The Causes of the Sierra Leone Civil War

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'The root of the conflict is and remains diamonds, diamonds and diamonds.' (Ibrahim Kamara 2000)

'To the economist, this is war motivated by greed. For the young fighter, it is injustice.' (William Reno 2003, p. 46)

I. Introduction

The decade-long civil war in Sierra Leone formally ended in January 2002 following the British government's successful military intervention to suppress rebel insurgents. However, the conflict has not completely finished yet; some features of brutality and viciousness in the conflict are still lingering in the minds and bodies of Sierra Leoneans. The recent trial of former Liberian president, Charles Taylor, clearly reveals the indelible scars left to people even ten years after the official declaration of end of the war. After he was found guilty of 'aiding and abetting the war crimes during the Sierra Leone civil war' in the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone on April 26 2012, one victim, whose forearms were amputated during the war, indignantly talked to the BBC: 'Taylor deserves 100 years in jail for his role in the atrocities' (BBC April 26 2012).

The forced recruitment of child soldiers by the Revolutionary United Front (henceforth the RUF) and the rebels' atrocious behaviour against civilians are the most frequently featured aspects of this war. Indeed, vast numbers of Sierra Leone children were conscripted into the conflict by both parties – the RUF and the Sierra Leone government forces. Yet no precise number of abducted children has been confirmed, and estimated figures vary according to agencies. For instance, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) estimated that 10,000 children were involved in various fighting forces, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) indicated that 6,000 children were forced into violence over the years (TRC 2004). One UNICEF report also shows that 8466 children was officially documented as missing between 1991 and 2002 with 4448 children missing solely in 1999 (Williamson 2006).[i] In addition, more than 50,000 people appear to have been killed whilst almost two-thirds of the total population in Sierra Leone was displaced (Gberie 2005). These figures do not properly show the actual agony and resentment of those victims, though. Up to today, a huge number of Sierra Leoneans including former child soldiers are still enduring pains in their souls and bodies.

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.[ii] The atrocities committed during the war were also portrayed as evidence of a mysterious and mindless rebel movement without legitimate political grievances. These one-sided or abstract approaches provide a limited picture of what really happened.

In order to explore more complex causes of civil wars deeply rooted in society, this paper will examine the case of the Sierra Leone Civil War. Instead of covering the whole period of the civil war, this paper will focus on the pre-war

period to show the causes of civil war onset. For the subsequent stage of civil wars is more likely influenced by diverse political and economic interests differing from the initial drivers of the conflict.

Section II briefly provides an overview of the scholarly debates regarding economic causes of civil wars and then 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 main focus of this paper will be placed on the interaction between structure and agency. Section III traces the political and social circumstances (*structure*) of Sierra Leone from its colonial period until 1991 which 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 theSierra Leone civil war. In this context, Section IV addresses the history of the emergence of the RUF, and then traces their motivations and sources of external support which paved the way for the war to come.

II. Economic Causes of Civil Wars and Sierra Leone

'Greed' and Its Critics

Why do civil wars occur? A number of scholars have addressed this topic; in particular, econometric literature in recent years tends to place much emphasis on material aspects of civil wars. Among others, Collier (2000, pp.91 & 96) claims that '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.

This argument has triggered a variety of scholarly debates. First, Fearon (2005, p.483), who used the same data as Collier and Hoeffler, has found that the research findings of Collier and Hoeffler become fragile, merely by 'minor changes in the sample framing and the recovery of missing data'. Unlike Collier and Hoeffler, he asserts that 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) also supports Fearon's argument while noting 'a disparity between the evidence from cross-national regressions and that from qualitative accounts'. Last but not least, to reassess Collier's latest 'greed' argument, Keen (2008) provides several critical points based on a dubious selection of proxies, a lack of attention to political goals, and the interaction of greed , grievance and the state.

Since Sierra Leone was a country with a massive diamond reserve, the competition for seizing control of lucrative diamond-producing regions has been widely regarded as a main cause of the conflict. Did the 'resource curse' – the 'diamond curse' in the case of Sierra Leone – provoke the decade-long bloody war there? Collier did not include diamonds and gems in his econometric analysis (Fearon 2005), so there is no clear evidence about how diamonds have contributed to the civil war outbreak in his cross-national research.

