

# Political Networks in a Failing State The Roots and Future of Violent Conflict in Sierra Leone

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Sierra Leone's conflict began in March 1991 and formally concluded at the 18th of January 2002 with a Joint Declaration of End of War. Representatives of nearly 70,000 combatants, from the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the Sierra Leone Army, and the quasi-official Civil Defense Force (CDF), pledged to disarm and integrate into civilian life. As of early 2003, 16,000 soldiers of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) oversee this transition and coordinate international aid to rebuild the country's administrative institutions, while British agencies take the lead in reforming the country's police and army. The end of Sierra Leone's conflict also marks the success of international efforts to draw attention to the role of »blood diamonds«, and other natural resources in sustaining warring groups and shaping their predatory tactics and goals. This trade in diamonds, generating an estimated annual income of 150 to 250 million dollars in a country that recorded a GDP of only 636 million dollars in 2000, highlighted links between Sierra Leone's combatants and Charles Taylor, president of neighboring Liberia, and Lebanese, Russian and Israeli criminal groups.<sup>1</sup>

Along with neighboring Liberia, Sierra Leone's war was among the first of several destructive internal conflicts in Africa in which the exploitation of natural resources has played a prominent part. Sierra Leone's government collected about 250 million dollars in internal revenues annually during the mid 1970s, plummeting to ten million dollars in 2000. Like Liberia, the country's GDP by 2000 stood at about a third of its 1980

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1. Ian Smillie, Lansana Gberie, Ralph Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter: Diamonds & Human Security*, (Ottawa: Partnership Africa Canada, 2000); United Nations, Report of the Panel of Experts Appointed Pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), Paragraph 19 in Relation to Sierra Leone, (New York, UN S/2000/1195, 2000). GDP figures from Economist Intelligence Unit, Sierra Leone, Sept. 2001, 32.

value.<sup>2</sup> During a peak in fighting in 1999, about 600,000 of Sierra Leone's five million people sought refuge in neighboring countries. About two-thirds who remained were displaced inside their own country.<sup>3</sup> Violence and predation continued despite internationally mediated peace agreements in 1996, 1997, 1999, and 2000. This long-running war and precarious peace mirrors conflicts in countries such as Congo, Guinea-Bissau, neighboring Liberia, and since September 2002, Côte d'Ivoire. These developments are explained in some scholarly work as a triumph of greed over grievance; that abundant natural resources cause conflict because they create opportunities for predatory individuals to maximize their economic gains and crowd out the rest.<sup>4</sup>

## **Under What Conditions Does Greed Create Or Not Create War?**

This analysis has a lot of utility when applied to Sierra Leone. The violent scramble to control natural resources played a key role in creating refugees, breaking down state administration, and in reinforcing the predatory character of armed groups. I add, however, that predation linked to natural resources in fact emerges out of particular political strategies that predate Sierra Leone's war that need to be understood to promote durable peace. Violent political networks, some armed and dating back to the 1950s provide a context in which natural resources played an especially prominent role in conflict. The politics of this era, and more so after the establishment of a single party state in 1978, emphasized a network of personal rule. After independence in 1961, this developed behind the façade

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2. Figures for the 1970s, adjusted to 2000 prices, are calculated from International Monetary Fund, *Balance of Payments Statistics Yearbook*, (Washington, DC: IMF, 1990), 243. 2000 figures are from Government of Sierra Leone, *Bulletin of Economic Trends*, (Freetown, 2001), 12. GDP figures from Economist Intelligence Unit, *Sierra Leone*, Sept. 2001, 32.
  3. International Crisis Group, *Sierra Leone: Time for a New Military and Political Strategy*, (London: ICG, 11 April 2001), 2.
  4. Paul Collier, »Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy«, Chester Crocker & F.O. Hampson, eds., *Managing Global Chaos* (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2002); »Doing Well Out of War: An Economic Perspective«, *Greed & Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 91–111.

of statehood. It was not founded on conventional concepts of legitimacy, or even on supporting formal bureaucratic institutions. Instead Sierra Leone's presidents ruled through controlling markets, especially in diamonds, and manipulated other people's access to economic opportunities in ways that enhanced their power.

A key element of this patronage-based strategy of rule lay in the fact that over time high officials found it in their interests to undermine the formal institutions of the state itself. State office and globally recognized sovereignty provided a license to exploit resources. But to use these resources to finance state institutions would threaten these officials, since an efficient army or civil ministry could provide a base for more efficient or popular rivals to challenge their economic and political power. Up to a point, it became possible for Sierra Leone's presidents to preside over the collapse of their own states years before fighting broke out, using their coercive control of markets to maintain their holds on power and impose a precarious order. Like the predatory organizations that arose in the 1990s, their political networks and strategies were deeply rooted in exploiting diamonds. Though more violent, later armed groups mirrored presidential political strategies and tactics to a large degree, especially as Sierra Leone's eleven year war featured competition for resources rather than their concentration in the hands of one organization.

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To the economist, this is war motivated by greed.  
For the young fighter, it is injustice.

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Natural resources and close connections to criminal rackets do not automatically generate predation, even if they offer incentives for some individuals to try to provoke war. Dagestan and Ingush Republics border war torn Chechnya and share many of Chechnya's criminal gangs and rackets that help fuel conflict in their less fortunate neighbor, but they remain more peaceful. Predatory wars develop in places with few resources like Somalia – with a prior legacy of patronage-based rule and destruction of state institutions – but ended in the better endowed north that was distant and marginalized from the predatory networks based in the capital in the 1970s and 1980s.

