Young people, education, and the 'new' wars: The case of Sierra Leone

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Introduction

Contemporary violent conflict is increasingly occurring in the most vulnerable countries in the world today: low-income and weak states (Collier et al. 2003; DFID, 2005a; 2005b; USAID, 2005). Once a country with low income and weak state capacity experiences a conflict, the risk of going back to another cycle of conflict increases greatly. The World Development Report 2011 states that 90% of the civil wars in the last decade took place in countries that had already experienced a civil war in the last 30 years (World Bank, 2011).

Such contemporary conflict concentrated in the vulnerable countries is considered to be 'new' kind of conflict. This is because it cannot be understood by an 'old' or a conventional model of warfare (c.f. Duffield, 2001). For one, it cannot be understood simply as a contest between 'two sides,' i.e. rebels versus government forces or between two rival ethnic groups. In Sierra Leone, a case that the article takes up, rebels and the government army had increasingly recruited a fluid but essentially the same group of marginalised youth, who switched sides at their convenience (see Keen, 2005; SLTRC, 2004b). Secondly, contemporary conflict, particularly in Africa, is considered to not be explainable by political 'grievances' or ideologies – the conventional explanation of violent conflict – as the driving cause. In essence, it has come to be recognised that economic dimensions of conflict as well as political ones are essential to fully understanding it (see Duffield, 2001; Keen, 1998; Reno, 1998; Collier and Hoeffler, 1998). Indeed, while von Clausewitz, the military historian who established the conventional explanation of war, stated that war is 'a continuation of politics by other means,' Keen (2000) states that contemporary internal conflict may in fact be 'a continuation of *economics* by other means' (p. 27, emphasis in original).

In this article, Sierra Leone is taken up as a key case to ponder the relationships among young people, education and the 'new' wars. One common feature of the 'new' wars is the large involvement of young people and children in it as combatants. For the rebel group of Sierra Leone, Revolutionary United Front (RUF), too, the majority of command and control structures were considered to have been made up of individuals under 30 (Rosen, 2005). And yet the Sierra Leonean conflict is unique among the 'new' wars in that the role of education is much debated as we will see below. If education had fuelled and can fuel such kind of conflicts directly or indirectly, it is important that we learn from the history so as not to repeat the same mistake after the war. Education has been greatly promoted in conflict-affected and 'fragile' states in recent years, partly with the expectation that it promotes stability, peace-building and development there (see UNESCO, 2011; Matsumoto, 2011).

And, as mentioned above, the low-income and weak (or 'fragile') states (that have been affected by conflict) are considered to have a high risk of (re)lapsing into a cycle of conflict.

The article shows that Sierra Leone developed unevenly in various ways, widening the gaps between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots.' In particular, it was young people who came to be disadvantaged politically, economically and socially. Education, rather than countering this, played a large part in the uneven development. However, the war cannot be simply understood as a rebellion by the 'have-nots' against the state; the rebel group the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) lacked a coherent political ideology and exhibited contradictory behaviours to what a 'rebel' group is supposed to be, for instance by committing indiscriminate atrocities against the civilians they should have been fighting for. In understanding the root causes of the war, it becomes clear that education has deep links to them. Indeed, the article suggests that the elitist and unequal educational system, the relationship between education and the political and economic context of the country, particularly the gap between expectations regarding the power of education and the actual capability of it, may have fuelled the motivations of young people to be mobilised in the war, and as a result, the root causes of the war.

I will first describe the history of Sierra Leone as a background to the war and the discussion of its root causes. In so doing, education and youth will receive particular attention. I will then describe the features of the civil war that puzzled the international observers and academics, which led some to see it as one of the 'new' (civil) wars. The various explanations that academics came up with about the root causes of the war and the mobilisation of the young people in it and are described in the third section. How education is seen to relate to them is discussed subsequently.

