

Full Length Research Paper

An examination of the Sierra Leone war

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This study is a historical analysis of Sierra Leone's state structure in the 20th and 21st centuries. This period was marked by defective leadership and insatiable greed that created political failure at both the national and regional level. The absence of a long-term democratic leader, coupled with the lack of institutions aimed at guiding effective resource distribution enabled the gradual collapse of the state in the wake of independence. Appropriation of wealth and corruption slowly established a cleavage between the rich elite who were in the minority, and the impoverished, uneducated and malnourished majority who eventually took up arms against the state. The latter group bonded under the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone (RUF/SL) banner, and engaged the state in a civil war that lasted from 1991 to 2002.

Key words: Civil war, state weakness, regional crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Fred, M. Hayward, a Higher education specialist has described Sierra Leone as "a pioneer" of West African history. He goes further to say that Sierra Leone has had a long history of mass political participation and representation, including its inspiration as the "Land of Freedom" in 1787 (Stevens, 1984). These traits were not visible in other West African states during colonial times, rendering Sierra Leone unique.

Despite Sierra Leone's uniqueness in West Africa, its vulnerable political climate was exposed between 1991 and 2002. Sierra Leone was a country in the process of state building, which unfortunately disintegrated when it suffered a set of violent attacks in 1991, carried out by the revolutionary united front of Sierra Leone (RUF/SL). This

study predominantly discusses possible causes of the 1991 to 2002 war, the role of other African leaders in initiating the war, and the factors that enabled the protracted timeline of the war with the aim of tracing how Sierra Leone came to be politically vulnerable to the point of state failure between 1991 and 2002.

It will be unfair to treat the Sierra Leone civil war as a mindless act of rebel incursion, which was orchestrated by greedy para-militants without political grievances. My assessment of this case is grounded on the premise that the civil war was mostly a result of the patron-client system of administration that served as a foundation for state weakness during the All People's Congress (APC) administration. Not only did the politics of the country

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remain unstable in the first three decades of independence¹ socio-economic growth was equally defective, and the war caused rapid regression on the state structure. It was difficult for anyone who lived in Sierra Leone during Milton Margai's reign as Prime Minister to imagine how much the country had regressed approximately thirty years later (Hirsch, 2001).

The war, while typical of most colonial states in Africa, occurred in a country that was thought to be modern. Sierra Leone has been described by Pham (2006) as "West African's oldest modern state," which according to him, has had a constitutional tradition dating back to 1787. The deep colonial era cleavage between the Krio descendants and the protectorates, diverse political leadership styles, coupled with weak political developments since 1964 and the presence of small arms and light weapons (SALW) during the war shaped the post-independence state, and paved an avenue for state weakness.

The discussion presented in the first section of this study is grounded in a theoretical framework that builds on relevant scholarly debates pertaining to the causes of the outbreak of civil war in Sierra Leone. The subsequent section is an evaluation of the factors that helped sustain the war for over ten years. This discussion is fundamental to this study because it portrays the fragility of the Sierra Leonean state before the breakout of war in 1991, and is an important piece for understanding why Sierra Leone almost fell apart between 1991 and 2002.

The study concludes with a brief explanation of how a modern nation-state could fail in the absence of effective state structures and political institutions. The RUF/SL imposed unfathomable acts of violence on civilians—human rights abuse was the most remarkable characteristic of the war—that helped delay state building efforts for several years.

METHODOLOGY

The research conducted towards the completion of this study is inclusive of pre-colonial Sierra Leone. The researcher read books that discuss the first Portuguese arrivals into the region, and how Sierra Leone got its name.²

From this research, the researcher learned that during British colonial rule, the Krio descendants enjoyed more political freedom than the protectorate people, of which the Mende and Temne are the largest. According to Fyle (1981), "a number of Krios served in senior service positions in the administration and medical services" (Fyle 1981).

¹ On April 27 1961, Sierra Leone was granted independence from the British with Sir Milton Margai as the first prime minister.

² Sierra Leone got its name in 1462 when a Portuguese sailor/explorer (Pedro de Cintra) under the direction of the King of Portugal, set foot in the area. The Portuguese initially named the area Serra Lyoa meaning Lion Mountain (Crooks 1972), owing to its wild mountainous topography (Fyle 1962, p. 1).