It is notable that Lujala, Gleditsch and Gilmore (2005) examine the impact of diamonds on civil war onset and incidence (or prevalence). They 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.

Sierra Leone and its Diamonds

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 2008). 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. These illicit diamonds are widely known to have been traded with Charles Taylor in return for arms and ammunitions, which were later falsely identified as Liberian in origin and then legitimately exported abroad (Stohl 2000).

Although 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, unequal benefits arising from diamond extraction were augmented as the ownership of diamond mines and mining licenses had been mostly given to the ruling families and loyal supporters of the ruling regimes. Thus, this economic inequality led to growing frustration among the population who were excluded from the benefits. To make matters worse, the Sierra Leone government was not able to properly collect tax from the diamond sector. 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).

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. Therefore, instead of simply laying all the blame on the greed for diamonds, this paper intends 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.

III. History of 'Grievance'

The history of Sierra Leone is a product of mixed grievances from its colonial period. A two-class society with a weak bureaucracy was established during British colonial rule, thereby sowing the seeds for the later popular discontents. 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 marginalised from their society, without access to proper education and employment. This fuelled political and economic grievances against the government and ruling classes. This section will examine how those grievances were generated in Sierra Leonean society.

Legacy of British Colonial Rule

The modern history of Sierra Leone goes back to 1787, when the Black Poor, mostly former soldiers from the British army, settled on the northern end of the Sierra Leone peninsula. After the area of Freetown and its environs became a Crown Colony of Britain in 1808, Sierra Leone was used as a principal navy base for a British anti-slavery squadron operating in western African waters (TRC 2004; Richards 1996). Then later in 1896, as the remainder of the territory of modern Sierra Leone was declared a Protectorate of Britain, British colonial rule, which was based on

a separate and disparate development of the two areas, started to take its shape (TRC 2004). The British colonial investment in Sierra Leone concentrated on the Crown Colony and its predominant residents – i.e. the Krios. For instance, the disparities between the Colony and the Protectorate were conspicuous in the field of education; although the vast majority of Sierra Leone territories and population belonged to the Protectorate,[iii] half of the primary schools were located in the Colony in 1947, and it was mostly the Krios who were the beneficiaries of higher education (TRC 2004).

The discriminatory aspects of the colonial period resulted from and were strengthened by the British tradition of indirect rule. Britain recognised only the Crown Colony as part of the British Empire while dividing the Protectorate into many small 'chiefdoms' and then controlling them indirectly. Under this rule, instead of establishing a strong centralised bureaucracy, the colonial government allowed the most important chiefs, known as Paramount Chiefs, to have considerable power – i.e. 'decentralized despotism,' a term coined by Mamdani (1996). Under British protection, the chieftaincy became a lifetime and inheritable position, and the chiefs played principal roles in local economic development and exerted real authority over the indigenous population by enforcing their customary rights (Keen 2003; Denov 2010; Peters 2011).

Competition for the office of paramount chiefs was intense and violent among rival ruling families due to the economic rewards that they would receive once appointed as the chief (Keen 2005). Yet tension in rural communities was not only caused by this rivalry between ruling families but also by the discontent of rural population at the chiefs' abuses including 'excessive cash levies, unpopular land allocations, forced labour, and the punishment of dissenters' (Keen 2005, p. 10). Systematically, the chieftaincy was established upon excluding women, youth, and the poor since each paramount chief was elected from ruling family members by an electoral college of councillors composed of twenty taxpayers (Denov 2010). Being neither citizens nor subject in this system (Fanthorpe 2001), those excluded under British indirect rule became more marginalised during the post-colonial period, and particularly Sierra Leone youth in rural area was the primary victim in the marginalising process.

The indirect rule of Britain failed to comprehend these dynamics at the local level, thereby letting the colonial government appoint or maintain autocratic chiefs who only served the interests of the British and themselves. As a result, this policy 'helped to lay the foundations for the later failure of the state in rural areas' (Peters 2011, p. 38). 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. While commenting that this situation 'had created [potential] recruits for the RUF', one Paramount Chief from Moyamba District said:

"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 vandalise civilians and villages (Keen 2005, p. 20)."