Likewise, resources alone tells little about why Sudan's government pursues a strenuous nationalist and religious ideological program to the point of attracting international sanctions that undermine the efficient

exploitation of oil. Khartoum's rulers fail to make the most basic programmatic and ideological compromises and equivocations grasped by rulers of oil rich Angola, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and elsewhere to appease foreign business partners. Likewise, Afghanistan's Taliban regime cut opium production by 96 percent between 2000 and 2001, foregoing an estimated income of 100 million dollar.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Liberia's president Taylor, commander of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) in that country's 1989–96 war, highlights the power of greed. UN investigators estimate that his private transactions in 2000 were five times larger than Liberia's official budget for that year.<sup>6</sup>

Universal assumptions concerning natural resources and motivations in conflict fail to explain why conflicts evolve differently unless they label contrary action as false consciousness or evidence that leaders dupe followers. They explain a lot about Sierra Leone's and several other African conflicts, however. But this is due more to the nature of rule and state collapse prior to conflicts rather than to an innate character of natural resources. In these cases, predatory personalist rule and state collapse destroyed other economic opportunities that depended upon more stable state institutions.

These developments generate grievances, especially over injustice and insecurity that violent personalist rulers and warfare imposed. These grievances get channeled into predatory organizations, as even dissenting individuals accept protection or collaborate with predators. Others eagerly join in. Regardless of actors' motive, analysis means that denying resources to armed groups is a necessary but insufficient requirement for ensuring that Sierra Leone remains at peace. This task also requires addressing grievances that are at the root of popular experiences of personalist rule and state collapse. It is this context that generated conflict in the first place and which is the subject of the next section. This follows with an evaluation of postwar conflict resolution and reconstruction efforts in light of this analysis.

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5. United Nations Drug Control Monitoring Programme, Afghanistan Annual Opium Poppy Survey 2001, (Islamabad: UNDCP, Sept. 2001), iii, 11.

6. Government of Liberia, The Budget of the Government of Liberia, 2000/2001, (Monrovia: Bureau of the Budget, 2000), 10–11; For estimates of Taylor's income, United Nations, Report of the Panel of Experts Appointed Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1395 (2002), Paragraph 4, in Relation to Liberia, (New York, UN S/2002/470, 2002), 23–34.

## Presidential Power Politics and the Political Economy of Diamond Mining

Since their discovery in 1930, Sierra Leone's diamonds have played a major role both in the prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s and in the devastation and war of recent years. Unlike oil, copper or cobalt, alluvial diamonds are accessible to large numbers of people equipped with hand tools and are easily smuggled. Official state and foreign corporate control over income from diamonds financed state services and investment in previous decades. Later this income attracted armed groups too, not so much due to an innate character of diamonds, but as a consequence of earlier policies.

Who controlled resources and for what end is reflected in radical changes in state capacity. In the late 1950s, officials complained that institutions of higher learning expanded too fast to absorb new funding, but lauded expanded government bus service to rural communities. They looked forward to the timely arrival of daily newspapers from the capital, courtesy of more domestic flights.<sup>7</sup> By the 1980s, civil servants received only sporadic salary payments. Television broadcasts ended in 1987 when the Minister of Information sold the transmitter to a »Kuwaiti investor«. The radio tower fell over in 1989, ending state radio transmissions outside the capital. In 1993, only three percent of the (drastically reduced) official budget was spent on education, and only four percent for other »socially oriented« projects.<sup>8</sup> By 1995 the battle against the RUF absorbed 75 percent of official spending.<sup>9</sup>

The initial recession of state capabilities was rooted in difficulties state officials faced in controlling diamond exploitation, a situation that need not implicate the government in a strategy of greed. Rather it highlights the fact that control over resources is central to the capacity of a government to impose legitimate political order. The discovery of alluvial diamonds occurred in a colonial legal context that distinguished between recently arrived immigrants and »natives« of chiefdoms. Colonial ordi-

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7. Governor's Office, Confidential, No. 13383/517, (Freetown, 12 Feb. 1959).

8. John Karimu, Government Budget and Economic and Financial Policies for the Financial Year 1996, (Freetown, 29 Dec. 1995), 12.

9. John Karimu, Government Budget and Economic and Financial Policies for the Fiscal Year 1995/1996, (Freetown, 29 June 1995), 10.

nances accentuated the precarious elements of the customary social standing of settlers, forcing them into a more vulnerable and permanent »stranger« category, which reinforced their need to seek protection from a local strongman. Previously, land use rights theoretically were subject to review each year by local chiefs and headmen, but strangers often married into local lineages and reduced their patron's power over them.<sup>10</sup>

The discovery of diamonds also marked the start of clandestine mining, known officially as illicit diamond mining (IDM), centered on Kono and Kenema Districts. IDM attracted young men from all parts of Sierra Leone and neighboring West African territories. Mostly single, their arrival caused consternation among colonial officials who feared the political and social consequence of the appearance of »rootless, detribalized natives«. These new arrivals also helped create clandestine trade networks that crossed borders and later played important roles in supplying arms and military support to RUF fighters in the 1990s. A Mines Department observed: »A large number of Protectorate natives resorted to the illicit mining of diamonds, apparently due to some bad crop years, and although many were failures, there were also quite a number who did very well and a few who made large sums of money and became rich. This attracted Africans from French territory and Liberia, some of whom come to mine and others to buy diamonds to smuggle away from Sierra Leone.«<sup>11</sup> An estimated 35,000 strangers settled in Kono to mine diamonds during the 1950s and 1960s, while the colonial government estimated that 75,000 people were engaged in mining in the whole country in 1956, the majority of them illegally.<sup>12</sup>

This new breed of strangers had to appeal to local chiefs not only to gain access to diamonds, but now for protection from Freetown's officials. With this came huge influxes, amounting to 43 percent of Kono's people in 1963, and 48 percent by 1970.<sup>13</sup> Enterprising chiefs and head-

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10. Vernon Dorjahn & Christopher Fyfe, »Landlord and Stranger: Change in Tenancy Relations in Sierra Leone«, *Journal of African History*, 3:3 (1962), 391–97.

