Conflict And Civil Wars In Africa: The Sierra Leonean Experience

Joseph Okwesili Nkwede[1] and Cornelia Orieoma Usonka[2].
joseph.nkwede@ebsu.edu.ng; corneleo4uu@yahoo.com
[1, 2] Department of Political Science,
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ebonyi State, Abakaliki.

Abstract

Africa has witnessed several civil wars and conflicts, some of which are still going on. Reasons include struggle for resources such as diamonds and oil, with various factions fighting for these prizes, supported by multinational corporations and other governments. The civil war in Sierra Leone began on the 23rd of March, 1991 when the RUF entered Kailahun District and Pujehun District in Sierra Leone from Liberia. Thousands of innocent civilians were killed. The war ended in January 2002 when the British government military intervened to suppress rebel insurgents. Diamonds, blood diamonds, conflict diamonds, war diamonds were seen as the main driving force of the conflict but were they really the cause? Despite the gravity of these war crimes, one should be careful to avoid judging the causes of the war simply based on the processes and outcomes of the war. Thus, this paper has really questioned the conventional belief that diamonds were actually the main driver of the war, and then explored the broader socio-political context of Sierra Leone and the emergence of RUF even before the escalation of the war. The study adopted relative deprivation theory and cross-sectional research design. The data was inevitably from secondary sources. The findings revealed that the central cause of the war was endemic greed, corruption and nepotism that deprived the nation of its dignity and reduced most people to a state of poverty. The study recommends that African leaders should take the challenge and work towards the development of the continent for the benefit of Africans; they should develop new ways of conflict management to avoid conflicts.

Keywords: Conflict, Civil Wars, Leadership, Politics, Africa.

Introduction

The history of Africa as a continent is replete with conflict. (Alabi, 2006:42). One may even assert that the major current that runs through Africa: from North to South, East to West and Central is conflict and wars. Since the 1960's, series of civil wars had taken place in Africa. Examples include: Chad (1965 - 1985), Angola since 1974, Liberia (1980 - 2003), Nigeria (1967-1970), Somalia (1999 -1993), Burundi, Rwanda and Sierra Leone (1991-2001). Apart from civil wars, Africa has also witnessed a number of intermittent border and inter-state conflicts notable among which are:

i.   Nigeria-Cameroun dispute over Bakassi Peninsula since 1970s;
ii.   Algeria-Morocco conflict over the Atlas Mountains area in October 1963.
iii.   Eritrea-Ethiopian crisis between 1962 and 1979;
iv.   Somalia-Ethiopian dispute of 1964 to 1978 over Ugandan desert region;
v.   Chad-Libya crisis of 1980 - 1982;
vi.   Kenya-Somalia border war of 1963-1967 in which Somalia aimed at recovering its lost territories including the Northern former district of Kenya.
vii.   Tanzania-Uganda crisis in 1978-1979 (Barkindo et al, 1994; 279-321, cook and Killingray, 1983: 183-84; Europa, 1987: 187)

As Ajayi (2005:143) has rightly observed, "the regularity of conflicts in Africa has become one of the distinct characteristics of the continent". However, it is apt to note that Africa has no monopoly of conflict. Other regions of the world are also riddled with considerable violence and social conflagration. For instance, Bosnia, Serbia, turkey and Northern Ireland are among the trouble parts of Europe. In Asia, one may point to Cambodia, Iraq and Burma among others as conflict ridden. Latin America is also enmeshed in conflicts as evidenced by countries like Peru, Guatemala, Mexico and Columbia. (Adedeji 1999:1). Perhaps, this widespread existence of conflicts across the continents of world has prompted scholars to observe that conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction. As such, conflict may be ineradicable for as long as people, nations and groups pursue conflicting interests, there will always be disagreements, disputes and conflict. (Otite, 1999; Deutsch, 1991: 26-28; Zartman 1991: Azar 1999:5). In 1462, Pedro da Cintra, a Portuguese sailed down the coast of West Africa and discovered the shape looked like "lion's teeth" and the thunderstorms over the mountainous peninsula sounded like the roar of a lion hence he came up with the name "Sierra Lyoa" meaning Lion Mountains. Although the English sailors in the 16th Century called it Sierra Leoa, the evolution of Sierra Leone was officially adopted by the British in the 17th Century with the "Province of Freedom" which later became Freetown in 1787.

This was a British crown colony and the principal base for the suppression of the slave trade and the local name before the coming of the Europeans was "Romarong" meaning the place of the wailers. This name came from the sounds of the constant weeping and screaming of victims of storms and cross current disasters at the mouth of the Sierra Leone River.