State Collapse & the Destruction of Patrimonial Society

The Sierra Leone political system in its post-independence era demonstrates the characteristics of a 'shadow state'. A shadow state, with its origin in dealing with illicit mining activities, reveals 'the construction by rulers of a parallel political authority to manage the diamond sector in the wake of the near total decay of formal state institutions' (Reno 1995, cited in Peters 2011, p. 40). With the connivance of the British, the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) distributed diamond mining licenses to party loyalists in the late 1950s (Reno 2003b). The shadow state, however, started to grow even more enormously under the All People's Congress (APC) which ruled Sierra Leone from 1968 to 1992 (Peters 2011).

Siaka Stevens, who was the prime minister (1968-1971) and then the first president of Sierra Leone (1971-1985) under the APC regime, and his Sierra Leone-born Lebanese partner, Jamil Said Mohammed, gained control of 'the state diamond marketing monopoly in 1976 in a bogus privatization exercise', enabling them to earn up to 300 million

dollars (at 2001 prices) in diamond revenues. Not being satisfied, Stevens extended his privatization projects to 'state agencies for agricultural marketing, road transport, and oil refining' (Reno 2003b, p. 56). Instead of leading to an efficient and competitive market, though, the privatisation process under the leadership of Stevens merely contributed to increasing his own fortune as well as his key political allies' wealth, 'by using government control over import/export licenses and over the allocation of foreign exchange to favour his own clients' (Keen 2003, p. 75).

The characteristics of a shadow state were further strengthened by the patrimonial principles which had upheld Sierra Leone society for a long time. Base on the principles 'involve[ing] redistributing national resources as marks of personal favour to followers who respond with loyalty to the leader rather than to the institution the leader presents', Stevens also behaved as 'the ultimate leader of the Sierra Leone patrimonial system' (Richards 1996, p. 34). For instance, he offered a number of benefits to the army officers, in particular to senior commanders, to buy off their loyalties (Keen 2003), but he did not finance the army for improving its fighting capacity. There were no proper training and weapons provided to the army for the fear that a well-equipped army could threaten his power. Rather he subordinated the army as a political instrument by 'transform[ing] the Army Chief of Staff into a Member of Parliament in 1974' (TRC 2004, p. 26). This patrimonial generosity soon resulted in the deficit of government budget, though, while leaving the rank and file unpaid (Keen 2003). Unfortunately, the weakening of the army both by not being paid and trained made the state system more vulnerable to rebellions.

Even after Stevens' peaceful hand-over of power to Joseph Momoh in 1985, the situation went worse. With government being almost bankrupt, it became impossible to pay most civil servants (Reno 2003a). To overcome the lack of state resources by receiving IMF financial support, Momoh's government pursued strict austerity measures such as reducing subsidies in petrol and food. This departure from the previous patronage system led to major budget cuts on health and education (Keen 2003). For instance, during the 1974/75 fiscal year, 15.6 percent of government expenditure was spent on education; but, this was reduced to 8.5 in the 1988/89 fiscal year (Abdullah 1998), then even plummeting to an all-time low 3 percent in 1993 (Karimu 1995, cited in Reno 2003a). This budget cut in education severely affected the salaries of teachers and the number of students: 'many schools and colleges were closed because of the non-payment of salaries to teachers' and, by 1987, less than 30 percent of children of secondary school age were registered in school (Davies 1996, cited in Keen 2003, p. 80). Considering the economic and social privileges that Freetown had enjoyed from its colonial times, these budget cuts had presumably hit urban areas much harder, which explain why we cannot simply regard the rebellion movement of the RUF as a rural uprising. This will be further examined in Section IV.

State collapse eventually led to the destruction of the patrimonial system, further fuelled by '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, p. 45). 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. To make things worse, 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).