11. Department of Mines, Report of the Mines Department for the Year 1955, (Freetown: Government Printer, 1956), 3.

12. The first estimate is from H.L. van der Laan, *The Sierra Leone Diamonds*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 10–11; the latter is from Department of Mines, Report on the Mines Department, 1956, (Freetown: Government Printer, 1957), 4.

13. David King, »Population Characteristics of Diamond Boom Towns in Kono«, *Africana Research Bulletin*, (1975), 62.

men found that they could extract informal »license fees« and »fines« from young men in return for protection for their IDM activities. Willing chiefs also manipulated widespread local sentiments that diamonds really belonged to local people. A foreign mining company reported that »this feeling also seems to have been prevalent in the rank and file of both the police and [mining company] security force«,<sup>14</sup> further undermining state control over this major source of income. The colonial government preferred that a large foreign firm mine diamonds to ensure regular payments of royalties and taxes. Anglo-American worked a large concession since the mid 1930s, and kept an armed private security force to contend with IDM poachers. After 1956, local small-scale mining came under the rubric of a government-run licensing system to entice clandestine operators into regulated and taxed channels. The preference for foreign firms to force out clandestine mining reemerged in the 1980s, a preference that Sierra Leone's foreign creditors would share, and which yet again is seen as the key to rebuilding central government revenue capacity.

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Corporate control in fact made conflict worse between IDM miners, chiefs, and national authorities. Coinciding local interests enabled ambitious chiefs to use IDM strangers to marshal support for their preferred local headmen candidates and to intervene in chieftom succession disputes in neighboring areas. The strangers possessed the added advantage of reliance on the chief's favor, since the chief could use the illegal nature of their activity to call upon individual Freetown officials to prosecute noncompliant guests. This arrangement gave chiefs informal social control over young men and diamond resources. It occurred against the interests and sanctions of the state, yet was legitimate in the eyes of many local people, and was accepted by most strangers so long as chiefs controlled access to mining opportunities. It was when outsiders, such as the Freetown government or agents of the foreign firm, interlopers in the

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14. Chief Inspector of Mines, Interim Report on the Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme, 18 June 1956.

view of strangers and their local patrons, gained control that conflict worsened in the 1950s.

Government interest in permitting small-scale miners' access to legally sanctioned mining in 1956 grew from British fears that party politics in advance of Independence would encourage local and stranger youth demands for a share of diamond resources. Many already favored a radical nationalist party that campaigned against »foreign exploitation« and remote officialdom in Freetown.<sup>15</sup> The official alluvial mining license scheme relied upon chief support for applicants to entice chiefs to comply. While appearing to legitimate and strengthen chief control over mining gangs, it started to chip away at the informal structures of chief control over IDM as it shifted political resources to the new national parties. The dominant political party, the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) enjoyed tacit British support and began to use its growing control over the state administrative apparatus in the late 1950s to distribute diamond mining licenses according to party loyalties.

In 1967 a new party, the All Peoples Congress (APC) under the leadership of Siaka Stevens was elected. Stevens was prevented from taking office by a military coup until a counter-coup enforced the election's result in 1968. He then moved quickly to shift the legal right of chiefs to grant licenses to the Ministry of Mines to limit the awards of mining licenses to loyal supporters. The award of mining licenses in the late 1960s shifted radically from chiefs who supported the SLPP to a more concentrated group of those who switched loyalties or were installed in office by the APC.<sup>16</sup> This tool gave Stevens a more certain means for controlling local strongmen than the unreliable army that earlier prevented him from taking office, a strategy vindicated in April 1971 when coup plotters entered his residence only to be fought off by bodyguards. Stevens thereafter limited the army's strength to just 1,500 men.

Tighter control over formal regulations and informal clandestine arrangements in the mining industry (but in fact now »official« in the sense of playing a central role in a strategy of rule) also gave Stevens control over armed IDM gangs to intimidate and attack political opponents. This control was strong enough that even some APC parliamentarians com-

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15. Fred Hayward, »The Development of a Radical Political Organization in the Bush: A Case Study in Sierra Leone«, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 6:1 (1972), 1–28.

16. A B Zack Williams, *Tributors, Supporters, and Merchant Capital*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1995), 164–66.

plained that thugs under the cloak of the youth section of the All Peoples Congress intimidated constituents and extort money.<sup>17</sup>

This forced chiefs in mining areas to make a choice. They could side with Stevens, but at the expense of their direct control over IDM and at the cost of suppressing opposition party activity. But not all local authorities faced similar circumstances. Pressure from Freetown on Kono chiefs was stronger than it was on those further downstream. Both places hosted alluvial mining operations. The upstream (Kono) area also contained deep-rock kimberlite mining and more deeply buried alluvial deposits away from rivers. This distribution of resources means that upstream deposits included diamonds more difficult to get without substantial capital investments and the involvement of outside firms. Downstream deposits are readily accessible by mining gangs with hand tools. Conventional wisdom would consider the latter more susceptible to predation and an attraction to armed gangs from outside the region, and thus greater social disruption.