The findings of the Archaeologists show that Sierra Leone has been inhabited continuously for at least 2,500 years, populated by successive cultures of peoples who migrated from other parts of Africa. The people adopted the use of iron by the 9th century, and by 1000 AD agriculture was being practiced by coastal tribes. The climate changed considerably during that time, and boundaries among different ecological zones changed as well, affecting migration and conquest (Fyfe: 1994).

Sierra Leone consists of 16 ethnic groups, the largest of which is the Mende, found in the Southern and Eastern Provinces, the Temne in the North, the Limba, also in the Northern Province, and the Kono in the Eastern Province. There are also the Koranko in the North as well as Yalunka, Loko, Soso, Madingo and Fula. On the coast, north and south are the Bullom and Sherbro followed by the much smaller groups of Krim, Vai, Gola, with the Kissi further inland in the Eastern Province. The Western area, including Freetown, is more mixed in population, but is basically the home of the Krio. The Eastern and Southern districts in Sierra Leone, most notably the Kono and Kenema districts, are said to be rich in alluvial diamonds, and more importantly, said to be easily accessible by anyone with a shovel, sieve, and transport (Abdullah: 2004).On the Atlantic Ocean in West Africa, Sierra Leone is half the size of Illinois having its neighbours; Guinea, in the north and east; Liberia, in the south and mangrove swamps lying along the coast, with wooded hills and a plateau in the interior as well as the mountainous eastern region. The Bulom people were thought to have been the earliest inhabitants of Sierra Leone, followed by the Mende and Temne peoples in the 15th century and thereafter the Fulani.

The Problematique

With the death of Sierra Leone's first prime minister Sir Milton Margai in 1964, politics in the country were increasingly characterized by corruption, mismanagement, and electoral violence that led to a weak civil society, the collapse of the education system and unlike his half-brother Milton, Albert Margai did not see the state as a steward of the public, but instead as a tool for personal gain and self-aggrandizement and even used the military to suppress multi-party elections that threatened to end his rule (Gberie:2005).

When Siaka Stevens entered into politics in 1968 Sierra Leone was a constitutional democracy. When he stepped down, seventeen years later, Sierra Leone was a one-party state. Stevens' rule, sometimes called "the 17year plague of locusts," (George: 2010) saw the destruction and perversion of every state institution. Parliament was undermined, judges were bribed, and the treasury was bankrupted to finance pet projects that supported insiders. When Stevens failed to co-opt his opponents, he often resorted to state sanctioned executions or exile (John:2005) Stevens turned the government into a one-party state under the aegis of the All People's Congress Party in April 1978.In 1985, Stevens stepped down, and handed the nation's preeminent position to Major General Joseph Momoh, a notoriously inept leader who maintained the status quo (Abdullah: 2004). During his seven-year tenure, Momoh welcomed the spread of unchecked corruption and complete economic collapse. With the state unable to pay its civil servants, those desperate enough ransacked and looted government offices and property. Even in Freetown, important commodities like gasoline were scarce. But the government hit rock bottom when it could no longer pay schoolteachers and the education system collapsed. Since only wealthy families could afford to pay private tutors, the bulk of Sierra Leone's youth during the late 1980s roamed the streets aimlessly (Gberie:2005) As infrastructure and public ethics deteriorated in tandem, much of Sierra Leone's professional class fled the country. By 1991, Sierra Leone was ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world, even though it benefited from ample natural resources including diamonds, gold, bauxite, rutile, iron ore, fish, coffee, and cocoa.

Rebel soldiers overthrew Stevens's successor, Joseph Momoh, calling for a return to a multiparty system in 1992 and in 1996, there was another military coup which ousted the country's military leader and president. Nevertheless, a multiparty presidential election proceeded in 1996, and People's Party candidate Ahmad TejanKabbah won the vote, becoming Sierra Leone's first democratically elected president.

Objectives of the Study

1.   To examine the remote and immediate causes of Sierra Leonean civil war.
2.   To examine the effects of the war on Sierra Leonean citizens.

Methodology

The research method used is Cross-sectional research design. This can only measure differences between or from among a variety of people, subjects, or phenomena rather than a process of change. Data collection was inevitably from secondary sources.

Review of Related Literature

The dreadful result of the war, both in figures and in reality, makes us wonder why this war broke out. Some economic literature asserts that civil wars are more likely to be motivated by opportunities of economic profit (*greed*), than by political and social dissatisfaction (*grievance*). This assumption about the primary role of economic opportunities appears plausible to explain the persistence or escalation of civil wars. However, one can doubt whether there is a strong correlation between the motivation of greed and civil war onset. In addition, some scholars and journalists disregard historical and political contexts in which civil wars occur and then describe the wars merely as products of less politics, more criminality or environmental collapse. The atrocities committed during the war were also portrayed as evidence of a mysterious and mindless rebel movement without legitimate political grievances. This one-sided or abstract approach provides a limited picture of what really happened.