Unfortunately, the Krios started falling out of British favor in the 1900s—following the 1898 rebellion.³ Governor Cardew suspected them of having instigated the rebellion, thus, started replacing formally Krio occupied government functions with British nationals, and by 1912, Krios only held 15 government posts out of 90. This preliminary research helped me understand the nature of the country before the slave repatriation, and the extent to which the slave repatriation created heterogeneity within the country.⁴

According to Doyle and Sambanis (2000), civil war is any war that has resulted in over a thousand deaths and internally displaced. Tens of thousands of casualties had been recorded out of a small population of about five million shortly after fighting culminated in Sierra Leone. Thousands had either been mutilated or raped, while an estimated 10,000 children had been captured and forced to work as child soldiers for the RUF/SL. This crisis resulted in major displacements and refugee emergencies, as Sierra Leoneans fled their homes for safety zones. The occurrence of civil war has been common in post-independence African states. Every one of such wars has occurred in a specific fashion, under a unique set of socio-political and economic conditions. Based on the uniqueness of the Sierra Leone case, it is impossible to apply general theories of revolution. The causes, actors, political history, timeline, resources and outcome of the war are unique to Sierra Leone. Any attempts to apply generalized concepts of revolutions or war, may only prove impractical. For this reason, the researcher treated this topic as a single case, mention of other African countries is solely for context. The completion of this study is dependent on information from:

1. Newspaper articles such as *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and *People's Pundit Daily* that started circulating at the start of the Sierra Leone rebel invasion in 1991. Academic articles, and peer reviewed papers (like that published by Ibrahim Abdullah in *The Journal of African Studies* (1998)), think tanks that address security studies and journal articles (*such as, Cultural Anthropology, International Security, Sierra Herald and African Studies Review International Politics etc.*).
2. Press releases and interviews or published dialogues between politicians (Sierra Leonean, and West African policy makers), military personnel who were deployed as part of the Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and witnesses of the decision-making processes and intervention such as UN Special Envoy—Mr. Berhanu

³ This rebellion also known as the Hut Tax War, was a resistance against British imposed taxes on the protectorate and at the time, Cardew served as governor. <http://www.sierra-leone.org/Heroes/heroes5.html>

⁴ There were instances in colonial Sierra Leone that the protectorate people lashed out at the Creoles (Krio descendants) for having a superiority complex (one instant was when Milton Margai advocated a new constitution in the 1950s).

Dinka (Ethiopia).⁵ The researcher retrieved documents of this nature from papers by Adekeye Adebajo, "The Security Council and Three Wars in West Africa" (2008) and from interviews published by the United Nations news center.

3. Data from surveys or public opinion polls of civilians from Sierra Leone and Liberia.⁶ These data have already been interpreted by international bodies like the Panel of Experts (PoE, 2000 report) and Human Rights Watch (HRW). Thus, the researcher investigated material relevant to the Sierra Leone case in order to add substance to the body of work.

For instance, the involuntary conscription of child soldiers by the RUF/SL coupled with the rebels' brutal acts of violence that were imposed on society are the most commonly highlighted features of the war. Paul Richards points out that the basic tactic (as with the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, NPFL) was youth conscription, to constitute a viable fighting force and suggest a credible "popular uprising" against the APC (Richards 1996). Unfortunately, the exact number of captured children has not yet been established, and projected figures differ by organization. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) for instance, predicted that as many as 10,000 children had affiliations with various belligerent forces, while the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) specified the involvement of about 6,000 children through the course of the war (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2004). Another UNICEF report confirms that an estimated 8,460 children were formally documented as having disappeared between 1991 and 2002 (Williamson 2006). Given the gaps in these studies, the researcher investigated data from Panel of Experts (PoE) and the Human Rights Watch (HRW) to complete this study.⁷

The number of authors in the field is small, meaning published works are scarce and evidence is sometimes insufficient. In its holistic form, the data base is inclusive of a variety of national, regional and local sources, with substantial historical profundity. A major amount of references is grounded on empirical research gotten from oral sources; and findings are often inconsistent. Scholarly works may diverge in terms of the degree of detail, topic of interest, place of interest, and certainty of their findings. The most salient problem the study encountered with the data base, has been in the primary sources. Surveys, for

instance, often fail to clearly mention the methodology that defines their findings. While other sources did not report data for some years.⁸

Some references that were made regarding the weapons' sources differed from others.⁹ These uncertainties are fathomable because of the complex (poor security) situation in the country during the war, which rendered conducting fieldwork and data compilation challenging. And because this paper is a historical analysis, it is important that dates and events are reported precisely. The study, however, managed this problem by only using sources that report similar evidence. Some of the secondary literature read, provide similar accounts of the political history of Sierra Leone, such as Harris (2014), Cole (2014) and Gberie (2005) (Appendix 1).

