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Tayloryism in the Sierra Leone Civil War**

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# **Socio-Economic Injustice and Cronyism: Warlordism and Tayloryism in the Sierra Leone Civil War**

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## Introduction

The Sierra Leone civil war (1991-2002) was the most ruthless in the history of the West African civil conflicts that erupted after the end of the Cold War. This is because the combatants did not follow international humanitarian law (IHL). The war added new terminologies<sup>1</sup> to the atrocities of war and the killing of innocent civilians using under aged as child soldiers contrary to the fact that this group has legal protection under many international conventions. The Sierra Leone civil war that started on 23 March 1991 was a deep reflection of the beginning of the geographic spillover of instability in the West African sub-region. Although the proximate endogenous factors are intrinsically linked to issues of maladministration and state patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism that resulted in utter poverty, the external dimensions are linked to the snowballing effects of the first Liberian civil war, (1989-1996) orchestrated by Charles Taylor.

The Sierra Leone war shows the linkage between endogenous and exogenous variables as causes of internal wars. The root-causes of the war in Sierra Leone are many and their internal and external dynamics are intertwined. Despite its natural resource endowments, Sierra Leone suffers from the so-called paradoxes of the plenty, otherwise known as 'resource curse'. This is a situation that is common to many resource-rich African countries<sup>2</sup>. In fact, Sierra Leone has consistently been found among the poorest countries of the world. Generally, two main traits are outstanding as the consequences of the exploitation of natural resources in Africa. The exploitation of mineral resources in commercial quantity has led to economic collapse and political instability with the same end product, which put the masses as casualties at the periphery of the socio-economic schemes of things. This irony is encapsulated by this revealing fable on Sierra Leone thus<sup>3</sup>:

At the time of creation, it is said, God created a tiny country rich in mineral wealth, with diamonds, gold, bauxite, rutile, iron ore, chromite and platinum; an abundance of offshore fish; relatively fertile land; and plenty of rainfall. People from the neighbouring territories became furious and demanded equal treatment. God, however, cautioned them with the caveat that they should wait and see what kind of government would rule over Sierra Leone (Zack-Williams, 1990:22).

From the foregoing analysis, this paper uses the theory of state *elitism*<sup>4</sup> to explain how the ruling elite in Sierra Leone mismanaged the economy and disempowered the people. The misgovernance was carried out through bad socio-economic policies that promoted social injustice and mortgaged Sierra Leone's future by trapping the populace into the carnage,

affliction and other concurrent effects of civil war when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) allowed atrocious violence to run free on its helpless innocent victims.

The root of the Sierra Leone civil conflict is partly linked to Liberia when in 1989 Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) launched an insurgency against Samuel Doe's regime. Since then, the West African sub-region had lost its political stability. The form of instability that was associated with violent regime change was the intervention of the military elite in the governance of some African countries.<sup>5</sup>

### **Sierra Leone: A Mosaic of Ethno-Linguistic People and Socio-Economic Competition**

The sociological configuration of Sierra Leone is multivariate with a density of settlers who had had a stint with the Western world during the slave trade. Alie (1990:6) explains that Sierra Leone is made up of 17 ethnic groups that can be divided into three main ethno-linguistic groups, namely the Mande, Mel, and others. The Mande group comprises the "Mende, Loko, Kono, Vai (Gallinas), Soso, Yalunka, Koranko, and Madingo"; while the "Temne, Sherbro (Bullom), Krim, Kissi, and Gola" ethno-linguistic category form the Mel group; and the third grouping consists of the "Limba, Fula, Kru, and Krio" (Alie, 1990:11). Quoting Alie further, it is worth noting that on the one hand, the Limba are recognized among the earliest inhabitants of the present day Sierra Leone, and on the other hand, the Bullom are among "the oldest inhabitants of the Sierra Leone coast" (Alie, 1990:12). Numerically, the Temne and the Mende are the dominant ethnic groups in the demographic setting of the country (Ogunmola and Badmus, 2006:82). The total population of Sierra Leone in 2007 was estimated at over 6 million (World Bank, 2009). The World Development Indicators Database of the statistics of the ethnic composition of Sierra Leone is as follows: Temne are 30%, Mende 30%, other ethnic groups represent 30%, while the Krio are 10% of the population.

Like other parts of coastal Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the shores of Sierra Leone became anchor points for slave trade. Later on the anti-slave movement had some backlash effects on the Sierra Leonean society. Nevertheless, the ethnic landscape changed when the British decided to look for an outlet for returnee slaves and bought a piece of land from Koya Temne chiefs to resettle some of the freed slaves known as creoles or Krio. Young (1976:91-92) observes that the shoreline of Sierra Leone was used as a place for the settlement of the freed slaves and "a

hinterland was attached which had no relationship to the returned slaves, partly acculturated by their residence beyond seas.”

With this arrangement, “freed slaves...who represent less than 3% of the population became part of the ethnic configuration in Sierra Leone. The Creole, with their vantage position and background in education, became politically and historically dominant in Sierra Leone’s life.” (Ogunmola and Badmus, 2006:83). However, the land issue became controversial and pushed the Temne to be adversarial to the colonists because it seems that the KoyaTemne chiefs had a different understanding of the terms of the agreement because in Temne understanding “land had only been leased, not sold”, what is more, in Temne customary law “land was not saleable.” (Alie, 1990: 62).

There were at least five successive waves of settlers in Sierra Leone who had been brought back by the Sierra Leone Company, an association of British philanthropists. Osaе and Odunsi (1973: 41) state that:

[t]here were the original settlers who had been brought from England in 1787 and their descendants. Secondly, there were the Nova Scotians, Negroes who had fought on the side of the British during the War of Independence [because they had been promised freedom and land to fight alongside the British]. After the war was over, for fear that these Negroes might be victimized by the newly proclaimed United States of America, the British Government had removed them to Nova Scotia [in order to fulfill their promise].

The third wave was the Maroon slaves who ran away from Jamaica after their revolt against the Jamaican government. They were later subdued and taken to the Sierra Leone colony via to Nova Scotia (Osaе and Odunsi, 1973: 41). There were many groups of Africans who migrated to Sierra Leone. The fourth contingent, which was the largest wave, consisted of the “recaptive slaves” or “liberated Africans” (Hirsch, 2001:23) who were mainly from Nigerian descendants and were Yoruba and Igbo. Osaе and Odunsi(1973:42) argue that, “[d]uring the 1820s and 1830s, thousands of fresh captives were brought to Sierra Leone. Many of them were Yoruba and Igbo from Nigeria. It is said that there were as many as seventeen main distinct ethnic groups of captives in Sierra Leone...The captives from Yoruba-land in Western Nigeria, known as Aku, formed the dominant group.” A large number of the captives found solace in monotheism while others still clung to the worship of traditional deities such as *Sango* the Yoruba god of thunder (Alie, 1990:74). Some elements of Yoruba cultural and traditional values are still noticeable in contemporary Sierra Leone (Personal observation, January 2009)<sup>6</sup>.

As a psychological phenomenon that was noticeable among the slaves and first settlers in other parts of Africa, the first settlers considered themselves superior to the recaptives that were seen virtually as outcasts (HampatéBâ, 2002). Armed with western civilisation as a way of climbing the social ladder and equipped with western education, Krio influence transcended Sierra Leone and spread to other parts of West Africa as well as to the administrative machinery of British West Africa (Osae and Odunsi, 1973; Crowder, 1977; Wyse, 1991). Furthermore, in the political terrain of Sierra Leone, the Creoles became a power to be reckoned with as they were represented in the Executive and Legislative Councils at the epoch (Crowder, 1977; Wyse, 1991).