An overview of the debates by some scholars regarding economic causes of civil wars explains why the Sierra Leone civil war does not entirely correspond to the arguments of the existing economic literature. Rather than using a single-dimensional approach such as focusing on diamond resources, the focus of this paper therefore is mainly on the interaction between structure and agency, the socio-political circumstances (*structure*) of Sierra Leone from its colonial period until 1991 and on increased discontent among its population. However, the structural problems do not solely account for the causes of the war. Growing grievances in the pre-war period paved the way for the birth of the RUF (*agency*), the main rebel group which initially triggered the Sierra Leone civil war, the history of the emergence of the RUF, their motivations and sources of external support equally paved way for the war to come.

Causes of Sierra Leone Civil War

Grievances

The history of Sierra Leone is a product of mixed grievances from its colonial period. British colonial rule established a two-class society with a weak bureaucracy, thereby sowing the seeds for the later popular discontents. This section will examine how those grievances were generated in Sierra Leonean society. On gaining independence in 1961, Sierra Leone was characterized by political and government corruption, lack of education and jobs and mismanagement of the country's natural resources which contributed to the civil war. This post-colonial mismanagement, particularly in the government of Siaka Stevens (1967-1984), even made the already weak state system completely collapse. As a consequence, the young population both in cities and rural areas became even more marginalized from their society, without access to proper education and employment. This fueled political and economic grievances against the government and ruling classes. The British indirect rule established chieftaincy excluding women and youth who became even more marginalized during the post-colonial period. These autocratic chiefs only served the interest of British and themselves and so could not control their people. After the independence, the resentment against chiefdom administrative staff further increased as new chiefs were directly appointed by the central government and more local population were alienated by the decision-making process in their own communities. The situation 'had created potential recruits for the RUF' thus, According to a Paramount Chief from Moyamba District,

> *"Chieftaincy is older than this current form of administration. After the independence the chiefs were molested and disgraced and reduced to nothing, and so could not control their people. And so many chiefs were created, which did not have popular support. Some of the chiefs who enjoyed the favour of the government ruled very adversely, abused and molested their subjects and connived with the administration, particularly under the APC, to intimidate and vandalize civilians and villages (Keen 2005, p. 20)."*

Also was the state collapse in which the army was weakened by not being trained or paid, the collapse of raw materials prices on the international market', the decline of the Cold War patronage system, and 'the withdrawal of large foreign firms from Sierra Leone due to high levels of corruption and depleting deposits of minerals' (Peters:2011).The biggest victims of the patrimonial system collapse were, in fact, young people who were not able to be educated and employed in this deteriorating situation. All these led to the destruction of the patrimonial system. With this, the state became more vulnerable to rebellion. The situation worsened when President Momoh delivered a speech in the eastern district of Kailahun saying that education was not a right but a privilege and then, not surprisingly, the RUF promptly used his speech as 'one of its justification to go to war' (Peters 2011, p. 46). According to the RUF, the fighting was to overthrow the APC government because of their exploitation.

Greed

According to Collier (2000, pp.91 & 96) 'conflicts are far more likely to be caused by economic opportunities than by grievance,' and 'grievance-based explanations of civil war are so seriously wrong', which is backed by the three major findings of his research: the exports of primary commodities, the number of young men and low education levels are positively correlated with the frequency of civil war outbreak. His later research with Hoeffler (2004) also reaches a similar conclusion supported by some newly added proxies: the risk of civil war outbreak is also likely increased in cases of the existence of large diaspora, a low *per capita* income, a low growth rate, a dispersed population and finally a higher population in total. Furthermore, Collier (2000) argues that the aspects of grievances are not readily involved in the making of civil wars mainly because of a collective action problem. He notes that while citizens may wish to see the government overthrown in order to have more justice, they may not have any interest in personally joining the rebellion. Rebellious groups are usually fragmented, which diminish the likelihood of reaching the goal of greater justice. In addition to this, people may be reluctant to join the rebellion when expected benefits may take years to be realized.

According to Fearon (2005, p.483), the impact of primary commodity exports is not sufficiently significant in provoking civil wars. On the other hand, countries with high oil production are more prone to conflicts. It is not because oil offers higher financial incentives for potential rebels; it is more likely that oil-dependent countries have 'weaker state institutions than other countries with the same per capita income' (Fearon 2005, pp. 487, 490-491 & 503-504). Bates (2008, pp. 10-11) in support of Fearon noted that there exists 'a disparity between the evidence from cross-national regressions and that from qualitative accounts'.