Causes of the war and factors that sustained the war

Causes of the 1991 to 2002 war in Sierra Leone

Partial control of political institutions, internal defense and industrial units was handed down to the elite nationalists at independence.¹⁰ The transfer of power entailed little conflict between the African elite, the grassroots indigenes and the expatriate officials. Nevertheless, Sierra Leone for one decade of its history, suffered a catastrophic internal war that resulted in socio-economic and political stagnation. Begging the question, what are the conditions that rendered Sierra Leone more susceptible to civil war? Several scholars (Dumont, 1966; Meredith, 2005; Nugent, 2004; Rodney, 1972) have cited ethnic divisions among the most prominent problems African leaders have been faced with. These scholars often argue that ethnic divisions are the ultimate cause of a lot of the rebellions that commence within the continent.¹¹ Robert Blanton argued that state conflicts are often a result of ethnic rivalry (Blanton et al. 2001), which resulted following the

⁸ For instance, www.heritage.org does not score Sierra Leone on their Economic Freedom report for 2001 and 2002 <http://www.heritage.org/index/visualize?cnts=sierraleone&src=country>

⁹ President Qaddafi denied directly sponsoring the war in Sierra Leone, his stand was corroborated in the RUF/SL pamphlet "therefore, the theory and accusations that we receive weapons and ammunition from Libya...are nonsense..." Sankoh (1995). <http://fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/footpaths.htm>. The UN Panel of Experts, however reported that Qaddafi also assisted with the transportation of weapons, "a few months earlier, two Alouette-3 helicopters had been flown in by a Libyan government plane, but these helicopters were replaced by the newly arrived ones." Report of the Panel of Experts (2000) <https://mondediplo.com/IMG/pdf/un-report.pdf>

¹⁰ Complete power was not handed down to the African leaders, as Great Britain remained a salient figure in Sierra Leone's politics. Sierra Leone only became a republic in 1978, until then, it still functioned with a British representative, Governor General within the country.

¹¹ "Africa, for example, was saddled with an irrational political map upon decolonization, one that corresponds to neither geography, ethnicity, nor economic functionality. The international system supported that region's leaders' decision to retain those boundaries, even as...costs made those boundaries more porous, and political units more susceptible to mutual destabilization" (Fukuyama 2006, forward in Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies*).

⁵ He was obliged by the United Nations to work alongside the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and ECOWAS toward a peace settlement, and bringing the crisis to an end.

⁶ Sources could include: www.gallup.com or www.pollingreport.com, www.France24.com and www.infratest-dimap.de. Most data are estimated, due to the absence of an official database.

⁷ One of the child soldiers reported to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that before he was captured, the rebels shot both his parents in front of him, gripped him by the throat, tied both of his hands, cut parts of his body with a blade and placed cocaine in it. He goes on to say "I had no option but to join them because I no longer had parents" (Truth and Reconciliation Committee Report 2004).

partition of Africa. Sierra Leone's colonial history indicated that ethnic polarization was a probable explanation for the violence that engulfed the country in 1991. The existence of heterogeneity was indeed created within Sierra Leone during the colonial era.

In this regard, Pham (2006) notes that diversity stemmed from the cultural variations between the Krio descendants, and the indigenous inhabitants of the country who dwelled in the hinterlands.¹² The imperialists accentuated the peculiarities between diverse ethnic groups and in so doing enforced tribal differences (Shillington, 1989). Indeed, ethnic polarization eventually caused friction between the Krio descendants, the grassroots chiefs and the protectorate elite, leading the British to draw up a new constitution in 1951, which afforded greater participation to the protectorates (Kilson 1966).

This political changes birth a sense of nationalism and (even) unity between the indigenes and the creoles. The result of this research into the heterogenous Sierra Leonean society proved that ethnic polarization, even though visible during the colonial era, did not factor into the causes of the RUF/SL-led war. However, political division played itself out when Stevens refused to sign the independence constitution under the allegation that Milton Margai's government was still British controlled. This first political disagreement shaped the political foundation of Sierra Leone as an independent state.

Another potential cause of violent revolts has been attributed to the flawed nature of the post-independence political structure. Stevens and his APC created, according to Harris (2014), "a new indirect rule: a highly hierarchical system reliant on 'traditional' authority on top of the paternalistic model developed under the British and the Krios" (Harris, 2014).