1896 is regarded as a turning point in the history of the Colony. In order to protect the British trade and ward off the looming French threats after the defeat of Samory Touré's army, and provide a secure naval base for its ships, the British government empowered the government of the Colony to sign new treaties with the indigenous chiefs and a Protectorate was proclaimed (Osae and Odunsi, 1973:47). The British political strategy had been to sideline articulate and progressive Sierra Leoneans. The colonial officials co-opted traditional chiefs who were more receptive to colonial policies. Under the British indirect rule system, the chiefs were the beneficiaries of the colonial administration and were suspicious of the educated elite (Alie, 2006:8).

However, the Creoles' political domination began to wane and finally became moribund with the emergence of political consciousness among the elite of the larger ethnic groups coupled with the policy of political exclusion by the British authorities against the Creoles (Hirsch, 2001:24). Unlike many African countries where ethno-politics had resulted in acute regional cleavages that undermined the unity of the country at the end of colonialism; in Sierra Leone, it was the acrimony, which the issue of citizenship/nationality generated, particularly the Creole question brought about by the distinction between the people of the Colony and the Protectorate (Alie, 2006:35).

On the economic front, commerce became one of the important aspects of the Creoles' power base as they flooded the Colony and Protectorate of Sierra Leone with their businesses. The recaptives, owing to their business acumen and emboldened by handsome returns from their trade surmounted those social challenges and by:

the late 1850s, the social differences had become blurred through ever-growing contact between the two groups, especially through intermarriages. In the end, settlers and

recaptives became merged into the Creoles' society of Sierra Leone (Osae and Odunsi, 1973:43).

The socio-economic configuration of Sierra Leone changed considerably with the discovery of diamonds in 1930 in Kono and Kenema Districts. Saylor (1967:59) argues that the scramble for spontaneous wealth and diamonds adversely affected agricultural output. On the one hand, the viability of agriculture was reduced by the prices the Marketing Board was offering to farmers, while on the other hand, the discovery of new diamond mines attracted “an estimated 50 000 to 100 000 Sierra Leoneans [who] left their farms and jobs to prospect, both legally and illegally for diamonds in spite of mass deportations, and in defiance of legislation enacted to restrict such movements.” (Saylor, 1967:59). This scenario was a forerunner to the neglect of the agricultural sector in the post-colonial period. Alie (2006:17) explains further that, in order to avert a major social crisis, the colonial government was compelled to import substantial quantities of rice to supplement the domestic production as shown in the table below.

Table 1: Rice Imports, 1953-58

<i>Year</i>	<i>Qty (cwt)</i>	<i>Value (£)</i>
<b>1953</b>	108	<b>364</b>
<b>1954</b>	91,722	<b>289,858</b>
<b>1955</b>	421,314	<b>968,018</b>
<b>1956</b>	735,993	<b>1,650,442</b>
<b>1957</b>	631,033	<b>1,429,270</b>
<b>1958</b>	<b>435,674</b>	<b>1,027,356</b>

**Source:** *Sierra Leone Department of Commerce and Industry Annual Reports-1953-58*, (cited in Alie, 2006:18).

This ugly trend would perennially plague post-independence Sierra Leone. For example, Hirsch (2001:27) states that “local agriculture was severely hit in the Kono region as many workers were drawn to mining.” Already in the early post independence years, Sierra Leone’s status had changed from being an exporter to an importer of rice. The land issue became a real handicap for the agricultural sector as farmers had to struggle with miners for arable land that was incidentally also useful for mining activities (Zack-Williams, 1999:23). In the twilight of colonial rule, the land issue was compounded by the introduction of new export crops (coffee and cocoa), which

made traditional rulers more influential as they collected money for land use and rents from the mining areas (Zack-Williams, 1982:79-80).

### **The Post-Colonial Sierra Leone: The Failure of Political Leadership**

Immediately after independence, the new Sierra Leonean state was enmeshed in a series of political crises that impacted severely on nation building. The first casualty of the inconsistent government policies was the education sector. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sierra Leone was the admiration of African intelligentsia owing to the high standards of its system of education, and the country was rightly called the “Athens of West Africa” (Hirsch, 2001:13). The signs of institutional decay were quite discernible. Wyse (1991:110) notes that the victory of the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP), led by Sir Milton Margai, at the 1961 Presidential election, which was keenly contested by the All Peoples Congress (APC), obliterated Creoles political ambition but that victory “did not destroy the Krio people”. It is acknowledged that, “the Mendes of southeastern Sierra Leone traditionally provide the bulk of support for the SLPP.” (Zack-Williams, 1999:150).

First of all, there was the crisis of succession generated by the demise of Sir Milton Margai on 28 April 1964. Milton Margai had failed to enshrine mechanisms of succession in the constitution. Although other party stalwarts were interested in the political leadership of Sierra Leone, the younger brother of the late Prime Minister, Sir Albert Margai, emerged as the new Prime Minister to the detriment of the unity of the party because those influential members of the party felt offended. Moreover, Sir Albert Margai did not help matters by failing to pacify the dissident members of the party who later stood as independent candidates, and he painfully tried to push through his bill on one party system that was virulently opposed by the APC (Alie, 2006:51). Therefore, it was on a slippery ground that the SLPP went to the 1967 Parliamentary election. Although the Prime Minister tried to cling to power, the SLPP lost to the APC.

Subsequently, the Governor-General appointed the leader of the APC, Siaka Probyn Stevens as the new Prime Minister. However, a crisis ensued and the democratic process was halted by the military when a faction loyal to the SLPP led by the Army Commander, Brigadier David Lansana, struck on 21 March 1967 while the new Prime Minister and some of staunch



members of the APC fled to Guinea-Conakry (Alie, 2006:53). However, the military rule was short-lived by another coup d'état. The counter coup of 23 March 1967 was apparently a vendetta within the military against their superior officer, Brigadier David Lansana (Alie, 2006:60-62). A third coup that was carried out by non-commissioned officers on 17 April 1968 reinstated Prime Minister Stevens. It is instructive to note that Siaka Stevens had left the SLPP to create the All Peoples Congress (APC) on the ground that the SLPP was "overly conservative and elitist" and still under British tutelage<sup>7</sup> (Smillie, Gberie and Hazleton, 2000:43).

In his anxious moves to strengthen his power and the survival of his regime during his seventeen year rule (1968-1985), Prime Minister Siaka Stevens employed unconstitutional means (the one party state and the manipulation of the electoral process) and ruthless methods (coercion, the involvement of youth as political thugs, muzzling of dissenting voices within the armed forces, the judiciary, and the political class) to achieve his objectives to the detriment of the well-being and unity of the country; and consequently, Siaka Stevens became the President with sweeping executive powers; as well as the co-option of opponents by the combination of carrot and stick strategies<sup>8</sup>, all firmly rooted in patrimonial and clientelist systems (Luke, 1988; Reno, 1995). The abortive coup of 1971 resulted in the execution of Brigadier Bangura and gave Siaka Stevens the opportunity to consolidate his grip on power (Wyse, 1991:119). The acceptance of one party system by Stevens after he had virulently opposed the SLPP's attempt at one party rule was just one of the many contradictions of President Siaka Stevens<sup>9</sup> (Luke, 1988; Reno, 1995). A section of the country, in the Pujehun District, a political base of the SLPP near the Liberian borders rebelled against the rigging of the results of the 1982 elections by the APC and this was known as the *Ndorgbowusi bushwar* and government forces had to use extreme violence to quell the insurgency (Alie, 2006:99). The rebellion would have serious implications on the national security of Sierra Leone nine years later.

### **The State and Chiefdoms, Landownership and Entrepreneurship in Sierra Leone**

Patrimonialism, clientelism, and corruption have characterised national politics on mining gemstones, especially diamond in Sierra Leone. Unfortunately for the less privileged Sierra Leoneans, who bear the brunt of the mismanagement of the national wealth, the mineral resources boom has become a source of doom by generating tears and despair for the down-

trodden. But, diamonds mining created wealth for the powerful individuals with the ‘right’ connections (Zack-Williams,1995).