Lujala, Gleditsch and Gilmore (2005) on examining the impact of diamonds on civil war onset and incidence (or prevalence) argue that easily exploitable secondary diamonds are positively correlated to the onset and incidence of ethnic war, whereas primary diamonds (mainly Kimberlite) affect them less likely because mining primary diamonds necessitates more stable and strong state systems. However, this quantitative research also fails to account for the relationship between diamonds and the civil war outbreak in Sierra Leone. The diamond mining industry in Sierra Leone was based both on primary and secondary diamonds (Lujala, Gleditsch& Gilmore 2005) and the Sierra Leone civil war was not rooted in ethnic rivalry either (Bangura 2004). Hence, even in the economic literature, it is still an unsubstantiated argument that the huge diamond reserve in Sierra Leone was the initial driver of the decade-long conflict.

Diamonds /Alluvial Diamond Miner
Despite the lack of evidence of the diamonds' role in initiating the civil war, it is quite clear that diamonds played an essential part in the war by offering the RUF an invaluable funding source to sustain its warfare. With the growing interests of both parties – the RUF and government soldiers – in illegal diamond-mining, battles often occurred over diamond-abundant areas (Keen 2005). The RUF is estimated to have made an approximate profit of 200 million dollars a year between 1991 and 1999 through the illicit diamond trade.

In as much as diamonds played a significant role in financing the war, this factor solely cannot explain the initial intention of actors involved in the conflict. Rather, some of the problems caused by the abundant diamond reserve are more useful to explain the structural inequality in Sierra Leonean society which later fed into the war. For instance, highly unequal benefits arising from diamond extraction made ordinary Sierra Leoneans frustrated. Under the Stevens government, revenues from the National Diamond Mining Corporation (known as DIMINCO) – a joint government/DeBeers venture – were used for the personal enrichment of Stevens and of members of the government and business elite who were close to him. In 1984, DeBeers was out of the venture and government lost direct control of the diamond mining areas. By the late 1980s, almost all of Sierra Leone's diamonds were being smuggled and traded illicitly, with revenues going directly into the hands of private investors. In this period the diamond trade was dominated by Lebanese traders and later (after a shift in favor on the part of the Momoh government) by Israelis with connections to the international diamond markets in Antwerp. The low purchase price of the Government Diamond Office (GDO) encouraged smuggling and, as a result, failed to increase tax revenues necessary for empowering civil sectors including armies (Keen: 2008). Momoh made some efforts to reduce smuggling and corruption in the diamond mining sector but he lacked the political clout to enforce the law. Even after the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) took power in 1992, ostensibly with the goal of reducing corruption and returning revenues to the state, high-ranking members of the government sold diamonds for their personal gain and lived extravagantly off the proceeds.

Thus, this economic inequality led to growing frustration among the population who were excluded from the benefits even as the Sierra Leone government was not able to properly collect tax from the

diamond sector. In order to argue that there was a direct and clear connection between diamonds and motivations of the war, it is necessary to substantiate that the first priority of the RUF's war aims was to secure diamond mines for gaining a huge commercial profit beyond the necessity of equipping themselves with weapons. The RUF did not demonstrate such an obvious aim in the beginning of the war, though rather, as Reno (2003b) asserts, it is more likely that universal assumptions on the relationship between natural resources and motivations in conflict do not thoroughly explain diverse evolutions of conflicts.

Although diamonds were a significant motivating and sustaining factor, there were other means of profiting from the Sierra Leone Civil War. For instance, gold mining was prominent in some regions. Even more common was cash crop farming through the use of forced labor. Looting during the Sierra Leone Civil War did not just center on diamonds, but also included that of currency, household items, food, livestock, cars, and international aid shipments. For Sierra Leoneans who did not have access to arable land, joining the rebel cause was an opportunity to seize property through the use of deadly force. But the most important reason why the civil war should not be entirely attributed to conflict over the economic benefits incurred from the alluvial diamond mines is that the pre-war frustrations and grievances did not just concern that of the diamond sector.

External Assistance
Obviously in the case of conviction of Taylor, the civil war in Sierra Leone cannot be explained separately from the Liberian civil war. Although some of the charges could have been exaggerated by the Sierra Leone government for its sake during the war and repeated by the media without thorough consideration (Abdullah 1998), Talyor's supplies of arms to the RUF and the participation of the NPFL in the Sierra Leone civil war are no longer controversial; in this context, it is significant to examine why Taylor decided to assist the RUF in waging the war.