The absence of a guided state structure for a coherent and suitable distribution of state resources and power created economic and social imbalance, which eventually birth conflict. Stevens and the APC governed Sierra Leone through a corrupt personalized system, pushing fair resource distribution and security to the rear. The APC government was more concerned with spending income generated from the distribution of raw material, than enforcing socio-economic growth.

This system of administration was faulty because if predefined social institutions are founded on weak collective interests when state building commences, their common identities have the likelihood to be easily obliterated through the state's distributive largesse (Vandewalle, 1998). The partiality of independence was soon visible in the political scene, as democratic elections eventually resulted in undemocratic governments.

In addition, Conteh (2001) maintains that "what was to

¹² Sierra Leone according to Fyle (2006, p. xxvii), is only 73,326 square kilometers holding a population of about 4 million people; Sierra Leone is home to 16 ethnic groups, the largest being the Temne in the Northern region and the Mende in the South and Eastern regions (Fyle 2006).

become a diamond boom, became a curse on the nation. Herein lies the irony. The economic benefits of diamonds, which were meant to free people from the clutches of poverty instead enslaved them in the clutches of greed" (Conteh, 2001). This personalized structure caused the state to degenerate and drift apart. The fabric of the state had thereby been weakened and infested with causes which rendered conflict inevitable.

Besides the APC's adoption of this new form of indirect rule, multipartism was abolished in 1978 and fuel prices were increased. Discontent with these changes in government administration resulted in riots in Freetown. The transformation to a one-party state did not completely remove all political threats to the state, as on March 23, 1991 the biggest threat to the APC's political life was witnessed as RUF/SL rebels attacked civilians in Bomaru in the Eastern province led by former Sierra Leonean army corporal, Foday Sankoh. These attacks quickly became the most vicious political campaign in Sierra Leonean history (Abdullah, 1996; Fayemi, 2004; Fearon, 2004). Sankoh's aim as stated in the RUF/SL pamphlet was to rid Sierra Leone of the corrupt APC party (RUF/SL 2006).

Moreover, a long-term strong government was absent, as such, developmental strategies faltered and state resources were misused. There was urgent need for a strong government to adequately oversee developmental growth. The ultimate importance of a strong political structure (government) has long been identified by philosophers, like Hobbes (1651), who maintain that people form governments to rule them, and submission to the state through a social contract gives the state the opportunity to foster its abilities and protect her from attacks. The government of Sierra Leone is typical, as it was rendered extremely vulnerable (if not weak) by the constant coups d'état, and the need for reconstruction was paramount to ensure survival. The occurrence of repeated military-led coups severely weakened government administrative and coercive capabilities, rendering the state vulnerable to a revolutionary movement.

Shortly after independence, Sierra Leone exhibited both distributive and weak state features. Siaka Stevens' reign was the most extreme at appropriating the nation's raw material for meeting his self-interested ends.¹³ During Stevens's administration, the political structure of Sierra Leone shortly after independence relapsed from a patrimonial structure to a patron-client system.¹⁴ The

¹³ Stevens confirmed his system of administration in his autobiography, "he must hand out largesse; educate not only his own children but also those of family members...Money slips through his finger like quicksilver and he can never have enough of it to satisfy his dependents. When it can be had so easily, when all that is required of him is influence in tipping the scale..." (Stevens 1984).

¹⁴ Weber (1947) explained patrimonialism as the situation in which the administrative apparatus is appointed by and responsible to the leader. Patrimonial rule has similarities to the feudal system of lord and vassal. Weber said the difference is that the feudal relationship is more ritualized and regularized, and thus more stable, than the ad hoc arrangements of patrimonialism. Meanwhile, clientelism or patron-client method of administration refers to a complex chain of personal bonds between political

patron-client system of administration was made possible because of the absence of democratic state institutions, which made it “considerably easier for a leader in Africa than for a leader elsewhere to pursue personal gains free from any restraints other than his own conscience, while it remains comparatively difficult for him to pursue goals that will make significant changes in his country” (Cartwright, 1978).