Diamonds were discovered in Sierra Leone in commercial quantity in the 1930s. The principal diamonds deposits are found in the forest zones of the Kono and Kenema districts near the Sierra Leoneans borders with Guinea and Liberia (Clapham, 2003:17). Diamond mining began after World War II (Richards, 2001:69). In 1934 the colonial government empowered the Sierra Leonean Selection Trust (SLST), an offspring of De Beers, to mine diamonds exclusively through a lease for ninety-nine years (Hirsch, 2001:27). However, this policy alienated Sierra Leoneans as they were denied the opportunity to extract and benefit from this wealth. The colonial government reinforced the control of land and its ownership by the paramount traditional chiefs through the indirect rule system (Keen, 2005:12). This policy reinforced the pre-colonial hierarchical political system that was deeply rooted in the predomination of the ruling families that derived their wealth from land through the Protectorate Native Law Ordinance of 1905 (Fenton cited in Richards, Bah and Vincent, 2004: 2). The policy made the position of chief to be much more alluring and rewarding. The ruling families competed because of the obvious benefits and influence they could derive from the control of land. For example, in the Mende and Kono regions, ownership of land is hereditary and land could be leased (Fithen, cited in Keen, 2005:13).Furthermore, Richards, Bah and Vincent (2004:3) explain that:

The ruling families divided into “treaty chiefs” recognised by the British, and others who rejected British rule. Those who rejected British rule were especially notable in the Liberia border region, and some border chiefs (of Gola and Kissi background). For this reason, Kailahun district has retained its reputation as a “difficult region” even to this day, and the RUF exploited some of the grievances of those “excluded” families.

Richards, Bah, and Vincent (2004:6) conclude that, “land stands at heart of the system”. Of course, this is true when natural resources abound in the land or it is suitable for agriculture purposes. As a Yoruba proverb tells us, “He who owns the slave owns the luggage he or she carries.” By implications, the ownership of land made the paramount chiefs *de facto* owners of natural resources in their domain and not the people who are their subjects. Another backlash from colonial policy was the controversial issue surrounding the re-demarcation of Sierra Leone borders in 1911. Richards (2004: 6) notes:

[c]olonialism divided many border families, and excluded some from chieftaincy, resulting in a long history of dissidence by certain local land-owing groups...A number

of chiefs in Kailahun District, for example refusing to recognise British overrule in 1896, and prevented from contesting colonial chieftaincy elections, developed a nomadic existence, in villages strung across the Liberian, Guinean and Sierra Leonean borders

An additional source of grievance against the traditional chiefs was that the paramount chiefs in the rural zone can overrule land owing families and in most cases their decisions is final (Unruh and Turray, 2006: 2). This shows the supremacy of the paramount chiefs to the detriment of the people despite the fact that post-independence government was at variance with the feudal system. The post-colonial political class found it difficult to alter this policy for ‘selfish interest’ and political manipulations. Most importantly, the Kailahun and Pujehun districts were the political catchment areas of the SLPP and the APC government ensured the effective marginalization of these ‘stubborn Districts’ because of its inability to put them under its sphere of influence as Richards (2004:13) analyses the situation further:

Opposition in Kailahun and parts of Pujehun Districts in the 1970s to the regime of Siaka Stevens caused Freetown to cut back on normal investments in road repairs, schools and salaries, in the hope of coercing political compliance. Chiefs came to be seen either as Freetown stooges, or predatory on young people as they sought to make (sic) the loss of revenue and services from central government.

In addition, the prolonged neglect and isolation of the rural areas created profound grievances and bitterness against the APC ruling elite. Davies (2000: 354-355) notes that:

Stevens’ regime aggravated (sic) isolation of rural Sierra Leone-home to 80% of the population and producing much of the country’s wealth. The railway linking the rural area to Freetown was dismantled in the early 1970s while no road network replaced it in the rural areas.

The RUF used the perceived accumulated injustices against the people of the hinterland to recruit. The combination of these policies of alienation by government and traditional authorities set the population and especially the youth who were at the “receiving end” of bad policies against the ruling class.

One of the issues the RUF raised in its political propaganda was the land problem that was intrinsically linked to the dismal output of the agricultural sector because “the acquisition of land for mining purposes reduced the availability of arable land” (Zack-Williams, 1995:181).The insurgents claimed that one of their aims was a policy of rural restructuring (Richards, 2004:16).They wanted accountability for Sierra Leone “misappropriated mineral wealth” (Richards, 2001:73). Moreover, the gemstones bearing communities live in abject poverty amid huge deposit of mineral resources that are the economic lifeline of the country; and ironically,

they are economically incapacitated by the very wealth whose benefits they cannot enjoy. Instead of emancipating the people, “[p]oliticians, powerful chiefs in the diamonds-rich chiefdoms, and Lebanese traders made a fortune, but the ordinary Sierra Leoneans standard of living continued to decline throughout the 1980s” (Zack-Williams, 1999:148). Reno (1995: 56-57) draws our attention to the fact that:

Local chiefs had played prominent roles in diamond mining as inescapable intermediaries during the colonial days thus giving them an aura of importance as a projection of the indirect rule system.

This created a ferment of frustration and resentment. Such antagonism was often in the form of migration to Freetown (to swell the colony of urban unemployed youth) or outright migration to neighbouring countries. Besides, Clapham (2003:14) notes that:

(...) diamond miners were excluded from the ‘official’ lines of communication, directed through the paramount chiefs, through which the formal politics was conducted, and on which its politicians largely depended to extract their rent from diamond mining

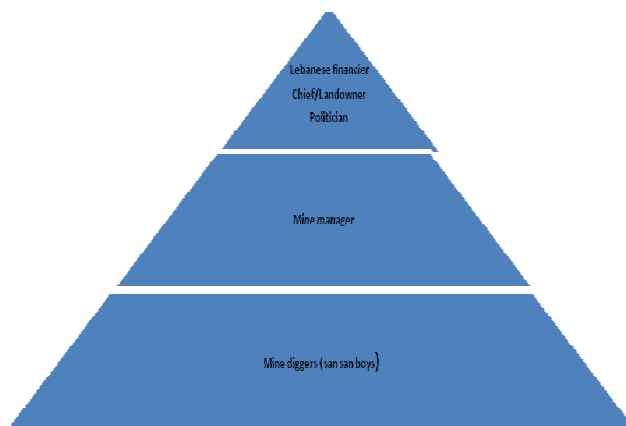
However, the SLST ceded large mining areas to the Sierra Leonean government in 1955 and SLST kept the rich diamond areas around Yengema and Tongo Fields (Keen, 2005:12). Nonetheless, the government lifted the ban on mining. The government had restricted Sierra Leoneans to mine precious stones with the caveat that only the paramount chiefs and others who, by virtue of their birth, had control over land in 1956 as the new scheme, the Alluvial Diamond Mining Ordinance and Rules could give Sierra Leoneans mining rights (Saylor, 1967:127-134). Subsequently, this provided the opportunity for the most affluent with the ‘right’ connections to profit from the liberalization. Those who could afford the license and the necessary rudimentary equipments were chiefs, politicians, and most importantly traders (Keen, 2005 12) and “capital was supplied by a Lebanese trading Diaspora” (Richards, 2001:69). Richards (2001:70) notes that “the central figures in Siaka Stevens’ APC system<sup>9</sup> had well-established stakes in Kono diamonds” to the detriment of budding politicians who had to explore “less well-known deposits including those along the Liberian border.” In this connection, Richards (2001:69) explains the pattern and/or division of labour in mining alluvial diamonds as follows:

A typical small-scale alluvial diamond mining operation is likely to involve a Lebanese “supporter” in partnership with a landowner or a political protector from the national elite...A trusted mine manager will supervise a team of diggers in the bush. Laborers are generally known as “sand sand boys”.