Sankoh and Taylor are thought to have first met in Ghana in 1987 and then again in Libya in 1988, but it is uncertain how seriously Taylor regarded Sankoh at that point. In 1989, Taylor, securing his forces, visited Freetown to request the endorsement of President Momoh for 'the use of Sierra Leone as a base to launch his armed insurgency' in Liberia. His request was, however, rejected and, further detained at Pandemba Road prison (Gberie 2005, p. 54). This affected his perception of the Momoh administration negatively, and probably made him realise the significance of having pro-NPFL regimes in neighbouring countries. At the onset of the Liberian civil war on Christmas Eve in 1989, the Nigerian-led Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) established an intervention force called ECOMOG (the ECOWAS Monitoring Group) in a hurry, and Sierra Leone joined this force by dispatching 300 soldiers. It was not surprising that Taylor, the main rebel leader at that time, was strongly against the external intervention and vowed to fight it. Notably, the domestic opinion in Sierra Leone was not much in favour of Momoh's initiative either since the ECOMOG intervention was partly considered as 'an attempt to frustrate a popular uprising against a soldier-turned-politician' (Gberie 2005). As a result of the First Liberian Civil War, 80,000 refugees fled neighboring Liberia for the Sierra Leone – Liberian border. This displaced population, composed almost entirely of children, would prove to be an invaluable asset to the invading rebel armies because the refugee and detention centers,

populated first by displaced Liberians and later by Sierra Leoneans, helped provide the manpower for the RUF's insurgency. The RUF took advantage of the refugees, who were abandoned, starving, and in dire need of medical attention, by promising food, shelter, medical care, and looting and mining profits in return for their support. When this method of recruitment failed, as it often did for the RUF, youths were often coerced at the barrel of a gun to join the ranks of the RUF. After being forced to join, many child soldiers learned that the complete lack of law as a result of the civil war provided a unique opportunity for self-empowerment through violence and thus continued to support the rebel cause. Also, given that the border region between Sierra Leone and Liberia was abundant in resources, including diamonds, Charles Taylor, one of the main orchestra of the war, was economically interested in a deeply destabilized Sierra Leone because of the border between Sierra Leone and Liberia (Richards 1996).

Furthermore, is the role played by Libya. Due to the military training offered to the three co-founders of the RUF in Benghazi, and the early influence of Gaddafi's *Green Book* on Sierra Leone students' movement, it is pertinent to say that the Libya connection laid the foundation for the emergence of the RUF. The controversy is that although Libya was not involved in the provision of military training programmes to Sierra Leone rebels, Libya was deeply involved in assisting RUF (Richards: 1996). Libya provided the RUF the funds to purchase weapons in the mid 1990s. He also refers to evidence that they shipped and airdropped weapons to the rebels. Nonetheless, it is unclear whether Gaddafi made a pledge of support for the military activities of the RUF before the rebels invaded in Sierra Leone.

Muammar al-Gaddafi both trained and supported Charles Taylor. Gaddafi also helped FodaySankoh, the founder of Revolutionary United Front. Russian businessman Viktor Bout supplied Charles Taylor with arms for use in Sierra Leone and had meetings with him about the operations.

Despite the accumulated grievances throughout history, circumstantial factors do not directly trigger violence; there should be active protagonists who take advantage of these grievances by channeling them into the road to war. In Sierra Leone's case, the main protagonist was the RUF which had been militarily assisted by Charles Taylor from Liberia. Civil wars cannot occur only by receiving external support; however, the Sierra Leone civil war might not have happened in 1991 had the RUF failed to acquire the minimum external assistance necessary to take an action. At the same time, though, the availability of external support limited the domestic support necessary to win the war in the long term. As Reno (2003b) asserts, this external support 'reduced the RUF rebel's incentives to rely upon popular support in Sierra Leone to survive', and it allowed, at least in part, the RUF's atrocious behaviour against its own civilians during the war.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Relative deprivation theory which focuses on the degree of the economic inequality in a community (Schock, 1996). Box-Steffensmeier et al. (2005) assert that if people perceive that there is a gap between what they are currently getting and what they deserve to get, it creates discontentment hence, a general feeling that the society owes them. The basic assumption is that if the gap is too big for a reasonable group of people within a specific population, there is a likelihood that the people will rebel. This is the discrepancy between what they are entitled to from a society and what they

believe they will get. The developing relative deprivation theory is credited to Samuel A. Stouffer (1900–1960) is in his study entitled "The American Soldier" (1949) after the World War II.The economic inequality may not necessarily comprise the poor on one side and the rich on the other. It includes those who are rich on one side and those who are extremely rich on the other. Economic inequality also exists in such scenarios. Douma (2006) emphasizes the element of poverty. The degree of poverty is not directly linked to an occurrence of violence in communities. He however, states that once poverty can be associated with specific group of people, their group identity as poor will emerge and may then suffer discrimination and that increases the risk of violence to oppose the state institutions which promote discrimination or the other groups such as the rich people. Douma (2006) further explains that the relative deprivation evolves from one's judgment regarding his or her circumstance and status in the community. What follows then are the issues of discontent, anger and resentment and a host of the other emotional factors. The intensity depends on the degree of the subjective evaluation of one's status in the society as he or she feels owed by the society. The emotional factors are supported by Bernstein and Croshy (1980).