In fact, the opposite turned out to be the case. Upstream deposits became the target of a mining policy in 1973 that Stevens advertised as indigenization of some of the large foreign firm's mining concession. This gave chiefs in the diamond source area access to joint ventures with businessmen and politicians directly tied to Stevens' favor and further concentrated distribution of the region's diamond wealth into the president's hands. The scheme also gave upriver political cliques more opportunities to make large amounts of money in industrial-scale mining operations, but at the cost of allying with politicians in the capital. Downstream, chiefs and local officials still maintained tighter control over IDM gangs, provided they showed sufficient levels of loyalty to the ruling party. This pattern shaped chiefs' social control over violence in the 1990s. In areas where chiefs became more dependent on an »official« clandestine economy before the war, youth, especially IDM gangs, were more likely to collaborate with RUF in the 1990s, and outside armed youth gangs (such as army units) also mined with more impunity. Local authorities further downriver were more successful in channeling youth violence into home guard units to defend communities. Local strongmen downstream at first glance appear to pursue »greed« agendas, when in fact they used social control to organize mining in ways that contributed to local order while upstream gangs operated outside this constraint. The consequences of

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17. Minute Paper, (State House, Freetown), 14 Jan. 1969.

these different social relationships, especially with regard to the position of young men, became more pronounced once war began.

Pre-war clandestine business in individual chiefdoms reflects these differences. The chief of the upriver Nimikoro chiefdom, for example, moved into alluvial operations with associates of the president after 1968, then into larger-scale mining operations in joint ventures.<sup>18</sup> Stevens' APC also sought greater influence on the selection of new chiefs. A Kono chief who supported the SLPP was deposed in 1971 and replaced with a former Anglo-American security guard who had no local base of support. The new chief ruled until late 1992, when RUF mining gangs chased him away. This chief was unpopular among IDM gangs in the early 1970s. »It was a case of this chief against the (illicit) miners«, said the former Provincial Secretary,<sup>19</sup> an unpopularity that persisted through the 1980s as the chief favored the business partners of his presidential patron at the expense of the now »unofficial« clandestine economy of small-scale IDM gangs. This may explain the early affinity of IDM gangs in this chiefdom for RUF when they first appeared in this area in 1992. They confronted and confronted chiefs who relied upon Freetown to stay in power at the expense of local people's clandestine access to diamonds and were able to recruit local IDM miners.

Prior to the rebel challenge, the informal institutions of Stevens' political networks protected his client chiefs. In 1982, a Kono chief shot a critic of the president. The senior District Officer recommended suspending the chief during the criminal investigation. From Freetown came the word: »His opponents may capitalize on his fate and cause chaos and confusion in the chiefdom with a view toward disposing of him«. <sup>20</sup> The chief was released and the case dropped. Stevens removed a recalcitrant Kono chief in 1982 when an ethnic Lebanese business partner of the president set up his own large-scale mining operations in the chiefdom. Then strangers became violent when they discovered that their former patron could no longer protect them from the business interests of Freetown officials who demanded that IDM gangs be cleared off. An-

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18. David Rosen, *Diamonds, Diggers and Chiefs: The Politics of Fragmentation in a West African Society*, PhD dissertation, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, 1974.

19. Interview with former Provincial Secretary, Eastern Province, Freetown, 9 May 2001.

20. The District Officer's report is found in Arrest of Paramount Chief of Gbense Chiefdom, Kono District, PF/NA/405/1/2, 5 July 1982. The reply is found in Sierra Leone Government, Minute Paper (State House, Freetown), 14 July 1982.

other Kono chief installed in 1981 headed the recently nationalized diamond-mining corporation. Consequently he had very bad relations with IDM gangs and periodically relied upon armed forces and APC youth gangs dispatched from the capital for his protection.

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Downriver in Kenema, a government administrator complained that local chiefs and IDM gangs were »total SLPP«, which meant that Freetown officials had to tread more carefully. This did not mean that the downriver communities escaped interference. Alpha Lavalie, a founder of the Civil Defence Force in the early 1990s, wrote that the APC »condoned, perhaps even encouraged, chieftom uprisings which entailed intimidation and coercion« that mobilized otherwise idle youths under the supervision of APC stalwarts to intimidate candidates who attempted to contest nominations for single party elections.<sup>21</sup> He observed that APC organizers brought youths from outside the area, even though many local youths were idle. The APC's need to recruit outsiders reflected the success of local notables in »organizing an anti-APC campaign based on the use of Poro«, a customary male initiation society. »By this means, the SLPP was able to unify all its supporters in Mende land to drive out from their areas imported APC supporters.«<sup>22</sup>

Lavalie's observations show the importance of the social context of violence and the relationship of local leadership to predatory central authorities. Though downriver communities were well known as IDM sites, local chiefs were more successful in keeping political and social distance between themselves and the emerging APC »official« clandestine economy and political network. They still faced serious challenges from youth violence directed against them. In the long run, however, they maintained greater control over local youth through influence over informal

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21. Alpha Lavalie, *SLPP: A Study of the Political History of the Sierra Leone Peoples Party with Particular Reference to the Period, 1968–1978*, MA Thesis, University of Sierra Leone, 1983, 12.

22. Alpha Lavalie, *Government and Opposition in Sierra Leone, 1968–1978*, Paper presented at Fourth Birmingham Sierra Leone Studies Forum, Birmingham, UK, 1985, 80.

institutions such as an initiation society and patronage to local IDM operations. This ability of many local chiefs to preserve some political distance from Freetown politicians gave them less income, but enabled them to behave in a locally legitimate manner as local patrons for IDM gangs, since they did not have to tolerate as much interference from Freetown ventures that forced IDM gangs off their land.