Often, the diggers are the unemployed youth who are resentful at being sent to sweat in the bush and not to school. This feeling of bitterness, which is associated with diamond mining, was not new. It had already been noticed as part of the prologue of the political tone to independence “was filled with feelings of ‘relative deprivation’ that political parties vented against the chiefs.” (Reno, 1995: 59).

The alluvial nature of some deposits of Sierra Leone’s diamonds makes it easy for predation. Silberfein (2004: 215) is of the view that “alluvial diamonds attract casual miners who dig pits in river beds and pan for diamonds” with its concomitant hazardous effects coupled with the fact that they are at the mercy of landowners and entrepreneurs.

Chart 1: Actors in Sierra Leone Licit and Illicit Alluvial Diamonds Mining.



Source: Ogunmola, 2009.

Cartwright (1978: 34) highlights the peculiar nature of Sierra Leone diamonds in the following words:

Since Sierra Leone’s diamonds were alluvial, their production, unlike most mineral extraction, could be undertaken either by the usual capital extensive (...) or by the much less sophisticated hand digging of native Sierra Leoneans, which from 1954 onward co-existed alongside the more efficient but foreign owned and operated by Sierra Leone Selection Trust.

Davies (2000: 353) states that Siaka Stevens contributed to the rush to the diamonds mines by pledging “free-for- all mining if elected” during the 1967 general elections and this promise led to the explosion of illicit mining when he came to power in 1968. This electoral pledge would

pick up the pace of the perennial problems of contraband gemstones being exported to Guinea and Liberia that dates back to the colonial days (Saylor, 1967: 59).

### **The Post-Independence Sierra Leone: An Economy Under Siege**

Sierra Leone had no reason to be poor (cited in Luke, 1988:73).

The above aphorism aptly captures the failure of the political leaders to emancipate the citizens. Siaka Stevens wove a network of patrimonial system to lubricate his clientelist regime (Adebajo, 2002: 81). Luke and Riley<sup>10</sup> (1989:134) observe that

The consequences of this pattern of politics are to be seen in a range of arenas, skewing development efforts and undermining the mobilization and redistribution of resources for public benefit.

Reno (1995:143) argues that the Sierra Leonean economy was virtually under the tutelage of the Lebanese businessmen who were filling the gap created by the inability of the Siaka Stevens' government to control vital economic resources as the Head of State "was himself becoming deeply involved in business."

The economic system bequeathed to the post-colonial state was mismanaged during the protracted rule of Siaka Stevens. The poor economic performance was due to exogenous and endogenous factors. The former include unfavourable terms of trade, oil shocks, debt overhang and their negative effects. The latter include inconsistent economic policies, ineffective monitoring of mineral trade, and serious lapses that encouraged the illicit mining of natural resources, and smuggling that were the hallmarks of gemstone trade in the country, and the collapse of basic infrastructure (Luke, 1988; Reno, 1995). In the same vein, Stevens institutionalized his 'Shadow State', the "informal diamond networks", by holding firmly to the most productive sector of the economy: the diamond fields and the mode of production, as well as its commercialization through proxies (Reno, 1995:78).

What is more, the presence and strong influence of Lebanese traders and other expatriates was a conduit pipe for Stevens and his cronies to drain off the country's natural resources (Reno, 1995: 96-132). According to Luke (1988:74), the Lebanese were "seen by many as an exploiting minority with undue and excessive influence-through the patronage network as providers of

spoils-in the country's affairs". The Lebanese were deeply involved in contraband diamonds. It has been estimated that "as much as half of the country's diamonds were still smuggled out, largely by Lebanese." (Smillie, Gberie, and Hazleton, 2000:43). Reno (1995:131) claims that some Sierra Leoneans referred to this state of affairs as 'Black Colonialism'. However, there were growing concerns and criticisms from Sierra Leone civil society as to the state of the nation (Reno, 1995:93). After a long reign, the octogenarian President Stevens retired from office in 1985, and appointed the Army Chief, who was also a nominated Member of Parliament and a Minister, Major-General Joseph Saidu Momoh through a stage-managed process to rule Sierra Leone (Luke and Riley, 1989:133). The political succession was carried out in an atmosphere of serious economic crisis as revenues accruing to the government from diamond sales fell dramatically "by 90 per cent in the decades up to 1984." (Sierra Leone Ministry of Mines, Annual Report, cited in Reno, 1995:133). In the same vein, Alie (2006: 85) states that the

(...) worsening economic situation in the country due to high level corruption, nepotism, over-centralisation of the state machinery, clientelism and patronage...had adversely affected all sections of society.

The result of this situation was that "Momoh... inherited a predatory regime that was steeped in corruption, opportunism, cronyism and sycophancy" (Kandeh, 1999:352). President Momoh was sitting on a keg of gunpowder. Keen observers of the Sierra Leone's politics did not need a magnifier to see that the 'change' that had brought General Momoh to power was a time-bomb (Reno, 1995; Kandeh, 1999).

### **Joseph Saidu Momoh's Regime: The Beginning of Political Instability**

Although President Momoh promised Sierra Leoneans a "New Order", it was apparent that he lacked the political clout, overbearing influence, and authority of his predecessor over the APC and cabinet members in particular, and the political class in general (Reno, 1995; Kandeh, 1999). Moreover, Momoh had to contend with two major obstacles to assert his authority, which, according to Reno (1995: 157) are:

(...) to establish his own authority, he had to break the economic stranglehold of deeply unpopular Lebanese "strangers" and their politician allies, which he had inherited from Stevens's political network. Lacking support from creditors to defend his own interests independently of Stevens' Shadow State network. For their part, creditors desired increased state revenue capacity to ensure payment of arrears. Creditors' and Momoh's

interests coincided on this fiscal imperative. Both saw Lebanese-politicians collaboration in the “private economy” as a threat, though for different reasons. Momoh feared their political capabilities while creditors identified Lebanese dealers as products of “bad policies” and informal-market evasion of state revenue collection.

Momoh’s policy to sideline the ‘old political brigade’ nearly proved fatal for his regime on 23 March 1987 with a coup plot in which some senior members of his cabinet were involved. This event revealed the cracks within the ruling APC (Reno 1995; Adebajo, 2002). President Momoh’s years were noted for bad governance and repression was unrestrained. Also there was the apprehension that he was not fully in charge of the affairs of the state<sup>11</sup> and the economy collapsed, amid wide dissatisfaction with his regime (Kandeh, 1999; Ogunmola and Badmus, 2006). The table below shows the extent of the prolonged financial crisis in Sierra Leone that was compounded by the civil war of Sierra Leone.