Given that the clientelist system of government has the tendency to flourish in vulnerable political and economic environs, it is fundamental to the “politics of survival” for both patrons and clienteles (Migdal, 1988). This administrative structure was not designed for a new state like Sierra Leone because it paved the way for massive appropriation of resources and eventual state weakness. The numerous coups that threatened the survival of the state only further worsened the political climate, leading to the formation of PANAFU, and later RUF. The corrupt nature of the APC, is the ultimate reason Sankoh projected for attacking the country with the aim of taking over control of political power.¹⁵

In analyzing the effects of post-colonial governments, one should never simply assume that any of such reasons will primarily influence the needs of any one given state. Ethnic divisions, for instance, did not pose a problem to Sierra Leonean politics, like it did in Nigeria. The patron-client system of government in Sierra Leone eventually resulted in civil war.

Thus, the intersection of the colonial regime and the newly formed independent governments that resulted in the patron-client system of administration holds the answer to the cause of the civil war. The argument that the political arrangements passed on to the new independent African leaders degenerated into dictatorial arrangements, is widely accepted in 21st century scholarship (Rodney, 1972). In the opinion of this study, power did not degenerate into dictatorial arrangements, independence leaders adopted these forms of governments from the exiting colonialists.

Unfortunately, the structure of the independent Sierra Leone state varied from the colonial state. Thus, while failure of British colonial rule resulted in the fight for nationalism, failure of the patron-client rule resulted in a 12-year civil war. These arguments add much context to this essay, but do not discuss the factors that sustained the rebel incursion in Sierra Leone. In this light, the next part of this study is aimed at discussing the role of SALW, and revolutionary heads of state in fostering the war.

patrons or bosses and their individual clients or followers. These bonds are founded on mutual material advantage: the patron furnishes excludable resources (money, jobs) to dependents and accomplices in return for their support and cooperation (votes, attendance at rallies) (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith. 2002, pp. 2-6).

¹⁵ “We are fighting for a new Sierra Leone. A new Sierra Leone of freedom, justice and equal opportunity for all. We are fighting for democracy and by democracy we mean equal opportunity and access to power to create wealth through free trade, commerce, agriculture, industry, science and technology.” Foday Sankoh. “Footpaths to Democracy: Toward A New Sierra Leone” <http://fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/footpaths.htm>

Factors that sustained the Civil War

Before the war we had lights, there was water in the taps, but now because of these guns we have nothing. Now we put kerosene in our lamps and have to fetch water. We had school libraries, now the buildings are standing empty (Lawson 2006)¹⁶

Zainab Kamara is a representative of the ‘voice of the masses’ (these were the civilians who suffered the most casualties from the cross-fire between Sankoh’s rebels and the government). The extent of abuse that the war imposed on civilians was new to the region. The only other regional war that reported comparable abuse was the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Given that the war was fought with the bare minimum of weapons, the timeframe was unusual. The war went on for such a long time that the Yamoussoukro communique in March left the country split between those in favor of peace and those who wanted the war to continue¹⁷.

The existence of diamonds laid the foundation for prolonged civil war as the enormous profits that were generated from the trade were used for the procurement of armament.¹⁸ In the words of Paul Orogun, “these warlords meticulously have cultivated both regionally and internationally diverse and elusive networks of trade partners that span African regional neighboring countries, Eastern Europe, Russia, the Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova, and the Middle East...The RUF sustained its war making capabilities...by retaining territorial control over the diamond-producing mines located in the northeastern regions of the country” (Orogun 2004).

States were also able to sell weapons in exchange for not only money, but other commodities like diamonds, enabling buyers with natural resources such as Taylor to afford unlimited arms. Schneider and Caruso (2011) throw more light on the situation by stating that, “in situations where access to normal banking channels is very difficult (for example, as with most non-state actors), the financing of arms deals often takes a different form, most often through commodity exchanges...illicit arms transfers to Liberia and Sierra Leone were often financed with diamonds and timber concessions”. The RUF/SL benefited from the illicit sales of diamonds to enable the continuous inflow of weapons that enabled a prolongation of the fight against the state.

The presence of SALW played an important role in sustaining the 1991 conflicts. The Sierra Leone military per Cole (2014), was ill-equipped relative to the RUF/SL. In

¹⁶ Zainab Kamara was a counsellor at Makeni in the Bombali District in 2006 when Lawson (2006) interviewed him for a control arms research paper.

¹⁷ These group consisted predominantly of the battle group commanders and uneducated rebels who were uncertain about a future without military victory or state power (Abdullah 1998, p. 228).