Historical background of Sierra Leone

Freetown, the capital of present Sierra Leone, and the peninsula were first established as a settlement for freed slaves in 1787 and became a Crown Colony of Britain in 1808. On the other hand, the hinterland of the colony (the rest of the present Sierra Leone), populated by indigenous people, became a British protectorate much later in 1896. The development of Sierra Leone during the colonial days was characterised by disparities. The disparities were between Freetown and the hinterland, urban and rural areas, the south and the north, and ultimately between the colonised, Sierra Leone, and the colonial master, Britain. A pattern of economic development that the British envisioned was to extract unprocessed raw materials, such as agricultural products and natural resources, from Sierra Leone to Britain. To do that they made the urban areas centres for trade and administration, where raw materials went out and manufactured goods came in. In particular, things were centralised in Freetown, due to the different territorial categories between Freetown, the colony, and the hinterland, the protectorate (Riddell, 1970). A railway was established from Freetown penetrating through to the south-eastern corner of the country (the present Eastern Region) to transport the rich agricultural products from that area. Riddell (1970) contends that the rail network directed and promoted the modernisation of Sierra Leone, through the provision of social services, including education, and development of banking and cooperate organisations. On the other hand, the north – where the railway only reached up to Makeni because of the less productive lands beyond – came to be neglected in the development vision of the British (Riddell, 1970) and the government did not have much incentive to develop industries or the rural economy in the country (Keen, 2005).

Politically, the British restructured the chieftaincy system by increasing the powers of the highest-level chiefs, the Paramount Chiefs. The British applied 'indirect rule,' a common strategy of their colonial administrations, in Sierra Leone, which meant that much of the day-

to-day administrative tasks were delegated to traditional local leaders. Part of the rationale behind the system was to reduce the possibility of a protectorate-wide opposition by ensuring political activity was contained within local sub-divisions (Keen, 2005). However, the system also contributed to sharpening the divisions between those with power – the chiefs – and those without it. It encouraged abuses by chiefs, such as forced labour and excessive cash levies, particularly against 'young' men, who are defined more by lack of power and status than by age as elsewhere in Africa. The abuses were exacerbated when the salaries for the chiefs – which had been provided by the government since 1937 – broke down as the state's revenue diminished. As a result, throughout the twentieth century, there were many acts of 'rebellion' against the chiefs (Keen, 2005).

The economic emphasis shifted in the 1930s, from agricultural products to minerals. Mineral exports, including diamonds, exceeded agricultural exports by 1935 and from the early 1950s on diamonds became the main source of export revenue. However, the shift did not yield profits to the majority of Sierra Leoneans but further widened the disparities between the 'haves' and 'have-nots.' In terms of diamonds, Sierra Leoneans even did not have the right to mine them legally (Keen, 2005; Hirsch, 2001). This was because a monopoly on diamond mining was granted to the Sierra Leone Selection Trust (SLST), part of the leading British company the De Beers cartel. However, as a result, illicit mining prospered among Sierra Leoneans. The fact that alluvial diamonds were not only easy to hide but required very little technology facilitated this. The number of illegal diamond miners rose sharply in the 1940s and 1950s, spurring major migrations to the diamond areas in the south and the east of the country (Keen, 2005). In 1956, diamond mining was legalised for Sierra Leoneans, but those who benefited from the changes were largely the wealthy and the well-connected politically, i.e. the chiefs, politicians, and Lebanese traders (Keen, 2005).

Thus, Sierra Leone developed unevenly during the colonial days partially due to the development and control strategy its colonial master envisioned. In particular, the accumulation of discontent and anger felt by 'young' men in rural areas and by illicit miners – more specifically, the young bands among them known as 'sansan boys' – are important in understanding the civil war dynamics (see Keen, 2005; Richards, 1996; Abdullah and Muana, 1998; Mokuwa et al., 2011). After independence, the disparities that had persisted since colonial days did not improve but rather came to be exacerbated.

Party politics started to be characterised by ethnic and regional divisions after independence. Before independence, an important distinction was between the Creoles – or Krios, the descendants of repatriated Africans from the Caribbean, North America and England – of Freetown and the indigenous people in the hinterland. However, post-independence politics came to revolve around regional/ethnic competitions between the All People's Congress (APC), backed by Temne speakers – or, more generally, Northerners – and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), supported largely by Mende speakers (Keen, 2005). The SLPP ruled until 1967 and produced the first and second prime ministers of Sierra Leone, Milton Margai (from 1958 to 1964) and Albert Margai (from 1964 to 1967). Since 1967, when Siaka Stevens of the APC won in an election, however, the APC came to rule the country until the 1992 coup.

