slave capturing. This cultural and structural change in Arochukwu contributed to the development and advancement of the military and economic capacity of the Arochukwu people, which was built on firearms and gun powder and its supposedly supernatural oracular power rather than machetes (Nwokeji, 2010:193-196;Cookey, 1974:7 Dike, 1956:39). Yet, the Aro also engaged several communities in wars as a result of the slave trade and this reinforced a vicious cycle of violence. Therefore, weapons were very critical to the security and expansion of the Aro state. Generally, the transatlantic slave trade altered the institutional structure, character and organization of warfare, war making, war fighting, including state formation process of the coastal slaving states of the Niger Delta and the gathering states in the hinterlands with implications for arms proliferation.

The coastal communities also suffered immense socio-political, economic and demographic dislocations. Even the final collapse of slave trade in the 1830s and the corresponding growth of palm oil commodity export trade in the Niger Delta did not insulate the affected coastal

communities from the culture of violence and insecurity that has been associated with firearms availability during the slave trade era. Instead, "warfare became more frequent and more deadly as, among other factors, old slave trading elites resisted the challenge of the power groups that emerged from the new economy" (Nwokeji, 2000:201). Advancing a similar argument Watts (2008b:71) has noted that "in the wake of the establishment of a British Consulate in Fernando Po in 1849 to, among other things, protect new British commercial interests in palm oil, the British attacked recalcitrant slave trading states such as Old Calabar and Bonny who continued to participate in the trade." Generally, it can be argued that "the seeds of a much longer era of socio-political, economic and cultural transformation, more for evil than good, had been planted" by the phenomenon of slave trade (Tamunu, 2011:2). Again, this violence did not end with slave trade because of the violent nature of the succeeding oil palm trade and oil palm economy.

In considering the trajectory and patterns of international arms transfer and arms proliferation associated with trade in the Niger Delta, the transatlantic slave trade was a key event in the history of the region and Africa at large.

The Impact of Oil Palm Trade on Small Arms Transfer and Arms Proliferation

Just as the transatlantic slave trade contributed to the growth of Western capitalism and industrialization between the 15th and 19th centuries, so did the oil palm and palm kernel trade in the Niger Delta. The palm oil trade rose rapidly in the middle of the 19th century as the new legitimate trade that replaced the slave trade. It became the new source of raw materials for the emerging companies in the fast industrializing European world, especially Britain in the production of soap, margarine, vegetable oil and lubricants for manufacturing companies. Like the slave trade, an analysis of the oil exports of selected coastal regions: Gold Coast, Dahomey, Porto-Novo, Lagos and the Niger Delta between 1780 and 1870 suggests that the Niger Delta was the highest in the history of palm oil exports from the coastal trading states in Africa to Europe (Manning, 1969:283). The oil palm trade also bore some significant but familiar characteristics and resemblances of the slave trade in key respects, especially, within the context of armed violence and arms proliferation. Dictated largely by the external dynamics of the evolving European industrial capitalism at the time, the palm oil and palm kernel trade was as

violent in nature as the slave trade. In this regard, weapons acquisition, arms availability and deployment played a crucial role in the organization and management of the oil palm trade either on the side of the British companies involved in the trade such as the Royal Niger Company (RNC) or the Niger Delta indigenous merchants and middlemen.

On the part of the European companies, the rise of Consular jurisdiction, authority and power in the Bight of Biafra and Benin beginning from 1849 saw the gradual but direct penetrations into the hinterland and involvement of the European companies in the palm oil trade such as the RNC (Tamunu, 2011:43-56; Dike, 1956:15-18). The RNC had evolved from the National African Company (NAC), an association of Europeans traders, which was formed in 1879 to articulate and advance their commercial interests in the region. It was later granted a charter by the British government in 1886 both to trade in and govern the Niger Delta. In this capacity, the RNC threatened the traditional inland markets of other indigenous traders and merchants in oil palm in the Niger Delta through its discriminatory trade policies. One of the key grievances expressed by the Nembe people in their presentation to British official Inquiry into the cause of the Akassa War of 1895 was that the company introduced several obnoxious trade regulations and policies that undermined their rights to engage in free trade in the region. The Nembe people specifically drew the attention of the British Consul to the provisions of the 1886 Treaty that the British government signed with them, which guaranteed free trade. They, therefore, queried why the RNC should exclude them from the palm oil trade. This is because by that time, the British had through the RNC exercised monopoly authority over their interior market and palm produce trade (Tamunu, 2011:50-51; Enemugwem, 2000:155). Contradictorily, however, it was the attempt by the Niger Delta kings and merchants such as King Jaja of Opobo to monopolise the oil palm trade as middlemen, as it was the case during the slave trade era, that he was dethroned and exiled by the British government. Other kings as detailed below suffered similar fate.