This connection between IDM and community defense became apparent in 1986 when a few local aspirants challenged externally imposed candidates in single party elections. Authorities rounded up local youth, including IDM miners and pressed them into service to defend local communities. A precursor of the Civil Defence Force militias emerged when these youth were recruited with the approval of traditional authorities and organized as »traditional hunters«. This practice gave fighters a high level of commitment and a stake in obedience to local social structures governing the use of violence to protect local communities.<sup>23</sup>

Urban society in Sierra Leone also showed the consequence of different configurations of social control over resources and youth violence. Armed APC youth and the Internal Security Unit (ISU), formed under presidential command, attacked University of Sierra Leone students in 1977 when they protested against the president and the start of a precipitous economic decline. In what students later commemorated as »All Thugs Day«, ISU joined with local unemployed youth to repress students and to loot. Resembling future RUF operations, the ISU and their collaborators were accused even in the government-owned newspaper of »capitalizing on their position to harass innocent traders at night, attempting assault on women, and even going to the extent of store breaking«.<sup>24</sup>

All Thugs Day showed the difficulties that a »grievance« oriented opposition to Stevens' regime faced in their efforts to mobilize. Some students organized a »people's tribunal« to mobilize regime critics. Others took up arms. Yet these ideas and tactics never emerged in the RUF. A perceptive observer of that era explains that RUF drew from »the large unemployed and unemployable youths, mostly male, who live by their wits or who have one foot in what is generally referred to as the informal or

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23. Marianne Ferme, »Studying *politisi*: the Dialogues of Publicity and Secrecy in Sierra Leone«, in John & Jean Comaroff, eds., *Civil Society and Political Imagination in Africa*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 160–91.

24. »Halt Deteriorating Situation«, *Daily Mail*, (Freetown), 4 Feb. 1977, 8.

underground economy«. <sup>25</sup> The inability of the student movement to channel or exert social control over this violence rendered them marginal to the war that would follow. Like youth in parts of the mining districts, urban youth had to calculate whether it was more advantageous to ally with politicians who they considered to be corrupt and vile in order to improve their prospects for survival. Backing regime critics who did not control resources would leave followers facing superior firepower of politicians' militias and without opportunities to gather loot for themselves.

## The Privatization of Control and the Destruction of the State

New paramilitaries and youth gangs gave Stevens more leeway to manipulate what was left of state institutions to loot the country's resources. He and a Sierra Leone-born Lebanese partner, Jamil Said Mohammed took over the state diamond marketing monopoly in 1976 in a bogus privatization exercise. This left the two in control of up to 300 million dollars (at 2001 prices) in diamond revenues. Stevens extended his style of privatization to state agencies for agricultural marketing, road transport, and oil refining. Other deals included schemes to import toxic wastes and sell an island to the Palestine Liberation Organization. <sup>26</sup>

The shift of revenues to Stevens' personal control destroyed state agencies as channels for patronage and made access to Stevens, not the state the primary avenue to enrichment. Deficit spending reflected this shift, jumping from about 50 percent of revenues through the 1970s to over 100 percent in the mid 1980s. <sup>27</sup> The subsequent collapse of state services, accelerating inflation and mass impoverishment reinforced the centrality of Stevens' »official« clandestine market for people's survival strategies. Stevens retired in 1985 (and died soon after), but not before handing power to his hand picked successor, General Joseph Momoh, the commander of the largely unarmed army. Stevens chose Momoh because he could not challenge the enterprise that Stevens and his business partners built in the »official« clandestine economy. Momoh's lack of

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25. Ibrahim Abdullah, »Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF/SL)«, *Africa Development*, 22: 3-4 (1997), 73.

26. »US Dumping Demonstration«, *West Africa*, 25 Feb. 1980, 377.

27. International Monetary Fund, *Balance of Payments Statistics Yearbook*, (Washington, DC: IMF, 1990), 173.

control was reflected in the near total collapse of official diamond exports by 1989 as Stevens' partners expanded their domination of the country's economic resources.

Momoh struggled to build his own political network amidst his lack of control over the clandestine, much less formal economy. Pressure from international financial institutions worsened Momoh's dilemma. The government's accumulation of arrears led to a break between Freetown and the IMF in 1987. Shortly after, Stevens' associates launched a coup. Momoh's support was in the army of about 3,000 soldiers, many of whom existed only on paper so that commanders could collect additional salaries on the increasingly infrequent occasions when these were paid. Live soldiers attracted names like »One Bullet« from citizens referring to the unarmed army's subordination to armed gangs.

Momoh and the IMF sought solutions to the weak capacity of the government and the country's arrears in corporate control over diamond mining areas. Like colonial officials before, IMF officials explained that a large foreign firm would displace IDM and channel revenue to Freetown, without needing strong (and expensive) state institutions. A steady stream of revenues could pay Sierra Leone's debts and finance a smaller, more efficient bureaucracy. From Momoh's perspective, a large mining operation offered him the best chance to chase off Stevens' business partners, their local allies, and IDM gangs and use those resources to ensure his own political survival.

Two Israeli firms appeared, but neither established large-scale operations. Instead, the first firm purchased diamonds from local traders to launder money and to finance clandestine trade with the apartheid regime in South Africa. The second firm allegedly laundered drug money. A more established firm based in the United States promised to invest in a major mining project on the condition that the Sierra Leone Army clear Kono's mining areas of IDM operations. In mid 1990, the army launched Operation Clean Sweep, then Operation Clear All, forcing as many as 30,000 miners out of the area. The vigor of the soldiers, many of who did not receive regular salaries, reflected haste to set up IDM operations on their own or with the former patrons of the miners they chased off.