Under the APC governments, particularly under those headed by Stevens, the political culture came to be increasingly based on patronage and corruption. Soon after Stevens made himself president (a position he held from 1971 to 1985), Sierra Leone in effect became a one-party state under the APC and he soon centralised the state under him. Moreover, in order to keep the state under his control, he extended patronage to 'insiders' and intimidated opponents, often with violence (Keen, 2005). He nationalised the main industries, starting with the diamond industry in 1971. This was to ensure the profits accrued

to himself and his 'insiders,' *not* to boost government revenues to improve the state institutions or public services (Keen, 2005). As such, Stevens constructed a patronage system through the informal economy – which Reno (1995) refers to as a 'Shadow State' – and distributed the 'revenues' from this economy to his clients. He also treated the army and the police well, providing them subsidised rice and accommodation besides regular salaries, so that they would not plan a coup against him (Keen, 2005).

In terms of the violent intimidations against opponents by Stevens and the APC, what is to be particularly relevant in understanding the civil war later is the involvement of the 'lumpen youth.' Since the early 1970s,1 the APC hired 'thugs' to terrorise and silence its opponents, particularly during the elections (Keen, 2005; Rashid, 2004). These thugs were largely from the 'lumpen youth,' a term used to describe young people, mostly male, who are unemployed but work in the underground economy in the city (see Abdullah, 1998; 2002; Rashid, 2004). The hiring of 'lumpen youth' for violent intimidations by APC is considered to have contributed to the creation of a violent youth culture and it is seen to be associated with present-day party politics (e.g. Christensen and Utas, 2008) and also with the civil war. In this period, violence became a form of labour to be rewarded, including in a situation of war (see Hoffman, 2011; Alie, 2006).

In the 1970s and 80s, the economy of Sierra Leone experienced a major decline. By the 1985–86 fiscal year, domestic revenue had fallen to just above 18% of what it had been in the 1977–78 fiscal year (Reno, 1995). One reason for this was the global oil-shocks in the 1970s. The prices of exports from Sierra Leone – still mainly based on primary commodity-exports – fell whereas the prices of imported products rose. This included oil-related products and other essential commodities such as rice. Another notable reason for the fiscal deficit was the increase in smuggling. The 'official' figures of production of natural resources, including diamonds, declined, but 95% of diamond production is considered to have been smuggled out by the late 1980s (Keen, 2005). Furthermore, the economic situation is considered to have been worsened by the structural adjustment encouraged by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in the 1980s. Largely prompted by the IMF, the value of the Sierra Leonean currency dropped from one leone being worth 50 British pence in 1978 to just over one penny in 1987 (Keen, 2005). The devaluation fuelled rapid inflation, which left salaries behind and eventually led to the many months of delay payment. The situation was further exacerbated when President Momoh, in power from 1985 to 1992, took austerity measures to attract IMF support, including drastic reductions in petrol and food subsidies.

The combination of the economic crisis and the corrupt patronage-based politics had various effects. Most evidently, it pushed the majority of people into poverty. Disparities existing since colonial days widened. It was no longer only the peripheral populations and regions that were neglected, but also the state's own officials, including eventually the security sector (Keen, 2005). The neglect by the state encouraged further corruption by civil servants, just for them to make ends meet. As a result, the state was losing the ability to suppress the corruption and discontent as well as to maintain the loyalty of the people. Nevertheless, prominent politicians and businessmen continued to benefit from the 'Shadow State' (Keen, 2005).

Education in pre-war Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone has an eminent and long history of education. Through that, education came to be seen as a key means for socioeconomic mobility of its people. However, on the whole, it

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1 Rashid (2004) claims that the APC had been hiring thugs since the 1960s.

was characterised by disparities in its provision and was fundamentally elitist in nature. Although the provision was expanded after independence, the uneven provision did not improve and, as happened to other state institutions, the system had become centralised and dysfunctional by the 1990s.