Table 2: An Overview of the Financial Predicament of Sierra Leone

Merchandise trade							External debt	
Exports	Import	Manufactured exports	High technology exports	Current account balance	Foreign direct investment	Official development assistance or official aid	Total	Present value
\$ millions 2005	\$ millions 2005	% of total merchandise exports 2004	% of manufactured exports 2004	\$ millions 2005	\$ millions 2004	\$ per capita 2004	\$ millions 2004	% of GNI 2004
150	350	7	..	..	-74	26	67	1,723

**Source:** Trade, Aid and Finance, World Development Report: Development and the Next Generation. Washington DC: World Bank, 2007, p.297

On the economic side, Momoh’s records were as depressing as his gloomy political performance. After an initial attempt to revamp the economy through some reforms largely engineered by creditors (Reno, 1995:155-156). Sierra Leone was at the mercy of rapacious cabals branded as the “Binkolo Mafia” and “Ekutay organisation”<sup>12</sup> (Kandeh, 1999:353). Momoh’s ‘New Order’ was a return to the Stevens’ ‘Old Order’ that his government even surpassed due to the ineptitude of his administration (Smillie, Gberie, and Hazleton, 2000:45). The reasons were many and obviously terminal for the country’s economy. With unrestrained looting and endemic, systemic and



systematic corruption, entrenched neopatrimonialism, sustained illicit diamond mining, a weak and neglected agricultural sector, the economy was under siege, and it finally collapsed (Reno, 1995; Kandeh, 1999). In this connection, Kandeh (1999: 353) provides a graphic account of the foregoing situation:

By the time Momoh was ousted from power in 1992, the state's extractive and allocative capacity had all but disappeared. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had fallen from \$1.1 billion in 1980 to \$857 million in 1990 and -5.1 percent (1991-95). International reserves, which stood at a paltry \$31 million in 1980, dipped to an all time low of \$5 million under Momoh. Average GDP growth rates in the last five years of the Stevens dictatorship (1980-85) hovered around 3.0 per cent but dropped to 1.1 per cent in the first five years (1985-90) of the Momoh government. From 1990 to 1995, not a single economic sector or activity registered any growth, with exports showing the sharpest decline.

One of the major economic decisions that had negative consequences on the social sphere was the Momoh government's implementation of the IMF and World Bank conditionalities. The removal of subsidies on oil and rice worsened a very bad situation as the prices of basic commodities skyrocketed. Amid government bankruptcy and the informalisation of the economy, the 'black market' dealt severe blows to revenues accruing to the government (Alie, 2006:125-129). The following explanations and the table below inform us that Sierra Leone was on the verge of economic collapse. On the bleak situation of Sierra Leone, Reno (1995: 165) contends that:

Crude oil sat in ships off shore in wait for cash payment. Suppliers no longer extended credit to this government, as bills for earlier deliveries had gone unpaid. Commerce halted and transport ceased as petrol prices reached \$10 per gallon in the informal market.

The country was in a critical economic situation. The government seemed incapable of reversing the ugly trend while economic hardship became the lot of the majority of the citizens. A sense of lost of confidence in government which might have led to growing frustration in the Sierra Leonean society due to government ineptitude in meeting the needs of the citizens was pervasive. Kpundeh (2004:91-92) states that the combination of these factors led to the internal causes of the war because:

[t]he deepening systemic corruption since the 1980s, evidenced by the lack of accountability and transparency, produced the proximate cause of the rebel war:

exclusionary politics, violations of rule of law, rural isolation leading to ethnic and regional grievances, extreme centralization, economic decline and high unemployment.

Table 3: Depiction of the Prolonged Sierra Leone Economic Crisis

	Millions of U.S. Dollars (current prices)											Annual average		
	1980	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	75-84	85-89	90-MR
Gross Domestic Product, real	840	851	893	907	835	754	755	781	703	738	..	2.0	0.8	-3.3
Gross domestic Product, nominal	1,199	1,286	1,181	897	807	691	771	928	866	940	..	1,044	1,081	843
Gross Public investment	..	2.0	3.1	3.5	4.4	4.7	5.3	4.4	2.6	3.3	..	3.2	3.0	4.0
GDP growth	4.8	2.1	5.0	1.6	-8.0	-9.6	0.1	3.5	-10.0	5.0	..	2.0	0.8	-3.3
GNP per capita	370	280	280	260	200	160	160	160	170	200	..	316	292	187
Total External debt	469	1,032	1,032	1,066	1,151	1,206	1,245	1,396	1,493	1,178	1,167	442	942	1,262
Long-term debt: private	111	92	82	86	99	98	36	26	26	8	8	91	84	43
Interest	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0

payment: private long-term loans														
Interest payment: long-term loans and IMF charges	10	2	3	1	4	2	14	14	58	19	11	8	5	17

**Source:** World Bank Development Indicators on Sierra Leone's Economy 1998/99 p.296

These shortcomings were exploited by the RUF as motives to move the people to them, at least at the inception of the war. The inescapable consequence is that the citizens, especially the less privileged, bear the burden of maladministration, as the provision of basic infrastructure that was epileptic even when government was not overwhelmed by economic setbacks becomes quasi in-existent.

The end of the East and West Cold War had snowballing effects on totalitarian regimes and it represented a watershed in African politics. In actual fact, the fall of communism heralded the end of the search for client states. (Chabal and Daloz, 1999:36). The new fervour has become the war against extremist Islam, especially since 11 September 2001. The aftermath of the fall of Nicolas Ceausescu in Romania in 1989 in addition to the long strike of Solidarity Trade Union in Poland in the 1980s, and the eventual election of Lech Walesa in 1990 became the beginning of a long process that emboldened civil society to seek more freedom, political rights and, especially, multiparty elections and forced one party state or military authoritarianism that had been the model of government in Africa after the post-independence general elections to liberalise the political space. The support for one party state waned inexorably with the emergence of the global

unipolar system and the triumph of liberalism (Ogunmola, 2009: 237-240). The 1990s was a turning point in the history of multiparty elections in Africa and there were signs that the one party state system was becoming anachronistic in Africa. Sierra Leone was no exception to the wave of democracy. After initial procrastinations, President Momoh was compelled by creditors and civil society groups to accept the return to multiparty elections that were scheduled for the early 1990s.

### **The Making of a Rebellion: The NPFL and Its Domino Effects on the West African Sub-region**

On 24 December 1989, Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL)<sup>13</sup> began an insurgency in Liberia from his rear base in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire against the regime of Master-Sergeant Samuel Doe who himself had seized political power through a bloody coup in April 1980 in which President Williams Tolbert of the True Whig Party who ruled from 1971 to 1980 was assassinated. The rebellion heralded a long period of anarchy not only in Liberia but also civil wars in the neighbouring countries, especially in Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire. The availability of diamonds made the extension of the Liberian war to Sierra Leone by proxy feasible (Reno, 1997; Collier, 2001; Gberie, 2002). Although some analysts believe that diamonds rather sustained and prolonged the civil conflict (Ross, 2006; Interview, Freetown, January 2009).

After his escape from Sierra Leone and subsequent detention in Ghana, Taylor resurfaced in Burkina Faso where he met with other Liberian dissidents (civilians and military officers of the Quiwonkpa's faction of the Armed Forces of Liberia, notably Prince Yomi Johnson) opposed to Samuel Doe's dictatorial rule (Ellis, 1999: 69). This group of Liberian military officers helped Captain Blaise Compaoré to seize power in a bloody military coup in which President Thomas Sankara was assassinated in 1987<sup>14</sup> (Ellis, 1999: 69). In Gberie's (2005) opinion, Charles Taylor was a willing tool in the hands of Colonel Gaddafi and the actual motive of Charles Taylor "was to spread destabilization in the region for the broader hegemonic control, in which Gaddafi would emerge as the new, shadowy master of West Africa." (Gberie, 2005: 54).

Furthermore, Ellis' (1999) account of Libya and Burkina Faso relations shows that Blaise Compaoré introduced Taylor to Colonel Gaddafi and "convince the Libyan leader of his

[Taylor] revolutionary credentials...Gaddafi took interest in these West African intrigues in pursuit of his own vast revolutionary ambitions, which extended to the whole of Africa” (Ellis, 1999:69).Moreover, “[t]he Libyans had for some years espoused the Pan Africanist cause” withGadaffi erroneously considering himself to be the heir of Kwame Nkrumah, [without the visionary approach to African politics of the late Ghanaian leader] (Richards, 2005:382). Above all, Samuel Doe was enmeshed in the US intelligence plot to end Gaddafi’s rule in Libya. Colonel Gaddafi vehemently resented Samuel Doe’s cooperation with the Reagan’s administration.<sup>15</sup>Charles Taylor alias “superglue”<sup>16</sup> was able to consolidate his guerrilla movement with the support of the governments of Libya, Burkina Faso, and Côte d’Ivoire that supported him by providing financial assistance and logistics (Ellis, 1999: 72).