Marginalised Youth

Shrinking opportunities for education apparently made the young generation increasingly marginalised from their society. According to Abdullah (1998), the number of students registered in secondary schools increased from 16,414 in 1969 to 96,709 in 1990. However, only about 60,000 were in paid employment by 1985, and the situation in job markets deteriorated; even university graduates found it difficult to secure jobs in the public sector by 1990, whilst the private sector was also rapidly downsizing.[iv] In this period or even before, many middle-class students and school drop-outs became associated with poorer alienated youths in urban areas. This created the general circumstances enabling student protest to move beyond campuses particularly in 1977 (Keen 2003).

Abdullah (1998, p. 207) underlines the lumpen culture in Sierra Leone which was created by 'the largely unemployed and unemployable youths, mostly male, who live by their wits or who have one foot in what is generally referred to as the informal or underground economy'. The lumpenproletariat expanded as more numbers of secondary school

dropouts and university graduates failed to find jobs and became marginalised from the privileged class (Abdullah 1998). However, the concept of lumpen does not clearly touch upon the real problems of marginalised youth in Sierra Leone since it neglects original causes of the emergence of the lumpenproletariat; instead, it merely focuses on their criminal behaviour or lack of ideology. As Fanthorpe (2001, p. 363) interestingly argues, 'scholarship focusing on lumpen or secular sectarian agency only serves to emphasize the conflict's apparent detachment from pre-war patterns of politics and identity'.

For those who left school and were still unemployed, there were no many options available except semi-subsistence agriculture, finding jobs in the urban informal sector or 'trying one's luck in the alluvial mining areas' (Peters 2011, p. 53). However, the situation in rural areas was not much better than in urban sectors. Peters (2011) found it hard to distinguish between the analyses and motivations of former rival combatants; which groups they fought for – RUF or government(s) – was not a decisive factor. Many of them shared similar opinions in a rationale for participation in the war – i.e. political corruption and lack of education and jobs. The interview with one former RUF combatant, who 'did not join the rebel completely voluntarily but neither was bluntly forced', clearly shows the resentment of young people against the whole society and what they really wanted:

"They [the RUF] told us that they are fighting to overthrow the APC government because they exploited the people and were taking all the money to Europe to build mighty houses or buy luxurious cars and forgetting about the youth. We, the young people, do suffer a lot in this country. Greed and selfishness was another factor which made the rebel war come to Sierra Leone. Nobody was willing to help the young men, especially the politicians have no sympathy for the young men. […] Actually we were fighting for awareness and also to have justice in the country. […] We fought against bribery and corruption in the country. […] If I become the president I will make all the youth to be engaged in skill training to avoid [the] idleness that will create confusion or make people commit crimes. If you do that for the youth they will not be any problem in this country. The young men should be encouraged by providing them with jobs. I think that will make the country stable. If I have my tools I will not go round town just being idle. I will survive through my trade (Peters 2011, pp. 20-21)."

IV. The Formation of the RUF and Its Invasion in Sierra Leone

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 channelling 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. This section will, thus, examine how the RUF was established and assisted by external actors.

Foday Sankoh and Founding Members of the RUF

Although the sole name of Foday Sankoh is widely known by the public, the RUF was actually founded by three Sierra Leoneans who received a military training together in Libya in 1987-88: Foday Sankoh, Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray. The rebels' atrocious behaviour against civilians during the war does not necessarily illustrate their initial motivation to start the war. Therefore, the process of the formation of the RUF and the roles of all these three founders need to be analysed to better understand the original characteristics of the rebel group.

Foday Sankoh joined the army in 1956, and then was jailed from 1971 to 1978 after having been convicted of failing to report the plot of John Bangura to overthrow the government (Gberie 2005). According to Abdullah (1998), Sankoh claimed to have participated in the 1977 student protest in Freetown; however, Abdulla definitely denied the possibility of Sankoh's participation based on his own experience of having been actively involved in the demonstration. It is undeniable, that Sankoh had a sort of distant connection to the student movement. For he was allegedly recruited and trained by a member of the Pan-African Union (PANAFU), Ebiyemi Reader, who was active in Freetown in the late 1970s and then moved to Bo to build a revolutionary cell.[v] When Reader discovered Sankoh in Bo, Sankoh was working as an itinerant photographer. As a secondary school dropout, Sankoh was not familiar with any intellectual radicalism in his early years, but as he joined Ebiyemi's group, he 'started, for the first time, to acquaint himself with pan-Africanism' (Abdullah 1998, p. 218).