The history of education in Sierra Leone began as soon as the freed slaves began to arrive there (Sumner, 1963). As early as 1827, Fourah Bay College (FBC) was established in Freetown. Being the first university in West Africa, Freetown came to be known as the 'Athens of West Africa', with students and scholars coming from all over sub-Saharan Africa to study at FBC (Paracka, 2003). However, the eminent tradition of education was at the same time characterised by inequality in provision and, indeed, had been elitist in nature since the early days. On the one hand, the level of educational enrolment was high in Freetown, the colony; by 1900, 7,000 students were enrolled in primary school out of an estimated 14,000 children of primary school age (Sumner, 1963). On the other hand, less than 900 children were enrolled out of estimated population of 1,500,000 in the hinterland, the protectorate (Corby, 1990). Moreover, within the hinterland, too, there was a great discrepancy between regions. According to the 1931 Census, the percentage of children attending school was 0.97% in the north while it was 4.75 % in the south (Sumner, 1963). In part, these disparities relate to the overall pattern of development: the difference in the territorial category between Freetown and the hinterland and the disparity in development in relation to the rail network between the south and the north. However, the disparities in education are also associated with the fact that education was largely developed by the Church Missionary Society in Sierra Leone (as in other West African colonies) from the early colonial days (Sumner, 1963). Compared to the north, which had strong Muslim influences, in the south the missionary endeavours were more successful and took hold in the area of education (Corby, 1990). Following a British grammar school style, the schooling was a literary education; for instance, Greek, Latin, and Bible history were taught. It was also British centred, with teaching of the history and geography of England (Sumner, 1963). This kind of curriculum was not clearly relevant or useful to the lives of the majority of Sierra Leonean students who were in rural areas (Banya, 1991; 1993).

The British had also envisioned education as a tool to facilitate 'indirect rule,' a system which sought to befriend Africans, but in a subordinating role (see Corby, 1990; Shepler, 1998). This thinking was embodied in the founding of Bo Government Secondary School in 1906. It was founded as a boarding school to educate the sons of paramount chiefs in the provinces by the then Governor Probyn. He wanted to educate future chiefs so that they would 'effectively mesh themselves into the British administration's policies at the local (chiefdom) level' (Corby, 1990, p. 319).

In the course of educational history in Sierra Leone, it became apparent that educational advantage was essential in achieving higher social, political and economic status. The Creoles received education to the highest level in Sierra Leonean society. It was these Creoles and the secondary-schooled hinterland Africans who gained success in the form of government employment during the colonial period and also after independence by taking over the roles previously held by expatriate Europeans (Banya, 1993; Corby, 1990). Furthermore, alumni networks began to play a pivotal role in young people's future careers. For example, Bo Government Boys School has a strong association, the Old Bo Boys' Association, and graduates ask for favours from older graduates with successful careers (Corby, 1990). In the political arena as well, Bo graduates have played prominent roles at national level; for instance, 40% of the 42 SLPP members of parliament in 1962 were Bo graduates (Corby, 1990). In this way, 'success' came to be strongly defined by academic qualifications (Wright, 1997). As a result, the importance of education was not much to do with what was learned in the classroom, but with the available opportunities in the economy

and social structure that were only accessible to those with particular qualifications and connections (Shepler, 1998). In other words, education created a powerful identity in Sierra Leonean society and became a source of 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) – a resource that has symbolic value on the basis of honour, prestige, or recognition – in the economy of Sierra Leone (Shepler, 1998).

After independence, one thing that had changed was the expansion of access to schooling, particularly at primary level. 40% of primary-school-age children were enrolled in 1970 compared to 14% in 1957. In terms of secondary school, 25,000 pupils were enrolled in 1970, compared to 5,924 in 1957 (Government of Sierra Leone, 1970). The White Paper on Educational Policy in 1970 also committed to expand access to schooling further, and 98,016 pupils registered at the secondary level according to the 1985 census, although the enrolment rate at the primary level had dropped to 33 % (Kromah, 1985). It should be noted that the census conducted in 1985 may not have been reliable given that it was the height of Stevens' regime. The numbers may have been exaggerated to 'please' the donors so that they would continue to provide support to Sierra Leone.