There are many reasons for Taylor’s face off with the Sierra Leonean authorities.

1. The failed attempt by Charles Taylor to use the Sierra Leonean territory (the Pujehun District) to launch his rebellion against the Samuel Doe’s government (Alie, 2006)
2. Taylorsubsequent arrest and brief detention in Freetown in 1989 (Gberie, 2005;Alie, 2006)
3. The involvement of Sierra Leoneans in the NPFL insurgency (Adebajo, 2002:82; Interview, Freetown, January 2009)
4. The interference of the Momoh’s government in the first Liberian civil war (1989-1996) by allowing ECOMOG to establish a base in Sierra Leone to attack the NPFL’s position, (Smillie,Gberie,and Hazleton, 2000;Abdullah, 2004)
5. To force the pulling out of ECOMOG from Sierra Leone, and Sierra Leone from ECOMOG and install a puppet RUF government (Adebajo, 2002: 82).

These are some of the reasons that might have resulted in Charles Taylor’s decision to state that, “he would teach Sierra Leoneans the bitterness of war” (Alie, 2006:132).

Furthermore, Gaddafi resented the boycott of the 1982 OAU Summit in Tripoli by PresidentMomoh and this “embittered the Libyan leader against the APC and its leaders” (Gberie, 2005:49). The antagonistic Sierra Leone government posture was a risky venture owing

to the unpredictable temperament of the Libyan leader. The influence of Libya can be summarized thus,

1. The APC leaders' non-cooperation with Libya was despite the fact that the Libyans had been building networks, especially in civil society in Sierra Leone since the 1970s and they had infiltrated the leadership of students in Fourah Bay College through the cell of the adepts of the tenets of Colonel Gaddafi's *Green Book* (Abdullah, 2004; Richards, 2004). The *Green Book* became the gospel of radical students, and school dropouts as well as marginalized youth of East Freetown that incited them to control or/and take political power; and Siaka Stevens had to use 'self-help' by instrumentalising the APC thugs, some unemployed youth of East Freetown, to harass that group of students (Abdullah, 2004; Richards, 2004). These youth had read but it seemed that they did not digest the fundamentals of the political works and theories of some of the Third World great thinkers (Clapham, 2003:15).
2. Siaka Stevens' visit to Libya was facilitated through the connections the Libyans had made in civil society and religious organisations, and influential diamond dealers; while Gaddafi had allegedly assisted financially Sierra Leone in hosting the 1980 OAU Summit. (Abdullah, 2004: 49-51).
3. Some students (mostly the radical leaders of the Students Union) were expelled over the allegation that they were agitating against the government at the instigation of Libya (Abdullah, 2004; Gberie, 2005; Richards, 2005). However, the threat was not credible.
4. Some of the expelled students underwent military training and were brainwashed ideologically through the rhetoric of the *Green Book* at the *Mathabh al-Alamiya* World Revolutionary Headquarters in Libya (Abdullah, 2004; Gberie, 2005).
5. Another group of students and dropouts, and individuals including FodaySankoh had trained in Libya after a sojourn in Jerry Rawlings' Ghana which had become a relay station for Libya through its Accra Peoples Bureau (Abdullah, 2004:56). FodaySankoh had undergone military training in Libya with Charles Taylor in 1987 and 1988 in Benghazi (Gberie, 2005:52).

However, the credentials of these students were confined to the Fourah Bay College and they lacked credible influence outside the university and the Libyans failed to appreciate that fact (Abdullah, 2004:52). Some of these students that were consistently harassed by the Sierra Leonean government would eventually give an intellectual texture and a revolutionary fervour to the RUF. While preparing for his insurgency, Taylor recruited Foday Sabaynah Sankoh and some of the expelled students (Abu Kanu, Rashid Mansaray) who had undergone military training in Libya. They joined him in the Burkina Faso military camp in Po where potential NPFL insurgents trained (Abdullah, 2004; Gberie, 2005). In addition, it is acknowledged that the responsibility of Libya and Burkina Faso “in training and arming a core group of the RUF has now been established beyond dispute.” (Clapham, 2003:15). Abdullah (2004:57) states that “some of the insurgents had acquired military training in Libya.” What is more, Davies (2000:351) argues that “the critical factor that triggered the [Sierra Leone] civil war was Libyan finance and training for the rebellion.” This is so apparently because the would-be rebels would not have launched any insurgency without these strategic facilities at their disposal for the common wisdom that “money is the sinew of war.”

The NPFL rebels that launched their attack on Liberia were a heterogeneous group of dissidents and adventurers from different horizons of 167 men from some West African countries (Guinea, Sierra Leone, the Gambia, and Senegal) and the anti-Doe forces (Verschave, 1999:207). Their common dominator was that they had had a stint in military training in Libya and Burkina Faso. Besides, Côte d’Ivoire was also involved in logistics support for the RUF (Berman, 2000; Davies, 2000). Subsequently, some of the Sierra Leoneans who had participated in the Liberian civil war later became the arrowheads of insurgency in the Sierra Leone fratricidal war. Thus, giving rise to the phenomenon of recycled warlords in the West African conflicts by appearing also in the Côte d’Ivoire internecine war. Sam Bockarie, one of the RUF commanders, also known as “General Mosquito” or Skinny who was eventually killed along the border regions between Liberia and Cote d’Ivoire is the archetype of this West African merchant of death<sup>17</sup>.

## **The Anatomy of the Revolutionary United Front**

“Pass war cam befor Salone go beteh, but way war cam we beleh full quick”<sup>18</sup>

Some scholars traced the origin of the civil war in Sierra Leone to the procrastination of General Joseph Siadu Momoh on the liberalisation of the political space through multiparty election for the enthronement of genuine democracy coupled with the overwhelming damage done to the economy (Gershoni, 1997:56). Others argue that the process of economic decay in Sierra Leone had started during the protracted maladministration of Siaka Stevens with his “shadow state.” In addition, the end of the cold war and the protection it offered Stevens’ government also galvanised the opposition to ask for multiparty elections and the end of one party politics (Luke 1988; Reno 1995).

Deep-seated frustration had already been embedded in the Sierra Leone society due to the APC maladministration that resulted in the lack of/or inadequate infrastructure, poverty, and unemployment especially among the youth. The central government became weak and virtually abandoned its duties and responsibilities to the citizens while the economic crisis was overwhelming (Keen, 1998; Reno, 1999; Abdullah, 2004). Moreover, “Siaka Stevens’ despotic rule from 1968-1985 engendered deep seated grievances widely believed to be the root cause of Sierra Leone’s rebel war.” (Davies, 2000:352).

As a result of their training in Libya and before Taylor’s recruitment drive for fighters and insurgency in Liberia, the core members of the nascent group that would germinate into the rebellion went into ‘revolutionary’ limbo for lack of vision and no clear-cut action plan to drive home their revolution agenda or mobilise fighters (Abdullah, 2004:54). However, the RUF came into being in 1980 with the aim of putting an end to the APC rule by establishing a training camp for its fighters in the forest zone of Yele; however the idea was dumped because of the security risk (Abdullah, 2004; Richards, 2005).

As a movement, the RUF had no clear leader to direct its affairs, but Foday Sankoh alias Papay, Abu Kanu, and Rashid Mansaray formed a loose and sometimes close triumvirate



depending on their immediate objectives while looking for new recruits and opportunities to launch an insurgency; and those who set up Sankoh had misjudged his ability “to think and act politically” because of the level of his education (Abdullah, 2004:54-55). This error of judgment would be fatal for his comrades as Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray were executed by firing squad on phony charges on the orders of Foday Sankoh because of their opposition to indiscriminate killings, sexual abuse by the RUF fighters (Abdullah, 2004; Interview, Freetown, January 2009). Sankoh’s relations with Libya and his association with Charles Taylor could have been major determinants for emerging as the leader of the RUF (Clapham, 2003:15-16).