The application of this theory emanates from the fact that while the leaders and government of Sierra Leone perceived the state as a means of personal gain and self-aggrandizement, the people felt the society owed them, they felt they were being marginalized and deprived of what they should get from the society. The resultant effect was rebel insurgents. This in effect explains the reasons for the forceful overthrow and takeover of the government which led to the civil war that devastated the country.

Discussion of Findings

Conflict usually occurs primarily as a result of a clash of interests in the relationship between parties, groups or states, either because they pursuing opposing or incompatible goals. As David Weeks puts it, "conflict is an inevitable outcome of human diversity and a world without conflict is not desirable, because it would mean a world without diversity." Sierra Leone as many other African nations is a diverse nation, diverse in ethnic, religious and socio-cultural terms (Weeks: 1995).

The Horn of Africa, which includes Sudan, contains today about all the problems that are on the world's agenda: ethnic, religious and border conflicts, civil war, high military expenditure, migration and refugees, famine and the break-up of states. Most African regions are seen as where the Cold War played itself out, and still deserves a lot of world attention. Robert Kaplan described West Africa as a region that "is becoming the symbol of worldwide demographic, environmental and societal stress, in which criminal anarchy emerges as the real "strategic danger" (Kaplan: 1994).Events in Liberia, before the election of Charles Taylor and Sierra Leone, before the restoration of the elected government of TejanKabbah confirmed this assertion.

The global significance of conflict diamonds has forced the international community to target them. The focus has been on how these civil wars are financed. Some analysts argue that international policy makers have neglected this aspect. In effect they say that economic motivations, as represented by conflict diamonds, are the primary cause for wars such as Sierra Leone's. International attention has focused rather too much on how "conflict diamonds" are fueling civil wars in Africa. They have

certainly fueled the Sierra Leonean war but are they really its primary cause? Or are fundamental grievances and social injustice at the root of the conflict?

This is more like an "old wine in a new bottle", because the exploitation of war economies, as represented by conflict diamonds, is as old as warfare itself. This kind of analysis has been applied not only to Sierra Leone, but to the violent and protracted civil wars in former Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo-DRC) and in Angola in the 1960s and 1970s. These wars were more about domestic and international exploitation of strategic minerals.

The argument is that strategic minerals such as diamonds, oil, copper and gold are fuelling wars in Africa because the proceeds from their sale are used to buy arms and drugs, and even to cultivate strategic alliances at home and abroad. But the role played by these minerals; diamonds, oil, uranium, cobalt, gold and copper in fueling conflicts was veiled during the Cold War because of the focus on East-West ideological conflict. But superpower rivalry in these countries was not only about ideology and shaping post-colonial African diplomacy. At its heart was the control over strategic resources. In this analysis, there exists a link between diamond exploitation on the one hand, and criminal complicity between the international diamond industry and Africa's political elites, warlords and multi-national companies on the other. The issue of conflict diamonds has only now become internationally prominent because a security vacuum has been created by the absence of superpower rivalry. This vacuum has been filled by the warlords, rogue states, arms and drug traffickers and multi-national companies, who have exploited the economic opportunities of globalization. The case of Sierra Leone is a classic example of the exploitation of war economy. The emerging informal network of barter arms for diamonds extends beyond the borders of war-torn Sierra Leone to include neighbouring states such as Liberia. What we see emerging is a growing informal economy, inextricably linked to the globalization of legal trade.

Conflict diamonds as the currency of war have generated huge personal fortunes for warlords, rebel movements and their regional and international clients. According to West Africa magazine, the sale of conflict diamonds by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel group was estimated at $70 million by 1999. In the case of the Angolan rebel group UNITA, an estimated $150 million worth of rough diamonds was mined in UNITA controlled territories. In the DRC approximately $35 million worth of diamonds were produced in rebel-held territories. The proceeds from the sale of conflict diamonds have been mainly used to buy weapons. The son of the former president of France, Jean Christophe Mitterrand, is currently under criminal investigation for his role in the sale of arms to Angola. Men like FodaySankoh of the RUF, Charles Taylor of Liberia and Jonas Savimbi of UNITA are alleged to have set up trans-continental smuggling and commercial networks that link them to the global market.