It was in August 1987 that Sankoh left to Libya for insurgency training, where he met his future RUF co-founders, Kanu and Mansaray: as the PANAFU members, Kanu was also 'a founding member of Future Shock club and a graduate of Njala University College', and Rashid was 'an activist from Freetown east end, who had left the country in 1986 to join the MPLA in the fight against UNITA in Angola'. Originally, the PANAFU congress discussed the issue of sending recruits to Libya on behalf of the organisation, but the majority was against the enterprise. Kanu and Mansaray were among those who were finally expelled from the union as a result of their support for the move to Libya. Once rejected by the PANAFU, the project became a matter of individual choice; in the end, there were three groups, not more than thirty five men, sent to Libya from July 1987 to January 1988 including Sankoh and the two former PANAFU members (Abdullah 1998, pp. 216-217 & 219).

In the beginning, the RUF was nothing but 'a loose collection of individuals who had returned from military training in Bengahzi' with a collective leadership of three: Sankoh, Kanu and Mansaray. The three travelled a lot in Sierra Leone and Liberia to recruit combatants and open a link with the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), and eventually by 1989, they managed to make an informal deal with Charles Taylor to help him in return for his military assistance. Even though there is no specific evidence that 'any Sierra Leonean took part in the initial NPFL attack on Nimba county in December 1989', some RUF members, notably Kanu and Mansaray, allegedly participated in NPFL battles by November 1990 (Abdullah 1998, pp. 221-222).

The early insurgent force of the RUF was composed of three major groups: those who had military training in Libya, Sierra Leone residents in Liberia and NPFL fighters on loan to the RUF. Scholars provide different analysis with regard to the characteristics of these original forces, in particular to the first and second categories. Abdullah (1998, pp. 219-221) argues that a majority of them were lumpenproletariats and, thus, 'this social composition of the invading force is significant in understanding the character of the RUF and the bush path to destruction'. On the other hand, Richards (1996) describes them as excluded intellectuals and economic exiles/refugees staying in Liberia. In addition to their early revenge-inspired attacks on some educational facilities, as Richards argues, their destruction of mines cannot be adequately explained by a lumpen culture or motivations of greed. Why did the RUF destroy a number of mines instead of running them for their own economic interests? Richards (1996, pp.25-27) interprets this abnormality as implying 'a typical academic response' to accumulated social discontents and the intellectual anger of excluded elites. Abdullah (1998, pp. 222-223), however, refutes Richards' argument that he 'totally neglects the centrality and dynamics of rebellious youth culture', while insisting that the RUF rebels were neither radical nor excluded intellectuals.

Considering this controversy, it does not seem easy to track and determine the original character of the early RUF members since the rebel group included members from relatively diverse backgrounds. At least, however, the transformation in the RUF leadership reveals a certain useful aspect for further research on the early stage of the RUF insurgency. As mentioned above, the RUF maintained a collective leadership system before the civil war. Yet the three co-founders roughly agreed Sankoh would be the spokesperson for the group.[vi] His status as a spokesperson became later transformed into the RUF leader through his speeches for external audiences (Abdullah 1998).

As Sankoh consolidated his power in the group with the beginning of the war, he also started to eliminate his potential rivals – mostly educated radicals – within the group; the number executed was allegedly reported to have reached almost at 300 (Keen 2005). Among those executed, there were Kanu and Mansaray who founded the RUF with Sankoh; Kanu was executed in August 1992 for 'failure to follow instructions and conniving with the enemy', and Mansaray in the following November for 'failure to defend a strategic position against the enemy.' They could have endangered Sankoh's position since both of them were regarded as the leading strategists and also popular among the RUF cadres (Abdullah 1998, pp. 226-227).