The RUF combatants’ baptism of fire really came when some of their members had fought on the side of Taylor’s NPFL (Richards, 2005:381). For all intents and purposes, Taylor and Sankoh alliance was a marriage of convenience. Abdullah (2004:56) notes that:

Sankoh met Charles Taylor in Libya in 1988, who then invited him to join the NPFL...By mid 1989 a deal had been struck: Foday Sankoh and his group would help Charles Taylor ‘liberate’ Liberia, after which he would provide them with a base to launch their armed struggle.

Furthermore, it appears that Taylor felt it a moral obligation to give back the supports he had enjoyed from the ‘Sierra Leonean contingent’ by assisting the ‘boys’ to overthrow the APC government (Richards, 2001:74). The RUF launched its campaign in Sierra Leone and, according to Richards, 2001: 74, accompanied by:

Liberian and Burkinabe “special forces”. The Special Forces were responsible for some of the worst atrocities against civilians. Fleeing civilians reported a populist violence—the hacking off of the heads of village merchants for example—in the name of revolutionary justice by young people who spoke in thick Liberian accents, or even French. Many of the early guerrillas were Sierra Leoneans but residents for long periods in Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire.

This is quite reminiscent of the Great Lake civil wars. For example, Yoweri Museveni backed Paul Kagame’s Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels after the latter had supported his insurgency; the National Resistance Army (NRA) in succeeding in his war against the Ugandan government in 1986. It is instructive to note that Yoweri Museveni had also benefited from Colonel Gaddafi’s support (Abdullah, 2004:52). One of foremost field commanders of the RUF was General Sam Bockarie. He was a former “san san boy” (an illicit diamond miner) in Kono, and many of the RUF rebels were more or less ex-illicit diamond miners (Smillie, Gberie, and Hazleton, 2000:49). And “diamond diggers are ever gamblers, even to the extent of gambling

with their own lives”, therefore a “secret army of gravel sifters was quick to heed the call” (Richards, 2001:74). A school drop out, Sam Bockarie was born in Koidu, in Kono district and

(...) having embarked on a series of coping strategies-diamond miner, hairdresser, waiter, disco dancer-before he started his career as a rebel when he joined the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in 1990 (Bøas, 2007:40).

Most of the RUF chiefs belonged to the Diaspora of Sierra Leoneans in Liberia who ran away from Siaka Stevens’ repression of the people of the boundary zones (Richards, 2005:382). The rebellion leaders started their recruitment drive “among thoroughly marginalized diggers working the “border-zone limbo-land” intimate with the process through which the magic money sustaining national politics is made and angered by social marginalization” (Richards,2001: 74).Another group of RUF rebels was the contingent of youth ‘volunteers’ from “the most isolated parts of the populous Kailahun district and in border villages in Pujehun” whose adhesion was motivated by the fact that the districts were ravaged by scenes of political violence and the “operation of an unofficial anti-smuggling force during the 1980s” (Richards, 2004:6). In addition, a study conducted by Richards et al (cited in Richards, 2004:10) reveals that the revolt against some aspects of customary practices enforced by traditional rulers compelled some youth to leave their village and join the RUF “ [i]f you refuse they [the chiefs] cause more problems for you than even being in the bush as a rebel.”

Two thirds of RUF youth fighters were either primary school dropouts or peasants working on farmlands in the rural areas and most of them were illiterates (Richards 2005:40). It is noteworthy that a number of the child soldiers were “children and who [could] hardly carry an AK 47 rifle” (Davies, 2000: 358). Furthermore, although 87% of the RUF recruits said that they had been kidnapped, the majority of them were quite familiar with the political objective of the rebellion which was to overthrow the corrupt and autocratic APC government (Richards, 2005:41). The pattern of recruitment of the RUF which was mainly carried out along the Sierra Leonean and Liberian borders includes the enlistment and training of young girls and the insurgents even established “*combat wives units*” (Richards et al cited in Richards, 2005:41). On the metropolitan character of the recruitment of urban youth, Richards (2005:41) is categorical and asserts that:

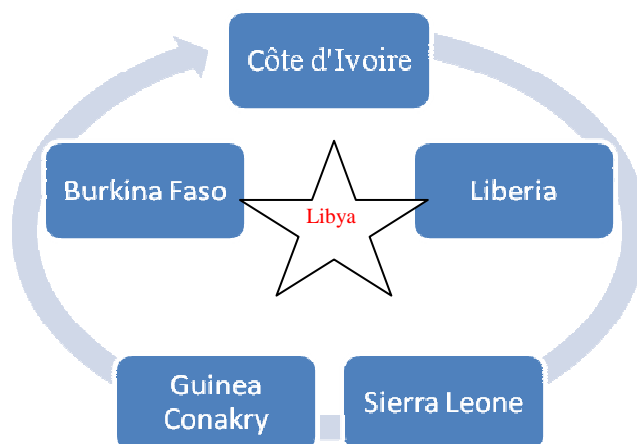
If the urban youth took part in the Sierra Leonean conflict, it was mainly on government side, not with the RUF. Post-conflict data on the life of the combatants do not confirm the discerning form of the urban gang pattern of the war [my translation]<sup>19</sup>.

Furthermore, a respondent states that, “ the leaders of the rebellion were urban dwellers. They had not lived in the bush.” (Interview, Makeni, January 2009). In a nutshell, the RUF was a heterogeneous group that included some individuals from the bottom of the social ladder that was united by their desire to overthrow the APC government and internal and external factors shaped its emergence.

### The Topography of the Sierra Leone War

A factor that facilitated the RUF incursion was the geography of the border region between Sierra Leone and Liberia. The insurgents used to their advantage the hilly forests, which were convenient sanctuaries of hit and run guerrilla strategy. Richards (2005:381) argues further that transborder proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) with the porous borders and hilly forest reserves, which form the Gola North reserves, were important to the rebellion.

Chart 2. West Africa: Sub-Regional Conflict Dynamics and Libya’s influence.



Source: Ogunmola, 2009.

This is coupled with the fact that the area is endowed with diamonds deposits which translates into capturing some of the most important and “useful parts” of Sierra Leone that would help the

RUF to prosecute the war, especially, the Gola North forest. Richards (2005:381) gives more details:

The three contiguous Gola reserves constitute a boundary wilderness occupying the middle one-third of the international border with Liberia. This connects to the Kambui reserves, which run northwards through eastern Sierra Leone along the ridge, interrupted only by a pass that gives access to the town of Kenema.

The topography of the civil war also shows that apart from providing a safe haven for the rebels, access to strategic mineral resources through the forest could also have motivated the choice of the rebels (Interview, Freetown, January 2009). Richards (2005:381) explains further that:

At its northern extremity the Kambui forests connect with the Kangari Hills, a forest upland traversed by the main road linking the northern provincial towns and the Kono diamond fields. Kambui North reserve directly overlooks a second important alluvial diamond mining area known as Tongo field. The Sierra Leonean forest reserves thus constitute a set of hilly, unpopulated “corridors” leading from Liberia into the diamondiferous heart of the country, connected by forest paths known only to specialist hunters. The forests offered a medium for the subsequent spread of the RUF and shaped eventual counter-insurgency responses.