These episodes underline how external intervention influences local social control over violence. Both the IMF and the president envisioned foreign firms as contributing to a centralization of control over coercion and resources. IMF advisors viewed this as occurring in a formal institutional framework; the president most likely imagined a reconstituted pa-

tronage network. Instead, external intrusion shifted control of resources to armed IDM gangs even further divorced from central control. As young soldiers joined IDM gangs, they began to resemble even more strongly the groups that would fight each other to control diamonds in the war that was soon to come.

## Predatory Gangs, Private Militias and Foreign Armies

Soon after the army invaded Kono's mining district, RUF fighters crossed from Liberia to Sierra Leone in March 1991 with help from Charles Taylor's NPFL. Momoh had little choice but to expand his army to 6,000 men to meet this threat. Momoh's foreign minister admitted that most recruits were »drifters, rural and urban unemployed, a fair number of hooligans, drug addicts and thieves«. <sup>28</sup> Some junior officers fighting rebels discovered that corrupt senior officers in Freetown were stealing supplies meant for frontline soldiers. Sergeant Valentine Strasser and other non-commissioned officers marched to Freetown in April 1992, forcing Momoh to flee. Strasser's immediate demand concerned the absence of medical care – he was allegedly injured in a battle with RUF fighters who discovered Strasser and his men mining diamonds. Strasser set up a National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) and promised to defeat the RUF. By 1994, the NPRC had increased the army to 14,000 soldiers recruited from the unemployed youth, some from armed gangs or who earned a living through crime.

Kono's diamond mining areas fell to the RUF in November 1992, and were recaptured by NPRC soldiers in January 1993 with help from Nigerian troops. Meanwhile, many soldiers mined diamonds, sometimes in collaboration with RUF fighters, while RUF developed its own diamond business with their Liberian patron. »There developed«, wrote a former NPRC minister, »an extraordinary identity of interests between NPRC and RUF. This was partly responsible for the rise of the *sobel* phenomenon, i.e., government soldiers by day become rebels by night.« <sup>29</sup>

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28. Quoted in Lansana Gberie, »The May 25 Coup d'État in Sierra Leone: A Militariat Revolt?« *Africa Development*, 22:3–4 (1997), 153.

29. Arthur Abraham, »War and Transition to Peace: A Study of State Conspiracy in Perpetuating Armed Conflict«, *African Development*, 22: 3–4 (1997), 103.

After the April 1992 coup, many Sierra Leoneans recognized that old connections between armed gangs and politicians persisted, especially in diamond mining and trafficking. A Freetown journalist explained that armed gangs received backing from what he called »town rebels«: »In constant help and communication with bush rebels. They are always neatly dressed and so are not easily identified. They work for the established government. They work in offices close to the seat of the President ... They are always neatly dressed especially in coats and ties. This class of rebels is responsible for the ugly state (and pleasant state) you are in today ... With just a signature they robbed your country of billions.«<sup>30</sup>

Most of the young officers who took power in the 1992 coup were among the marginalized youth who in other circumstances sought the patronage of strongmen, but now acted as their own bosses. The RUF leader, Foday Sankoh, echoed these sentiments in his justification for RUF's diamond mining: »They ask us why we mine diamonds. Why didn't they ask Jamil or Shaki [Siaka Stevens] that when the APC was in power? Yeah, we mine! We in RUF believe in wealth, arms and power in the hands of the people ... We are not going to give up diamonds or our guns to anybody.«<sup>31</sup> In this regard, Sankoh and NPRC soldiers shared a view of the country's problem – it was potentially rich, but politicians had stolen everything.

A turn in the war came in April 1995 when the NPRC government hired Executive Outcomes (EO), a South African private security firm, to fight RUF rebels who were within 20 miles of the capital. By December 1995, EO had captured the Kono mining area from RUF, and were training fighters who had managed to keep downriver areas out of rebel hands. EO trained and reorganized anti-RUF fighters in the formal CDF framework to help EO track rebels. RUF faced defeat and accepted negotiations, resulting in the Abidjan Agreement in November 1996, which led to an election in March 1997 and a UN observer mission.<sup>32</sup>

The election's winner, Amhed Tejan Kabbah, faced IMF and donor pressure to quit spending the government's meager funds on EO, so he

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30. As Nasralla, »Types of Rebels«, *For di People*, (Freetown), 5 Feb. 1999, 2.

31. Transcript of Foday Sankoh speech, Makeni, 1 Feb. 2000, (my translation of text).

32. United Nations, *A Peace Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone*, 30 Nov. 1996, S/1996/1034.

told the outfit to leave.<sup>33</sup> Soon after, on 25 May 1997, rebellious soldiers and RUF fighters battled their way into Freetown. These »sobels« formed the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) with the army's Major Johnny Paul Kromah at its head and RUF's Sankoh as his deputy. The AFRC forced civil servants to »donate« their efforts in lieu of payment, as fighters looted the city and human rights abuses proliferated. When faced with opposition from the Nigerian expeditionary force (which occupied part of the city), AFRC spokesmen announced that they would kill citizens and burn the city in Operation No Living Thing.<sup>34</sup> One fighter who mutilated a civilian reportedly told his victim: »Since you civilians are not here for us, we are here to destroy you.«<sup>35</sup> Nigerian soldiers forced the AFRC out of the city in February 1998 and reinstalled Kabbah as president.

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External support reduced the RUF rebels' incentives to rely upon popular support in Sierra Leone to survive. They allied with a distant patron in exchange for access to diamond wealth, and could use outsiders as military muscle to chase off local people who opposed that arrangement.