Indeed, the powerful monopoly of the RNC produced violence and counter violence, which was sustained and reinforced by the military and imperial might of Britain. For example, unlike the slave trade era where the European traders could penetrate the hinterlands and directly acquire slaves, the penetration of the hinterlands and direct involvement of British companies in the oil

palm trade were facilitated by the imperial gunboat. The ultimate aim of the British government was to secure and protect the oil markets to its imperial advantage through political and military strategies including the use of force (gunboat diplomacy) to end all attempts or any form of monopoly created by the indigenous middlemen and merchants to control the palm oil and palm kernel trade. The first casualty of the growth and demonstration of consular power, as evident in armed confrontations with Niger Delta kings and merchants who opposed and resisted the British attempt at the so-called liberalization of the oil trade and more broadly, the penetration and colonization of the Niger Delta, was King William DappaPepple of Bonny. He was deposed as King in 1854 and deported to "Fernando Po, Ascension Island and Britain in turn" (Tamunu, 2011:55). Other prominent Niger Delta kings and merchants who were also dethroned and banished for their nationalist activities and resistance to British discriminatory and imperial trade policies include: King Jaja of Opobo in 1887, King Nana Olomu of Itsekiri in 1894, Ibanichuka of Okrika in 1896 and Ovonramwem of Benin in 1897 (Alagoa, 1995:15).

Each of the above nationalists had adopted strategies that sought to preserve and promote the sovereignty of their states as well as their commercial interests. Also, in key respects, the ability of these early nationalists to acquire and maintain access to foreign-made weapons show the ineffectiveness of international arms control, especially when considered against the backdrop of the Brussels Act of 1890, which forbade the sale of firearms to Africa as noted earlier. Indeed, the successful mobilization and deployment of 31 well armed Canoe Houses by King Koko to attack the RNC depot in Nembe in January 1895 (Alagoa, 1995:8-9; Tamunu, 2011:53), may raise the question: where does such firepower come from? One possible answer can be located in the legacies of previous arms acquired by the slave merchants of Nembe during the slave era. As has been noted earlier, Nembe was one of the major slave trading states and export terminals in the Niger Delta during the era of the transatlantic trade. For example, archival records of the British Foreign Office show that British trading ships transporting slaves from Nembe to Britain was named NV Nembe (Enemugwen, 2000). In the era of palm oil trade, Nembe also emerged as a major participant and a trading centre in the Niger Delta as evident in the establishing of the RNC's oil palm depot in Bembe by the British authorities. The possibility of rearming by

Nembecannot be ruled out, especially since the transportation of oil palm produce to Bonny terminal required armed protection against sea pirates and attacks.

Furthermore, internally driven dynamics, such as rivalries between merchants and communities involved in the oil palm business, made the trade in firearms and ammunition, one of the most profitable throughout the 19th century (Ikime, 1968:5). In fact, "the possibility of war was only one reason why the Itsekiri trading canoes were armed, and why special canoes capable of carrying forty paddlers and a hundred of fighting men were designed primarily for war" (Ikime, 1968: 5). Making specific reference to the predatory activities of the Ijaw on the Itsekiri oil palm traders, Ikime (1968:6) notes:

> The Ijo seem to have been a terror to canoes in this area. In 1856 and again in 1857, the British Consul had to take out war ships against the Ijo because they had ventured in great force within sight of English factories and committed great depredations, capturing several canoes with cargoes of palm oil, making captives of their crew.

Thus, military confrontations on the Niger Delta trade merchants and Kings by British navy, and the counter resistance posed by the local kings themselves, as well as armed conflicts amongst the oil trading communities such as the case of the Itsekiri and Urhobo resulted in the militarization of the Niger Delta and further proliferation of firearms in the region. Citing R. Burton, Dike (1956: 107) captures the nature and extent of arms availability and proliferation within the state of Bonny alone in 1864, a time that Bonny was considered comparatively peaceful:

> …in the case of a fight at Bonny each House would be able to raise 2,500 musketeers and that the city-state possessed 'abundance of ammunition, ships swivels and carronades and when hostilities break out they will be equally bloody to the natives, and injurious, if not dangerous to the Europeans.