In other words, the Sierra Leone civil war could be said to have actually been the result of varied interactions between structural problems in Sierra Leone society which increased grievances among people and, accordingly, led to the emergence of the RUF. Although diamonds seemingly played a significant role in financing the war once it started, diamonds more likely contributed to corrupting state institutions in the pre-war period, thereby increasing grievance, rather than directly triggering the

conflict. The problems of marginalized youth following the collapse of patrimonial society were also serious issues: without proper education and employment, many young people were left vulnerable to be easily recruited to the rebel forces. Lastly, the RUF was not merely mindless and violent bandits without any legitimate political cause as widely believed. The early co-leadership reveals some roots of radical student movements in the earlier period, and by successfully eliminating these roots, Sankoh consolidated his power and conducted the war in his own ruthless way. Identifying conflict diamonds or greed as the main reason for the civil war in Sierra Leone is rather simplistic. But this is the analysis that has most influenced international policy responses to the conflict. There is no denying of the fact that conflict diamonds have fueled and perpetuated the war. But that does not make them the primary cause. Obviously, the excessive focus on conflict diamonds is unhelpful in understanding the fundamental causes of the civil war in Sierra Leone. The debate away from the traditional analysis of African conflicts as mere tribal or ethnic wars to a resource-based approach. According to Dr. James Jonah, the former finance minister of Sierra Leone, the war is "simply about diamonds". This is perhaps not surprising given the role played by key western governments in leading the campaign against conflict diamonds. This has not only diverted attention from a proper understanding of the fundamental causes of the conflict; it has also obscured the search for lasting solutions that lead to peace and development. A more plausible explanation is that economic and political exclusion, perceived injustice and fundamental grievances were at the heart of the conflict. Following the opinion of (Kamara: 2000) 'The root of the conflict is and remains diamonds, diamonds and diamonds.'and (Reno: 2003) 'To the economist, this is war motivated by greed. For the young fighter, it is injustice.'

Obviously, as long as the fundamental grievances and perceived injustices are unresolved, the potential for relapse into further violence will always remain. This is actually because the civil war in Sierra Leone is essentially about fundamental political, economic and socio-cultural grievances and not just about greed. In view of this, one would ask: if diamonds were the primary reason for the war, why did Sierra Leone not degenerate into civil war until 1991, even though diamonds were discovered in the 1930s?

Effects of Sierra- Leonean Civil War.
When the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) started their attacks on the Liberian border in 1991, one of the bloodiest civil wars in Africa was initiated. The eleven-year conflict (from 1991-2002) left more than 50,000 dead and was marked by unprovoked and unjustified violence - especially the amputation of limbs. The social and economic effects of a decade of civil war were devastating for the country and for poor people in particular. In the aftermath of the war, poverty has become pervasive and intensified. Agricultural output has continued to decline, with drastic effects on food prices and rural incomes. The war disrupted education in many areas. During the conflict, the dislocation of large segments of the population, the separation of families and frequent violence against women contributed to the spread of HIV/AIDS. In almost all aspects of human resources development, the country's poor rural people are disadvantaged. Their levels of health, nutrition, education and food security are inadequate. As a result, productivity became generally low. Low productivity also stems from limited access to land and to technologies, markets and financial services. The serious challenges encountered in the implementation

of women's anti-discrimination convention in Sierra Leone is also as a result of the after math of the war.

Although Sierra Leone is peaceful, but as a result of high population growth and a decade of civil war that ended in 2002, poverty remains widespread throughout the country and so Sierra Leone is seen as to be among the world's poorest countries, with a much longer recovery in store. Sierra Leone being the poorest country in the world, according to the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI), ranked last out of 177 countries on the HDI in 2005. Health and nutrition indicators remain among the worst in the world. A large proportion of youth, who include many former combatants, are unemployed or underemployed. This situation presents a threat to sustainable peace and stability.

The West African country was only able to free itself from the 12 years of violence with the assistance of international forces. The civil war has carved indelible scars into Sierra Leone's society, which will take generations to heal before the shadow of past carnage can be forgotten. Some 72,000 ex-combatants needed to be disarmed and demobilized, although many are still awaiting reintegration assistance. Furthermore, many young boys and girls that were forcefully involved in the war, were ostracized and expelled from their communities. Many people left their hometowns in order to seek shelter from the horrors of war and of these, many remained in Freetown, hoping to find a better future in the city after the end of the war. High unemployment rates throughout the country and especially in the overpopulated capital Freetown sometimes leave people with no other choice but to hang around spots highly frequented by foreigners and other wealthy people in order to get some money for watching or washing parked cars or just by begging. Sadly, enough, even young children that are passing by will reach out to strangers for food or money. Indeed, vast numbers of Sierra Leone children were conscripted into the conflict by both parties – the RUF and the Sierra Leone government forces. With no access to water, sanitation, or electricity throughout much of the country, people struggle just to survive. Individuals have become desensitized to death and most do not have the luxury of dedicating time to the remembrance of the past. The school curriculum does not even teach the root causes and facts behind the decade-long war, which caused many of Sierra Leone's current problems. It feels as if a veil of silence has been drawn over the precedent events. Only small elements, such as the Okada riders, unemployed young men, who are mainly ex-combatants and now, make a living by conveying passengers on cheap UN-supplied motorcycles recall Sierra Leone's bloody past. In other words, the severe economic decline that went hand in hand with civil war and social unrest destroyed social and physical infrastructure and impoverished the country.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and a Special Court which was set up by UN for victims and perpetrators to facilitate healing started operation in 2002.The TRC examined the root causes of the conflict and concluded "that the central cause of the war was endemic greed, corruption and nepotism that deprived the nation of its dignity and reduced most people to a state of poverty". Diamond revenues in Sierra Leone have increased more than tenfold since the end of the conflict, from $10 million in 2000 to about $130 million in 2004, although according to the UNAMSIL surveys of mining sites, "more than 50 per cent of diamond mining still remains unlicensed and reportedly considerable illegal smuggling of diamonds continues". (TRC, Vol. 2).