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Elements of the army that joined the AFRC behaved much like RUF, preying upon local communities, recruiting youth to loot, setting up roadblocks and collecting »taxes«. Calling themselves West Side Boys, like RUF they incorporated elements of Sierra Leone youth culture into their war fighting culture. The name »West Side« came from hip-hop music admired by some urban youth. A business rivalry between two US gangsta rap music studios led to the murder of Tupac Shakur, the popular »West« artist, and Biggie Smalls, the CEO of »East«. Fighters admired these men who began as enterprising and clever drug dealers, who like them had to live in the informal economy and depend on wits and violence to survive. The savvy among them hit it big and got rich. While not retailing crack cocaine, this sort of violent enterprise can be said to have characterized the behavior of Sierra Leone's politicians too.

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33. John Hirsch, *Sierra Leone: Diamonds and the Struggle for Democracy*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 40.

34. United States Department of State, *Sierra Leone Atrocities Against Civilians*, (Washington, DC, 12 May 1998); United Nations, *Second Progress Report of the Secretary General on the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone*, 18 Oct. 1998, 8.

35. Human Rights Watch, *Fresh Reports of RUF Terror Tactics*, 26 May 2000.

The bulk of CDF forces evolved very differently. Most civilians recognized little difference between soldiers, West Side Boys, RUF and other groups that often preyed upon civilians and at first these fighters easily overwhelmed local vigilante groups. But during the December 1994 RUF attack on the downriver towns of Bo and Kenema, Lavalie and several local chiefs organized these vigilantes under the rubric of traditional authorities and initiation societies. These local defense units survived Lavalie's violent death in late 1994 and formed the core of the Civil Defence Forces.<sup>36</sup>

Though the CDF mobilized fighters' shared ethnic ties, the relative lack of serious disruption of local customary practices and greater legitimacy of traditional authorities permitted participation by outsider youth. Strangers in the community were incorporated into local social structures through local practices that had developed around mining. Because chiefs in mining areas had more incentive to try to protect »their« strangers in the »unofficial« clandestine economy against politicians' predations, local informal institutions still played a large role, in contrast to the social disruption that the Freetown political and business elite's intrusion into Kono politics and business caused. In wartime, these reciprocal obligations in downriver communities translated into a promise that chiefs and their miner allies guarantee each other's security. Though weakened by APC rule and earlier colonial administrative practice, pressures of war and home defense produced an organization that mined diamonds while supplying order. They managed fragmenting pressures and the self-interest of entrepreneurs associated with war involving natural resources and the collapse of state institutions. Furthermore, they showed how clandestine economies and control of violence can promote order in some circumstances.

The CDF also played a role in creating disorder. The head of the AFRC regime justified the 1997 coup, complaining: »The SLPP tribal hunter militia received logistics and supplies far beyond their immediate needs. This was indication of the preference for the private army over our Armed Forces, foreshadowing the ultimate replacement of the Constitutional Defense Forces by Mr. Kabbah's hunters.«<sup>37</sup> In addition, CDF units de-

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36. Patrick Muana, »The Kamajoi Militia: Civil War, Internal Displacement and the Politics of Counter-Insurgency«, *Africa Development*, 22:3-4 (1997), 77-100.

37. Letter from Johnny Paul Kromah to Economic Community of West African States, 12 Aug. 1997.

ployed outside home areas were removed from social institutions that disciplined their behavior, which contributed to CDF abuses of human rights elsewhere in the country.

CDF history shows the importance of informal institutions, including chief control of the »unofficial« clandestine regional economy. This experience belies predictions of standard approaches that link exploitation of easily obtained natural resources with predatory behavior and political opportunism. It shows the role that continuity of authority played in enabling downriver chiefs to organize local »unruly youth« in contrast to APC-imposed Kono chiefs who lacked informal institutional ties to their communities or control over youthful strangers and violence. Local authorities in some downriver communities were able to build upon this institutional legacy to create an effective mechanism for providing order that was at least modestly responsive to popular interests.

Outside intervention in Sierra Leone's war also shaped the distribution of social control of violence and resources. As noted above, Liberia's president Charles Taylor supported the RUF rebels since the start of the war in 1991. This external support reduced RUF incentives to rely upon popular support in Sierra Leone to survive. Like chiefs in Kono in the 1970s under the APC, RUF allied with a distant patron in exchange for access to diamond wealth, and could use outsiders as military muscle to chase off local people who opposed that arrangement. Like Stevens and Jamil, RUF and Taylor used international business connections to market diamonds and to supply weapons to fighters.

International recognition of Taylor's election as president of Liberia in 1997 reinforced his role as an external patron for diamond mining rebels. He received over 75 percent of the vote after he warned that he would go back to war if voters rejected him. Taylor accurately guessed that foreign recognition of his victory and eagerness to disengage from the conflict would free him from a need to build new popular bases of support if he wanted to be president. Even when military setbacks and international pressure forced the RUF into peace negotiations, Taylor aided the RUF. The 1999 Lomé Agreement, for example, called for the RUF to transform itself into a political party in preparation for elections and established a role for 12,000 UN observers as the United National Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) to oversee disarmament of all factions in the country.<sup>38</sup>

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38. Peace Agreement Between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone, author's copy of original.

It also made RUF leader Sankoh head of the Strategic Minerals Resource Commission to manage Sierra Leone's diamond resources. Sankoh instead used his position to protect RUF's diamond deals with Taylor and other outsiders.

When UN peacekeepers investigated RUF's activities, RUF fighters robbed UNAMSIL convoys. RUF fighters refused to report to disarmament sites. RUF fighters then kidnapped several hundred UN observers in early May 2000. Sankoh was captured and arrested on 16 May 2000 after fleeing his Freetown residence, a point that marked a shift in the UN's approach to the conflict. Almost a thousand British Royal Marines and paratroopers arrived to bolster the Kabbah government. British trainers arrived to retrain and support the Sierra Leone Army in an offensive against rebels, and Sankoh was arrested in May 2000. This pressure succeeded in forcing rebels to hand over weapons to redeployed UN peacekeepers as they sought refuge from military offensives on other fronts. British strategists also helped CDF units press the offensive against the RUF. By late 2001, 17,500 UN peacekeepers had access to most of the country, and the 18 January 2002 declaration ended the war.