In fact, the quantity of firearms recovered from King Nana's house upon his death in 1894 after the British offensive against him, as indicated in the table 4.1 below reveals that SALW transfer, firearms accumulation and weapons diffusion were an important issue to contend with in the era of the palm oil trade. See list of Munitions of War captured on the fall of Ebrohimi as follows:

S/N	ARMS	S/N	AMMUNITION
1	106 cannon, from 3-prs to 32-prs.	1	1,640 kegs of powder, over 14 tons.
2	445 heavy swivel blunder-busses, about half of them brass.	2	500 zinc cylinder case-shot, filled.
3	640 long Dane guns		500 bamboos cylinder case-shot, filled.
4	1, 151 short flint-lock and cap guns.	4	1000 or more, bamboo cylinders, ready for fillings, of all calibres, to suit the cannon.
5	17 cases of short swords.	5	14 kegs of small round shot.
6	5 large swivel of mountings for small cannon.	6	540-gallon iron pots of balls of various sizes
7	10 Revolvers, various calibres.	7	2 cases Snider ammunition, about 1,600 rounds.
		8	5 cases machine gun ammunition, containing 36 feeders filled ready with 43 rounds in each-1, 548 rounds.
		9	1 case, containing 5 empty feeders for machine-gun.
		10	2, 500 rounds solid-dawn machine-gun-ammunition.
		11	300 rounds of Eley revolver cartridges, various calibres.

Source: ObariIkime (1968). *The Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta*, p.202.

Post-Cold War Crude Oil Trade, Arms Transfer and SALW Diffusion

Crude oil was discovered in commercial quantity in the Niger Delta in 1958 and emerged as the mainstay of Nigeria's economy since the 1970s. Given the strategic place of oil in the political economy of Nigeria and the international economy, the struggle over the control of oil as well the market and trade in crude oil has made the Niger Delta socially and politically sensitive. This struggle manifests in the different ways including arming conflicts in the Niger Delta, whether by the Western and emerging powers, the transnational companies exploiting oil, the Nigerian state, militant groups or the local communities in the region. Crucially, all of these structures of

arming conflicts in the Niger Delta have had significant implications for the nature of local and international SALW transfer as well as the character of arms control in the region. Like the slave and palm oil trade of the 15th and 19th centuries, the relationship between crude oil and weapons supply and arms proliferation in the Niger Delta is historically rooted and, therefore, not a post-Cold War phenomenon as the literature on SALW proliferation tends to suggest. The Nigerian civil war of the 20th century may provide the obvious starting point in the historical continuum of arms trade and arms proliferation in the Niger Delta that is intimately connected to the control of the black gold of the region.

The Nigerian civil war broke out in May 1967 between the OdumegwuOjukwu-led secessionist Biafra and the Federal government of Nigeria headed by Yakubu Gowon. France, China and Czechoslovakia lent support to Biafra as arms suppliers. Bulgaria also supplied weapons to Biafra (Grillot and Apostolova, 2003:279). On both sides of the civil war, the control of Niger Delta oil resources and commercial interests was the central issue in the international transfer of weapons to the combatants. While the supply of weapons by Bulgaria, China and Czechoslovakia to Ojukwu was primarily driven by commercial and profit motivations, French interest was both economically and politically strategic. The ultimate goal of France was to protect its oil company, Safrap (now Totalfina), which had been operating in the Niger Delta, as well as to reduce the growing Anglo-Saxon influence in Africa. It has been argued that it was partly because of the role of France that Britain, which was initially reluctant to support either Biafra or the Nigerian government, switched support for the latter, not only to preserve and consolidate its traditional political influence in Nigeria as the former colonial master, but also to protect Shell oil company in the Niger Delta. On the other hand, like China and Czechoslovakia, Russia's support for, and arms sale to Nigeria were mainly profit-driven. In all, a combination of profits and strategic motivations was the central factor in the political economy of arms transfer by the core arms producing states to the conflicting parties in the Nigerian Civil War. In other words, their interests were also not unconnected to the domination of the Niger Delta through the control and exploitation of its crude oil resources.

Similarly, since the end of the Cold War and the resumption of armed agitation for self-determination in the Niger Delta, the motivations for international supply of weapons to Nigeria and the armed groups had not changed radically. Oil has continued to influence the logic of Western SALW supply and other emerging powers. Arms transfers to Nigeria by the major and emerging arms supplier states particularly in the late 1990s, and between 2006 and 2010 were largely influenced by commercial motivations, including the need to promote security and political stability in the Niger Delta for uninterrupted oil production rather than addressing the structural roots of political rebellion and insurgency in the region. In this regard, economics intersected strongly with the securitization and stabilization goals of the Western powers in the Niger Delta in order to ensure uninterrupted supply of oil by both the supplier states and the Nigerian state. In 2006, Israel supplied surveillance equipment worth US$260 million to the Nigerian state, the highest weapons imported by the Nigerian government between 2006 and 2010 (Wezeman 2006:3; see also Wezeman, Wezeman and Béraud-sudreau, 2011: 6). These coastal surveillance equipment were acquired mainly to engage in military and violent confrontations with MEND in the Niger Delta to promote stability in the region (Wezeman, Wezeman and Béraud-sudreau, 2011: 6) in the name of oil rather than peace.