¹⁸ The PoE 2000 reports on Sierra Leone note that the RUF/SL owned conflict diamond mines in the Kono District and the Tongo Field among others. Their diamond production was estimated at one eighth of Sierra Leone’s best year (PoE 2000, para 69 and 79).

this regard, Abass Bundu ECOWAS Secretary-General of Sierra Leonean origin, pointed out that the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) was small, consisted of about "3,694 in total, largely ceremonial and ill-equipped to counter the insurgents. Armed with antiquated rifles, armored cars that did not work, poor communications, and no efficient ground transportation system to speak of, let alone air strike capability, they could hardly shoot, move and communicate" (Bundu 2001).

In addition to this number, was the paramilitary force (SSD) that had been created by Stevens. This force comprised of about eight hundred personnel, and one hundred coast guards. This number could barely muster two infantry exercises, armed with mostly defective Nigerian-made G3 rifles (Gershoni, 1997). Worse still, routine military to test combat readiness were hardly conducted.

According to Pham (2006), between 1977 and 1991, there had been a grand total of two such drills. Plus, the few supplies that were allocated to military units were often misappropriated.¹⁹ The RUF/SL rebels by contrast enjoyed a steady flow of arms through their Liberian allies. The rebels were armed with M-16 and AK-47 rifles, most of which were obtained from Ukraine, and transshipped through Burkina Faso. The availability of these weapons enabled the RUF/SL to control the bush and Kailahun District from 1991 to 2001 when support from Taylor started diminishing.²⁰

Not only did weapons availability sustain the war for over ten years, they also imposed stagnation on state building efforts. SALW are a policy and security threat that adversely impact weak states. Beyond the loss of lives, the impacts of wide-scale violence were devastating on public institutions, the national economy, infrastructure, and social cohesion of Sierra Leone (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008; World Bank, 2011).

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs defines this arms problem as a worldwide scourge. In the same light, former U.N Secretary-General, Kofi Annan referred to small arms as "weapons of mass destruction in slow motion." Their proliferation he argued, is one of the key challenges in preventing conflict in the next century. More than any other type of arms and ammunition, assault rifles have "changed the face of war in Africa" and other developing countries, noted Peter Marwa, a retired Kenyan army colonel, currently an arms analyst (Coker, 2001).

Assault rifles and other small arms are responsible for 90% of all conflict-related deaths in the last decade, a number that equals about 3 million civilians, as was stated by the International Red Cross. These economy-class weapons fueled an economy-class war in Sierra Leone,

¹⁹ Pham (2006) notes that military resources were often diverted to the clandestine mining operations run by officers or stolen and sold by desperate and ill-paid enlisted men (Pham 2006, p. 84).

²⁰ Taylor was involved in a war against the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) which had intensified and was drawing in Sierra Leonean fighters headed by Bockarie (Harris 2014, p. 116).

leaving the future of the state uncertain for almost a decade.

Support from Qaddafi, Taylor, and Compaore also played a major role in bolstering the rebels' morale and subsequently fostering the war. Though some of the charges against Taylor may have been overstated by the Sierra Leone government and reported by the media without thorough investigation (Abdullah, 1998), Taylor, and Compaore, nevertheless facilitated the supply of arms for use by the RUF/SL. The bloody conflict in Sierra Leone was closely entwined with a wide range of external factors prevalent in West African politics.

Richards (1996) argues that Qaddafi retained some "residual sympathy for the RUF/SL as one of the sincerer African attempts to apply aspects of his youth-oriented revolutionary philosophy" due to his own difficulties with the sub-Saharan African venture. Berman (2001) further suggests that copies of the letters Sankoh allegedly wrote to Qaddafi reveal that in the mid-1990s, Libya provided the RUF/SL with the necessary funds to acquire weapons. The reasons for why Taylor supported Sankoh vary considerably. Some argue that his support was out of disdain for Momoh, while others suggests that economic motives were the guiding factor for Taylor.²¹ Given that the district that falls on the boundary line between Sierra Leone and Liberia, which was rich in natural resources, economic reasons were possibly the reason for Taylor's decision to support the RUF/SL (Richards 1996). Taylor was very instrumental in providing weapons for the RUF/SL (with help from Compaore), providing military training to RUF/SL recruits, and permitting the participation of his NPFL in the initial phase of the Sierra Leone war.