## Flawed Conflict Resolution

International efforts to resolve Sierra Leone's conflict have involved large amounts of money to create order. The UNAMSIL deployment to late 2002 has cost about 2 billion dollars to sustain 17,500 soldiers, the world's largest peacekeeping force. The Secretary General foresees a deployment through 2004 at an annual cost of about 700 million dollars, about equal to Sierra Leone's GDP. A Special Court is to be convened in 2003 under Security Council Resolution 1315 of 2000 is estimated to require a three-year budget of 60 million dollars to prosecute war criminals. A Multi-Donor Trust Fund called for contributions of 74 million dollars to finance demobilization and reconstruction efforts. Creditors in 2001 approved 950 million dollars in debt service relief.<sup>39</sup>

While lavishing money on imposing order on Sierra Leone, this strategy fails to change the distribution of resources that played a large part in sustaining that country's war. Most immediately, a 13.5 million dollars

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39. United Nations, Fifteenth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (New York: UN, 5 Sept. 2002), 13.

shortfall in the Multi-Donor Trust Fund left 24,000 ex-combatants waiting for reintegration payments. Some engage in street protests, while others join an insurgency against Liberia's government. Donor officials complain that postwar reconstruction efforts receive less political backing from donors, especially once fighting ends.

The World Bank and the Sierra Leone government recognize that the key to sustainable postwar programs lies in developing Sierra Leone's own revenue sources. Thus both support diamond mining license schemes resembling the 1950s British effort to lure illicit miners into taxable channels. Like the earlier effort, current policy centralizes award of licenses in Freetown. IDM gangs complain that politicians use this power to reward allies, as before the war, and protest that this constitutes a theft of »their« resources. These gangs include many ex-combatants who are eager to exploit one of the country's only sources of economic opportunity.

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At the cost of several billion dollars international agencies have brought order to Sierra Leone through establishing a state (or UN) monopoly on violence. But it leaves unaddressed the particular social distribution of resources in the hands of political networks in the context of state collapse. These networks control resources at the expense of local people's security and opportunity.

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Like British and post-colonial Sierra Leone officials, creditors advise that »capturing a substantial share of diamond mining rents in the form of taxes hinges mainly on attracting an international mining enterprise«. <sup>40</sup> Though this is aimed mainly at deep deposits, IDM gangs fear that it will cordon off large alluvial deposits. This would also shift control of resources to the distant central government. A British funded Anti-Corruption Commission also offers significant evidence that these resources continue to be distributed on a political basis. Since its establishment in 2000, the commission reported corruption scandals that include several ministers of government, all of whom have suffered mild reprimands and many of whom remain active in politics.

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40. World Bank, *Transitional Support Strategy for the Republic of Sierra Leone*, (Washington, DC: World Bank, 3 March 2002), 9.

Continued corruption leaves little hope that increased government resources will be used to rebuild civil administration. Teachers in late 2001 were reported to be waiting for salary arrears of 6 to 8 months. The rank-and-file civil service averaged earnings of about one dollar a day, equivalent to the UN's definition of absolute poverty. Sierra Leone in 2001 had only 15 magistrates (earning 900 dollars per year) and 18 judges to administer justice to five million citizens. Even in the southern province, in government hands for most of the war, local courts have been operating autonomously since 1994. Only one state employee deals with local court matters outside of Freetown. The total judiciary payroll in 2001 amounted to only 215,000 dollars, versus the 20 million dollars budgeted each year for the Special Court to try two or three dozen individuals who are of interest to the international community as war criminals.<sup>41</sup>

This poor record of corruption and scarce resources creates incentives to leave reconstruction in the hands of local agents. Thus local courts get rebuilt around existing autonomous structures. The problem with this lies in continued channeling of resources through political networks. Though starved of formal revenues, politicians in the capital continue to find incentives to make deals with local strongmen who will use their control over courts and law enforcement to favor business operators favored in the capital at the expense of local miners. As ex-combatants, many of these miners evince little sympathy, especially from the international community, and often are defined as »thuggish youth« who threaten peace.<sup>42</sup>

Thus at the cost of several billion dollars international agencies have brought order to Sierra Leone through establishing a state (or UN) monopoly on violence. But it leaves unaddressed the particular social distribution of resources in the hands of political networks in the context of state collapse. These networks control resources at the expense of local people's security and opportunity. The only way to remove this threat is to build a real state administration that provides services to people as clear evidence that its claims on resources and control over economic opportunities is used for the benefit of the population as a whole. This will not come at a low cost, and is likely to involve a level of outside interference in administrative matters to reverse several decades of state decline that

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41. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative & Sierra Leone Bar Association, *In Pursuit of Justice: A Report on the Judiciary in Sierra Leone*, (Freetown, 2002).

42. United Nations, *Fifteenth Report*, 2.

will deter foreign donors. It is the only viable course to turn the present order into a durable peace.

Furthermore, it is cost effective. Foreign governments have already spent billions of dollars to bring fighting to an end in Sierra Leone. If they withdraw without helping to establish a state, it is probable that the war will return to the country via conflicts currently waged in Liberia, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. If young miners and others continue to perceive that the country's resources are in the hands of corrupt officials they will be more willing to join that fight. To the economist, this is war motivated by greed. For the young fighter, it is injustice.