The case of British arms transfer to the Nigerian government in the 1990s to protect Shell's investments in the Niger Delta is of particular relevance here. Amongst other TNOCs operating in Nigeria, Shell, which is owned by the UK and the Dutch government, is the largest onshore operator in the Niger Delta, dating back to 1958. This privileged position and its associated socio-economic benefits for Britain should be protected at all costs. Highlighting the role of the British government in supplying arms to the Nigerian state for the internal suppression of the Ogoni struggle for self-determination in 1993, which had seriously threatened the operations of Shell in Ogoniland, Ken SaroWiwa has this to say:

> ... Ultimately the fault lies at the door of the British government. It is the British government which supplies arms and credit to the military dictators of Nigeria, knowing full well that all such arms will only be used against innocent, unarmed citizens. It is the British government which makes noises about democracy in Nigeria and Africa but supports military dictators to the hilt. It is the British government which supports the rape and devastation of the

> environment by a valued tax-paying labour-employing organisation like Shell. I lay my travails, the destruction of the Ogoni and other peoples in the Niger Delta, at the door of the British government (Saro-Wiwa, 1995:245-246).

As the Ogoni case effectively illustrates, the overriding objective of Britain in its supply of arms to Nigeria was the strengthening of the coercive capability of the Nigerian state as part of its long-term goals of internationalizing a capitalist state system, thereby preventing the evolution from below, popular aspirations and agitation for genuine democratization of social life in Nigeria. Britain, therefore, privileged oil capitalism, the protection of valuable oil resources and statism over and above the rights of the Ogoni people and collective security in the Niger Delta. Yet, the political economy of SALW transfer to Nigeria by Britain and states like Israel with a view to promoting state repression of popular agitation had its own backlash for militarization and SALW proliferation in the Niger Delta. Empirical evidence suggests that the emergence of a new brand of armed Niger Delta militants opposed to the Ogoni pacifist methods who acquired sophisticated weaponry and challenged the Nigerian state was a direct consequence of the failure of peaceful conflict resolution strategies in the region (Tamonu, 2010: 9). The interplay of oil, western arms transfer and SALW proliferation in the Niger Delta is thus illustrative of the politicization of small arms control that is more strategically, politically, economically and to some extent security driven than humanitarian concerns. The promotion of state sovereignty at the expense of human security, human rights and democracy is frequently the case in small arms control violations that leads to further arms proliferation in the developing world. This is what Perkins and Neumayer (2010:248-249) aptly call ‘organized hypocrisy of ethical foreign policy in Western arms sales” to the developing countries.

Conclusion

States transfer weapons for a variety of reasons and motivations. These may range from strategic, political and security motivations to direct financial and economic gains. It may also include the advancement of ideological and cultural interests of the supplying states. In some cases, these factors intersect and, therefore, state motivations may not be independently or exclusively driven. Again these motivations may sometimes undermine international arms control efforts with implications for weapons proliferation. For example, as Erickson (2013) has found in

relation to arms trade "when market imperatives meet norms of arms control, the former triumphs (p. 218). In this regard, extra-territorial rights and development concerns of citizens of the arms-receiving states may be of secondary importance to the supplier states.

In the Niger Delta, SALW proliferation and human rights violations associated with international arms transfer are historically rooted. These conditions had been shaped by three interconnected factors of the transatlantic slave trade, oil-palm trade and the crude oil trade of the post-Cold War. These three factors draw attention to continuity and change in the international political economy of small trade, arms control and arms proliferation in the Niger Delta rather than imperatives of domestic demands in the region. The article shows that the nature of this trade has been conditioned by the dictates and dynamics of the international political economy, which also undermined the effectiveness and legitimacy of small arms control in the region. It identifies the trajectory and patterns of international arms transfer and the dynamics of arms spread in the Niger Delta since precolonial time, drawing attention to the inherent limitations of the demand-side analysis of small arms proliferation that had dominated the literature beginning from the post-Cold War Africa era.

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