Despite the expansion, the elitist and British-centred nature of the educational system and its unequal provision did not change much. The structure continued to follow the British model. It was 7-5-2-4 (seven years in primary, five years in secondary, two years in the sixth form (optional), and four years in tertiary), and the upgrade to the next level was determined by public examinations: the Selective Entrance Examination after primary education (Class 7), the General Certificate of Education (GCE) O level after secondary education (Form 5), and GCE A level after the sixth form (Government of Sierra Leone, 1970). In the system, about half of the education budget was allocated to the higher education in 1989 (Government of Sierra Leone, 1989, cited in Banya, 1993, p. 161). Most schools were found in urban centres and were almost non-existent in rural areas, despite the fact that approximately 85% of population lived in rural areas (Banya, 1993). There continued to be great discrepancies between regions as well. The primary enrolment for the Southern Region was more than double that of the Northern Region in 1989 and, for the secondary level, enrolment in the south was more than triple that in the north (Government of Sierra Leone, 1989, cited in Banya, 1993).

Under Siaka Stevens, the educational system as well as other state institutions became centralised. Although regional offices of education existed, all decisions were made in Freetown (Banya, 1993). Furthermore, the fiscal crisis of the 1980s directly affected the education sector. Expenditure on education reduced to only 8.5% of government expenditure in the 1988–89 fiscal year from 15.6% in the 1974–75 fiscal year (Abdullah, 1998). As with other civil servants, teachers' salaries were delayed for many months. As a result, many became 'ghost' teachers, on the payroll but not actually teaching (Keen, 2005). They were instead busy trying to make ends meet, for instance by engaging in farming (Banya, 1991). Dilapidated buildings, lack of essential school supplies, and closure of boarding schools were also commonly observed (Banya, 1991). The quality of education also declined; this was apparent in the fall in the performances in GCE examinations (Banya, 1991). From parents' perspectives, they could not even afford to send their children to school, where fees were still charged, due to the devaluation of the currency (Keen, 2005). Thus, by the beginning of 1990s, the educational system was highly dysfunctional.

The decline of the economy on the one hand and the expansion of enrolment on the other had two negative implications for young people. One is that there were many more dropouts, who were unable to continue schooling and who did not have much prospect for jobs in the stagnant economy. For the period 1961–62 to 1985–86, only 19 out of every 100 pupils who started primary level reached Class 7, according to figures provided by the Ministry of

Education (Banya, 1993). Indeed, the attrition rate of Sierra Leone was the second highest in the world after Haiti in the 1980s (World Bank, 1987, cited in Banya, 1993). Secondly, even many of those who completed secondary school or university did not have job prospects. There were 98,016 pupils registered at the secondary level (Kromah, 1985) in 1985 but there were only about 60,000 in paid employment at that time (Abdullah, 1998). As a result, a huge swathe of graduates could not get the public sector jobs they desired (Abdullah, 1998). Indeed, as political corruption increased and economic deterioration was exacerbated, only those who had a politically influential patron were able to secure prestigious jobs (Wright, 1997)**.**

In short, by the beginning of 1990s, the disparities had widened, corruption was rampant, and the majority of people were experiencing poverty. These problems were mirrored in the education sector. The provision of education continued to be unequal and elitist in nature. People could not afford to send their children to school anymore and even those who remained in the system could not gain the jobs they wanted after completing their education. As a result, the needs of young males – from urban to rural areas, including mining areas – were not met. They were stuck in the status of 'youth' with few opportunities or tools to promote socioeconomic mobility, i.e. education or employment (Keen, 2005).