Once the rebels were able to control the diamondiferous areas, the government was severely cut off from its main source of revenues which obviously weakened drastically its economic muscles to prosecute the war. However, the effective control of the naturally endowed regions of Sierra Leone became the RUF’s weak point as it exposed the predatory nature of the rebels’ desire to exploit those resources. This development exposed the RUF as a rapacious and greedy movement that was not different from the predatory ruling elite it was trying to overthrow. Moreover, the RUF’s reputation and image were tarnished by the atrocities committed on civilians. Peters and Richards (1998:184) argue that “[t]he brutal terror tactics of the Liberian ‘special forces’ alienated local populations”.

### **Conclusion**

The internecine Sierra Leone war was triggered by deep-seated domestic causes in conjunction with multiple exogenous factors. These causes are basically related to political and socio-economic policies, which include the effective obstruction of the channels of emancipation, a recurrent desire, and policy of marginalization, as well as the unbridled lust predatory behaviour by the governing elite and their cronies that inevitably threw Sierra Leone into the torment of civil war. The civil conflict was also triggered by the spillover effects of the first

Liberian civil war and the emergence of warlords who capitalized on the frustration brought about by years of neglects and absolute poverty of rural dwellers to launch their guerrilla warfare. The exploitation of diamond heightened tension between farmers and miners which increased frustration in rural areas against the traditional chiefs. All said, the causes of the Sierra Leone war were many. Sadly, the war had resulted in further impoverishment of the masses.

#### Notes

1. The new terminologies that are ascribable to the Civil War in Sierra Leone are (1) Short sleeves, and (2) Long Sleeves. The former is used when the RUF rebels amputated their victims at the elbow and the latter is used when they cut off their victims' limb at the wrist. This cruelty has led to a colony of amputees in the country, which shows the dimension of sheer brutality of the war, (3) Sobels refers to those members of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Sierra Leone (AFRSL) who joined the rebels at night to fight government troops.
2. South Africa, Namibia, and Botswana are exceptions to the perverse effects of conflict engendered by mineral resources.
3. A variant of this tale is given by Pemagbi (2006: xviii): "When God Created Sierra Leone, He endowed the country with such wealth of natural resources that the angels protested at the unfairness of His distribution. 'Oh! That's nothing,' God replied. 'Just wait till you see the people I put there.'"
4. Elitism is used pejoratively in this study and in this context it refers to the ruling elite who are out of touch with the common people. It denotes a group of self-centered people who benefit from the spoils of office of the governing elite who grant themselves extra- privileges at the expense of others. Moreover "consensus about major political issues that directly affect the distribution of valued things

is never deep nor widespread among non-elites. Once such issues rise to public consciousness, the tendency of non elites is toward civil strife” (Field and Higley, 1980: 117).

5. The first Liberian civil war (1989-1996) started a whirlwind of sub-regional insecurity with its legion of refugees and Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs) and snowballing effects that triggered the Sierra Leonean civil war (1991-2002); boomeranged to Liberia (1999-2003) and some of the actors of these wars were also involved in Côte d’Ivoire civil war (2002-) as well as acts of destabilisation of LansanaConté’s government in Guinea. The scores of refugees threaten the fragile economy and the delicate ethno-social structures of the neighboring countries.

6. During my fieldwork in Sierra Leon in January 2009, I noticed with surprise that during an *Egungun* (masquerade) festival, the participants sang traditional Yoruba songs associated with the Yoruba hunter’s mythology and beliefs whereas this tends to disappear in some Yoruba societies due to the influence of monotheism or Abrahamic religion of Christianity and Islam.

7. Smillie, Gberie, and Hazleton (2000:43) note that” [a]s a Minister of Mines with oversight of the diamond industry during much of the turbulent 1950s; Stevens had been on the side of corporate control of the important diamond resources. But now in opposition, he campaigned on a populist platform calling for a greater share of SLST’s holding for the ‘common people’. His new party claimed to stand for a welfare state based on a socialist model in which all citizens, regardless of class, colour or creed, shall have equal opportunity and where there shall be no exploitation of man by man, tribe by tribe, or class by class.”

8. Luke (1988:71) notes that President Stevens “not only incorporated leading SLPP politicians into the All Peoples Congress (APC) after assuming power in 1968 but cultivated clientelist relations with the leadership and other well-placed individuals of potential opposition groups: the army, labour unions, the intelligentsia (notably, faculty members of the country’s institutions of higher education) but with less success, the students).”

9. The ambivalence of Siaka Stevens is highlighted in as an opposition leader he was quoted as saying, “not only as leader of APC but as an individual, I abhor and detest One Party System of Government” (*WeYone* 1965, cited in Reno, 1995:79). In addition, when he became president he said “The widespread belief that political parties are indispensable for the existence and maintenance of good and effective government is certainly erroneous” (*President Stevens Speaks*, Ministry of Information and Broadcast, Freetown Publications Division, cited in Reno, 1995:79).

10. (Luke and Riley 1989:135) observe that Sierra Leone is unusual in experiencing such setback “[a] number of African states combine neo-patrimonial politics and progress in economic development, including Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Malawi, and Morocco...In the case of Sierra Leone, however...development management has not been insulated from a political culture which encourages or tolerates maladministration, bureaucratic incompetence, and corruption

11. A vivid example of President Momoh’s weakness is provided by Koroma(cited in Alie, 2006:131) as follows:

“The Inspector-General of Police Bambay Kamara...whose office had unofficially doubled as the APC headquarters, took it upon himself to harass opposition members without reference to President Momoh...When the Minister of Labour complained to the President that the Inspector-General was interfering in his constituency, the President lamented that the Inspector General often ignored his directives.”

12. Kandeh, (1999: 352) explains further:“A parasitic cabal known as the *Binkolo Mafia* (most of its members hailed from Binkolo, Momoh’s hometown) replaced the personal rule of Stevens. The members of this inner circle belonged to *Ekutay*, an organization of Limba politicians, cultural entrepreneurs and influence peddlers. Membership in *Ekutay* became such a prized social currency under Momoh that even opportunistic non-Limba elites sought to join.”

13. Charles Taylor was a protégé of General Quiwonpka. The original NPFL was founded by the former Commanding General of the Armed Forces of Liberia, General Thomas Quiwonpka who died while attempting to overthrow Master Sergeant Samuel Doe in 1985 (Ellis 1999; Verschave 1999).

14. Ellis (1999:69) states further that “Compaoré was beholden to the Liberian expatriates who had helped him to take power and helped them with ...introductions”.

15. A detailed account of Samuel Doe’s involvement in the American Intelligence plan is provided by Bram Posthumus, 2000, *Liberia: Seven Years of Devastation and an Uncertain Future, Searching For Peace in Africa*

16. According to Verschave (1999:206), Charles Taylor was a former Director of the General Services Agency. An adept of self- service, he was nicknamed “Superglue” because anything that he handles stuck to his hand. He was accused in 1983 for corruption and the embezzlement of \$ 900 000 [my translation].

*Original version: Il [Charles Taylor] fut directeur général des services généraux. Adepte du self service, on l’avait surnommé « Superglue » : tout ce qui passait entre ses mains y restait. En 1983, accusé d’avoir détourné 900 000 dollars, il fut contraint à l’exil.*

17. Bockarie was indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) on seventeen charges of war crimes, including acts of terrorism, collective punishment, unlawful killings, sexual violence, crimes against humanity, use of child soldiers, abductions and forced labor, looting and burning, and attacks on United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) personnel. The indictment was withdrawn after his death was confirmed on June 2 (Bøas 2003:53).

18. Sierra Leoneans were so desperate that this belief became popular “It is only through war could Sierra Leone prosper but when we witnessed the atrocities of the war we were exhausted.”

*19. Si des jeunes urbains ont pris part au conflit sierra léonais, c’est essentiellement du côté du gouvernement, pas avec le RUF. Les données post-conflit sur le passé des ex-combattants ne confirment donc pas la pertinence du modèle de guerre de bande urbaine.*

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