The RUF/SL propaganda aimed at mobilizing disenfranchised unemployed youths, worked at increasing the rebel population, and deterring the SLA. Unemployed youths in the rural areas who were dissatisfied with their government's failure to provide basic amenities and combat the insurgency, were being recruited to join the rebel group. The basic tactic for the RUF/SL was youth conscription, "to constitute a viable fighting force and suggest a credible popular uprising against the APC" (Richards, 1996). Conscriptions resulted in double jeopardy, as new recruits risked executions by the RUF/SL and rural civilians.²² Fear of execution was enough to retain them in the RUF/SL throughout the course of the war. By 1993, Fyle (2006) reports that the rebel force had grown in number, and had become stronger than at the start of the war (with various groups operating in the

²¹ Authors like Abdullah (1998), Gberie (2005), and Pham (2006) all discuss Taylor's role in the RUF/SL war. Meanwhile, during Taylor's prosecution, he unequivocally denied providing any military assistance to the RUF/SL. He even referred to Sam Bockarie's presence in Liberia as a gesture of goodwill. However, upon further investigation, it will revealed that the RUF/SL received regular training in Liberia at Gbatala near Gbanga (PoE 2000, P. 35-40).

²² New recruits who considered deserting the RUF/SL were "trapped by this suicidal double jeopardy...and by the expectation of revenge at the hands of rural civilians who judged all members of the movement by the values of its lumpen leadership" (Abdullah and Muana 1998, p. 180).

bushes).

In addition, the continuous coups d'état that occurred while the war was ongoing contributed to prolonging the time frame. Two successful coups were instigated in 1992 and 1996, but the coup attempted in May 1997 by the APRC failed to permanently unseat the SLPP from power. These coups gave the RUF/SL a tangible platform to argue that their fight was guided by political reasons, and added to their number of recruits as they formed a merger with the APRC against the state.

Furthermore, Momoh's leadership capability played a dominant role in keeping the RUF/SL focused and united throughout the course of the war. He was strategic in his attacks against the state, and in 1993 when the RUF/SL almost suffered defeat, good strategy was the tool that sustained the insurgent unit. "By late 1993...we were pushed to the border with Liberia. Frankly, we were beaten and on the run, but our pride and deep sense of calling will not let us face the disgrace of crossing into Liberia as refugees or prisoners of war. We dispersed into smaller units, whatever remained of our fighting force" (RUF/SL (1995).

Smaller RUF/SL units infiltrated Sierra Leone and engaged in "audacious hit-and-run attacks on government controlled villages and ambushing isolated SLA units" (Pham, 2006). Division of the RUF/SL into smaller units was a strategic move on Sankoh's part, which favored his rebel group, enabled their reinvigoration in 1994, and ensured the subsequent prolongation of the war for another nine years. Per Olu Gordon the RUF/SL could be described as a "military organization with a political agenda not a political movement with an armed wing" (Gordon, 1997).

The need for political stabilization in post-colonial Africa continues to be of major concern to the international community, as the UN has been seen constantly struggling with issues of peace and security. Rebel wars like that witnessed in Sierra Leone have drawn scholars, politicians, and policy makers' attention to the causes of these violent movements, with the aim of finding answers to how they can be prevented.

Scholars like Gurr (2011) have analyzed the origin of rebellions by looking at society's grievances, while Skocpol (1979) and Tilly (1978) have looked for answers in sociopolitical structures and political mobilization (the occurrence of organized violence), respectively. Gurr's *Why Men Rebel* model suggests that "governments sustain or create the conditions for conflict at every step in the model. Government-imposed inequalities are a major source of grievances; repressive policies increase anger and resistance; denial of the right to use conventional politics and protest pushes activists underground and spawns terrorist and revolutionary resistance" (Gurr 2011).

The Sierra Leone war was not the result of spontaneous action (as was seen in Tunisia in 2011), but of effective planning. Stevens' patron-client government was losing legitimacy and popularity—the state was failing to provide

basic amenities (security and livelihood) to most its citizens. As such, Sankoh and his followers fought to implement their idea of a democratic regime.

Conclusion

The Sierra Leone civil war revealed two major facts:

1. It was the result of diverse interfaces pertaining to structural complications between the Sierra Leonean society and the state. The patron-client structure of the Sierra Leone state did not promote the rule of law, transparency, and sustainable economic development. As such, corruption prevailed, distribution of wealth became indiscriminate, and civilians formed anti-state movements (like the Pan-African Union—PANAFU) in which they discussed their grievances against the state. Moreover, the transformation of Sierra Leone from multiparty politics to a single-party state—under Stevens' administration—tremendously reduced civilian participation in politics. Civilian participation in the political process usually enables society to have a voice in the affairs of the state. Unfortunately, this was not the case between the 1978 adoption of a single party constitution and the 1996 general elections that resulted in a win for the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). Finally, human development was not promoted in Sierra Leone before the outbreak of the war in 1991. The creation of the first western-style university in West Africa (Fourah Bay College) on February 18, 1827, meant that the British were committed to enforcing human development. This commitment was not upheld by the APC government upon assuming power from the SLPP.²³ These existential problems increased grievances within the populace subsequently resulting in the emergence of the RUF/SL.