In addition, according to a former PANAFU member in the army, 'the area under Kanu's control was generally peaceful and well organised' because 'he reached out to explain what the RUF was about to the peasants, and was not engaged in unnecessary violence against civilians'. Mansaray's second-in-command also confirmed that one of the reasons Mansaray was executed was his 'opposition to the indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians' (Abdullah 1998, pp. 226-227). By these executions, as Pratt (1999) noted, 'the radical intellectual roots of the RUF were

extinguished in its first year of operation, and its brutal attacks on civilians stood in contradiction to its ostensible aim of creating a revolutionary egalitarian system'.

External Assistance

Though it was originally a civil war, the bloody conflict in Sierra Leone was also closely intertwined with varied external factors prevalent in West African politics. First, as widely known through the recent 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, who had already secured 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 summarily and, to make things worse, he was detained at Pandemba Road prison (Gberie 2005, p. 54). This episode seems likely to have affected his perception of the Momoh administration negatively, and probably made him realise the significance of having pro-NPFL regimes in neighbouring countries. Furthermore, once the Liberian civil started 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, pp. 55-56).[vii] Also, given that the border region between Sierra Leone and Liberia was abundant in resources, including diamonds, a deeply destabilised Sierra Leone could have been Taylor's interest in economic terms (Richards 1996).

There is another major external factor which should not be disregarded: that is Libya. In light of the early influence of Gaddafi's *Green Book* on Sierra Leone students' movement and, more practically, the military training offered to the three co-founders of the RUF in Benghazi, it is obvious that the Libya connection laid the foundation for the emergence of the RUF. Yet it is controversial how deeply Libya was involved in assisting the RUF except providing the military training programmes to Sierra Leone rebels. Richards (1996, p. 20) argues that Gaddafi could not go beyond 'retain[ing] some residual sympathy for the RUF as one of the more sincere African attempts to apply aspects of his youth-oriented revolutionary philosophy' because of his own problems with the sub-Saharan venture. However, Berman (2001) suggests a different point of view: some copies of the letters allegedly written by Sankoh show that, in the mid 1990's, Libya provided the RUF the funds to purchase weapons. 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.

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, p. 60) 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.

V. Conclusion

The war finally began on March 23 1991 when the RUF entered Kailahun District and Pujehun District in Sierra Leone from Liberia, and as we all know, thousands of innocent civilians suffered and were killed by both parties – government soldiers and rebels – during the eleven-year war. Despite the gravity of those war crimes, we should be

careful not to judge the causes of the war simply based on the process and outcomes of the war. This paper, thus, questioned the conventional belief that diamonds were the main driver of the war, and then explored the broader political and societal context of Sierra Leone and the RUF's history before the war.

The Sierra Leone civil war was 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 marginalised 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.

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[i] There is no clear explanation in Williamson's article about why almost half of missing children

was reported in a single year of 1999. Presumably, it was because of the RUF's 'Operation No Living Thing' in 1999 in which thousands of innocent civilians in Freetown was murdered and raped. Many children were also reported missing and likely abducted by the RUF. See more details about 'Operation No Living Thing' in Denov (2010: 74-76) and Gberie (2005: chapter 6).

[ii] One of those journalists is Robert D. Kaplan (1994; 2001), and Paul Richards (1996) criticises Kaplan's argument as 'New Barbarianism'.

[iii] 'The Crown Colony was not more than 200 square miles. The Protectorate, on the other hand, extended some 182 miles from West to East, and 210 miles from North to South. The Colony had only about sixty thousand people by the end of the colonial period, while the Protectorate had about two million people.' (TRC 2004, p. 6)

[iv] The author did not state further details. More quantitative data concerning unemployment rate in Sierra Leone is difficult to find in other sources.

[v] The PANAFU was launched as a radical student group at Forah Bay University in the early 1980s.

[vi] It is not clear why Sankoh assumed the job of spokesman in the beginning. Presumably, it may have been related to the fact that he was much older than other RUF members. When the war broke out, he was already 53 years old.

[vii] 'The ECOMOG peace-keeping forces in Liberia were dominated by the Nigerians. Presidents Momoh was a close friend of Nigeria's military leader, General Babangida, and Freetown served as an important base for ECOMOG.' (Richards 1996, p. 19)

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