The characteristics of the Sierra Leonean civil war (1991–2002)

The civil war was, crudely put, a war raged by a rebel group, the RUF, against the then one-party government under President Momoh of the APC. The origin of the RUF can be traced to a group of university students who envisioned a 'revolution' to create an egalitarian society. However, as the war progressed, it became increasingly clear that the war did not fit the conventional model of a (civil) war. In this section, rather than describing the complex timeline of the war, I will highlight the features of the war that distinguished it from the conventional model, but that have also been observed among other contemporary conflicts in low-income and weak states, such as Liberia, Uganda and Ivory Coast, to name but a few (see Keen, 2005 and Gberie, 2005 for detailed accounts of the war). The features I highlight are the indiscriminate atrocities against civilians, fluidity among the fighting factions, and the lack of a strong ideological basis but evident economic interests of the RUF. These, in turn, will aid understanding of the debates on the root causes of the war to be discussed in the following section.

It was civilians who bore the cost of the Sierra Leonean civil war (see, for example, Hoffman, 2004). The RUF who had set out to liberate the country and its people from the corrupt APC regime and to create an egalitarian society killed and terrorised the same civilians, looting their properties and forcing them to labour on farms and in diamond-mining areas (e.g. SLTRC, 2004b). Indeed, it was not only the RUF, but also other groups such as the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) and the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) that supposedly came to help end the war which also committed violence against civilians and looted their properties, albeit to a lesser extent (SLTRC, 2004b; Human Rights Watch, 1998). As a result, although estimates vary greatly among sources, probably close to 75,000 were killed, 20,000 were mutilated (Hoffman, 2004), two million were displaced, and tens of thousands of women and girls were raped or forced into sex slavery (Dougherty, 2004).

While civilians were being attacked, there were not actually many direct battles between the warring factions during the war. The distinction between the armed factions itself became blurred. This was especially so after the RUF changed to the guerrilla strategy in November 1993 (SLTRC, 2004b). Both the SLA soldiers (and ex-soldiers) and the RUF sometimes disguised themselves as members of the other side (e.g. Keen, 2005; SLTRC, 2004b). As a

result, a term, 'sobels,' or 'soldiers by day, rebels by night' came to be used to refer to them (e.g. Keen, 2005). Furthermore, the collusion between the supposedly archenemies of the RUF and SLA came to the fore in May 1997, when Johnny Paul Koroma, then an SLA officer, succeeded in a coup d'etat against the government – under democratically elected President Kabbah – and invited the RUF into the formation of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC).

The features above are fundamentally related to the ambiguous political goals of the RUF in contrast to their evident economic interests. Although the RUF initially set out with the goal of overthrowing the APC and creating an egalitarian society, it committed more atrocities against the civilians they were ostensibly defending than the SLA did. They further colluded with SLA soldiers and overturned a democratically elected president. In addition, they did not seem to be interested in ending the conflict. In the Lome Peace Accord in 1999, the RUF were given politically preferable conditions: full amnesty to Sankoh and all the combatants who committed war crimes; the position of Chairman in charge of managing natural resources, which is also equal to the position of Vice-Presidency; and power-sharing with the government. And yet all this time Sankoh was giving underground instructions to the RUF fighters not to disarm (SLTRC, 2004b). While the political goals of the RUF were not clear, however, what were apparent were their economic motivations (as well as those of other fighting factions). In a minor way, the looting of civilians' possessions already demonstrates this. More significantly, the fighting was concentrated in the southern and eastern areas, which were rich in natural resources and fertile in agricultural products (Keen, 2005). By 1994, the RUF occupied the major diamond-mining areas. However, the areas continued to be targeted by various fighting forces to use the profits to support their war efforts.

In many ways, the above-mentioned features of the civil war in Sierra Leone were common among recent conflicts in low-income and weak states (see Humphreys and Weinstein, 2006). The war in Liberia also featured atrocities committed against civilians and apparently economic incentives (Ellis, 1995). Indeed, the RUF seems to have adopted tactics from both the National Patriotic Front of Liberia in Liberia and the Mozambican National Resistance rebels in Mozambique (Abdullah and Muana, 1998; Richards, 1996). The Sierra Leonean war also has two other characteristics that were commonly observed among contemporary conflicts. One is that it was in many ways both regionalised and internationalised. For instance, the initiation of the conflict was greatly aided by Charles Taylor in Liberia and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and the majority of the original RUF fighters were Liberians, with some also from Burkina Faso (Keen, 2005; Gberie, 2004). In turn, some Sierra Leoneans who had fought in their own civil war went on to join other rebel movements in West Africa (see Hoffman, 2011). Furthermore, international diamond and arms companies were behind the continuation of the RUF's war efforts (SLTRC, 2004c). Another characteristic is that children and young people were greatly involved in the fighting forces. Of the total 137, 865 members of Sierra Leone's armed forces in the conflict, 48,216 were estimated to be children (McKay and Mazurana, 2004). In the RUF, the majority of command and control structures were considered to have been made up of individuals under 30, with great atrocities being committed by children themselves, although many of the children are considered to have been forcefully recruited (Rosen, 2005).