2. While diamonds arguably played a substantial role in financing the war; once it was ongoing, the absence of a strong state enabled the sustainment of the war.

The civil war in Sierra Leone revealed that the success of new nations is reliant on a strong democratic state and society. Clientelism laid the foundation for state weakness, which in turn served as a legitimate political motivation for outright war. The motivation of African political leaders as portrayed by Stevens was grounded in the need to provide economic satisfaction for themselves and their dependents. This motivation can hardly be curbed, due to the absence of sufficient structural and cultural restraints built into the political systems. The problems faced by weak states are daunting, but effective efforts at democracy could possibly ameliorate the problem of wealth appropriation, and reduce episodes of grievance-driven rebel movements. A study of Sierra Leone's political history resulted in the realization that

²³ President Momoh "went as far as to declare that education was a privilege not a right" (Harris 2014, p. 76).

socio-economic developments coupled with political advancement are central for the survival of the state. In the absence of effective socio-economic, political, administrative, police, and military organizations the state is rendered vulnerable and disposed to collapse.

On January 18, 2002, the war was officially announced over, and a peace ceremony was attended by RUF/SL interim leader Sessay, President Kabbah and international guests. The war had ended and a period of disarmament and demobilization was currently ongoing. The cleavage that had been created as a result of the political complications that characterized the Sierra Leonean state from autonomy to 2002 were finally being repaired with honest attempts being made at democracy. The birth of democracy was not the only positive fallout from the war, but a strengthened nation state was among the most conspicuous transformations.²⁴ From the civil war was birth a more democratic, bureaucratic, peaceful and ingenious state. Data from *Global Finance and Heritage* suggest that Sierra Leone experienced increased economic growth and freedom, improved standard of living, and increased foreign direct investment inflow following the civil war.²⁵ However, these growth rates slowed considerably with the Ebola outbreak in the region, and corruption persisted. Sierra Leone is a long way from attaining the status of a strong state, and the civil war served as a contributing factor towards hampering socio-economic and political growth.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author have not declared any conflict of interests.

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²⁴ The first post conflict elections were scheduled for May 14, which resulted in President Kabbah's re-election to office. Multiparty politics and democracy ensued ever since the first post-civil war elections.

²⁵ In 2013, the country was nominated amongst the world's best emerging markets banks in Africa.

Appendix 1. A contracted timeline of Sierra Leone's political history

| Year | Event |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| April 1961 | Officially gained independence from the British |
| March and August 1964 | Njala University College was opened, and the official state currency, the Leone was established, respectively |
| 1967 | The APC narrowly wins the general elections. President John Lansana is ousted a few days after swearing in by military officers, and Andrew Juxon-Smith heads a provisional government (the National Reformation Council – NRC) |
| 1968 | NRC is overthrown, and John Banguru turned over the government to the APC LED BY Siaka Stevens |
| 1969 | The University of Sierra Leone is instituted, with an amalgamation that consisted of Fourah Bay College and Njala University |
| April 1971 | Sierra Leone is named a republic, headed by Siaka Stevens |
| 1975 | Sierra Leone Development Company (DELCO) declares bankruptcy, ending iron ore mining in Marampa |
| 1977 | Widespread anti-government protests commenced |
| 1978 | Sierra Leone becomes a one-party state, and the All People's Congress (APC) is declared the sole political party |
| 1985 | Major-General Joseph Saidu Momoh assumes office of the presidency, upon Siaka Steven's retirement |
| March 23, and September, 1991 | First reports of civil war on the eastern frontier are reported (to be led by former corporal Foday Sankoh). In September, the state is returned to multiparty politics, and a cabinet comprised of non-members of parliament is equally enforced by the constitutional amendments |
| October 1991 | Adopted an official constitution |
| April 29, 1992 | The government of Joseph Momoh is removed from power by means of a military coup d'etat |
| January 18, 2002 | The civil war officially ended with the UN declaration of cessation of hostilities |