The civil war served as background for depicting several movies like blood diamond starring Leonardo Dicaprio, Jennifer Connelly etc, Lord of the war, Yuri Orlov, A Long way Gone by Ishmael Beah and many other movies. These documentary movies and many other write ups are memoirs that analyze the atrocities of war and the mutilation that took place during the civil war days. With the assistance of international donors, the country has successfully tackled reconstruction and has embarked on a process of democratization and stabilization. Sierra Leone is currently making progress towards securing macroeconomic stability.

Conclusion

Instead of simply laying all the blame on the greed for diamonds, the intention of this paper was to examine the broader and unique political and societal context of Sierra Leone which created the circumstances for the invasion of the RUF in 1991. Diamonds also helped to arm the Revolutionary United Front rebels. The RUF used funds harvested from the alluvial diamond mines to purchase weapons and ammunition from neighboring Guinea, Liberia, and even SLA soldiers. But the most significant connection between diamonds and war is that the presence of easily extractable diamonds provided an incentive for violence. To maintain control of important mining districts like Kono, thousands of civilians were expelled and kept away from these important economic centers. Therefore, it is pertinent to say that more than twenty years of poor governance, poverty, corruption and oppression created the circumstances for the rise of the RUF, as ordinary people yearned for change.

Recommendations

Politics of cultural plurality has sensitized that the more fairly a society is organized, the more the people tend to forget about the particularism that divides them. Conversely, the more unfairly a society is organized, the more its citizens revive and cling to all manner of cleavages of deep segmentation and the more conflict arise. Africa should work towards getting out of the zone of turmoil, characterized by poverty, repression and war, in which it has existed all along, into zone of peace, in which can be found peaceful, democratic and wealthy nations.

Embarking on preventive deployment for the creation of peace enforcement units as proposed by Boutros Boutros-Ghali in June, 1992, is an important phase to anticipate, limit and if possible end conflict. Sierra Leone has to find answers to their conflicts by comprehending and understanding the underlying causes and histories of the civil war and work out ways of averting potential conflicts.

Democracy can only be nurtured in a stable and secure society, but cannot be sustained in the midst of social turmoil and political instability. It is good leadership that brings development and prosperity and ultimately eliminates conflicts. Therefore, instead of consistently blaming the woes of the continent on colonialism, slave trade and the like, African leaders should take the challenge and work towards the development of the continent for the benefit of Africans. While working towards such a stable environment, more analysis has to be made about this great idea of democratization.

The mere presence of many ethnic groups in a country does not necessary bring about internal stability, animosity and conflicts. What makes the difference between stable plural societies and unstable ones is usually the response of the leadership to the fact of multi-nationality. This makes it imperative for Sierra Leone and even other war torn African countries to develop new ways of conflict management. It is true that artificial societies created by colonialism in which different nationalities, ethnic groups and tribes were forcibly yoked together cannot be wielded in peaceful nation-states that can be stable and prosperous; the problem is not peculiarly only with Sierra Leone but also other African states and deeply segmented societies that exist virtually everywhere.

Thuggery, looting, corruption and arson which became part and parcel of Sierra Leone should not be allowed to continue, even in other African countries, the youth should be included in the political system to see results stemming from their efforts. This will make them to continue to be a powerful force for peace.

Banning conflict diamonds and denying its access to the world market is not the solution to end conflict. This is because; research on the exploitation of the war economy in Sierra Leone has shown that diamonds are not the only currency of war. The focus on conflict diamonds has neglected other aspects of the war economy. With the evolution of a complex barter system, timber and agricultural products such as coffee and cocoa are traded by the RUF for arms and logistical support. Although the revenue generated from this trade is limited, it does contribute to the perpetuation of the war. Closing world markets to conflict diamonds will only succeed if the other range of issues involved in the war economy is addressed.

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