Root causes of the Sierra Leonean civil war

Below, I will review the various explanations for the Sierra Leonean civil war focusing on the issues within Sierra Leone. Of course, the civil war in Sierra Leone was not precisely an 'internal' conflict as was touched upon above. However, there were specific issues in the country. After the initial incursion, the war gained its own momentum quickly by recruiting Sierra Leoneans and they became the great majority by the end of 1992 (SLTRC, 2004b).

Keen (2005) states that '[i]f the war sometimes resembled a virus spreading from Liberia, it was the weakness of the Sierra Leonean "body" that allowed it to spread so quickly and widely' (p. 58). Therefore, in this section, I will review the existing knowledge of the root causes of the conflict in Sierra Leone (the weakness of the Sierra Leonean 'body') that allowed the civil war to spread so quickly and be so prolonged.

The Sierra Leonean war is arguably a key reference point for the 'new' wars (Weinstein and Humphreys, 2006; Peters and Richards, 1998). It clearly has the features of new wars, in that it was not a straightforward contest, unlike conventional war, between the rebel (i.e. RUF) and the government forces (i.e. SLA) and the distinction between them was rather ambiguous. In addition, the RUF had distinct economic interests but not the political ones that rebels are supposed to have. Furthermore, the war in Sierra Leone can be seen as the 'poster child' of the new wars because it is treated in the literature as one of the primary instances of 'new' wars and, as a result, a diverging set of explanations exists (Peters, 2011). This can be seen in contrasting explanations by Kaplan and Richards. On the one hand, Kaplan's (1994) work depicts the war in Sierra Leone as the prototype of the new wars that pervade the developing world, underpinned by an anarchy and chaos and cannot be understood with Western rationality. It is an end in itself, like criminal violence in which, far from being 'a continuation of politics by other means', young men find liberation in violence. On the other hand, Richards (1996), in the first book-length study of the Sierra Leonean civil war, goes to the other extreme in explaining the war. He depicts the RUF as a coherent political organisation aligned with a conventional model of 'revolutionary war.' More specifically, Richards argues that the RUF is a political organisation run by dissident educated elites, the purpose of which is to revolt against the collapsing and patrimonial state under President Momoh. He traces the origin of the RUF to the radical student groups of the 1970s and claims that the RUF's violence is 'an intellectual project' (p. 33); educational institutions were deliberately attacked because of the excluded intellectuals' grievances against them and apparently random and anarchic violence against civilians is a rational act when it is seen as a 'performance' in which techniques of terror cover up the lack of equipment and limitations of the RUF.

Richards (1996) further explains that what made the expansion of the RUF possible, as well as the extension of the struggle, was 'the crisis of youth' in Sierra Leone. Young people in rural and mining areas started to have at least partial educational opportunities with the expansion after independence. However, they came to be the most marginalised group in Sierra Leone as the patrimonial state ran out of resources in the 1980s to support education, and as development policies continued to be biased toward urban areas. 'Modernised' by the power of education, according to Richards, the young people were frustrated; they did not want to go back to farming but lacked opportunities to further their education or get employment (other than farming) that could help them move beyond the status of 'youth.' Therefore, the RUF put the provision of education and employment high on its agenda, a tactic which attracted these young people.

On the one hand, Richards' account clearly falls short in explaining the complexity of the war and the ways it diverges from the conventional model of warfare as described above (see Bangura, 1997; 2004). In particular, Richards' depiction of the RUF as a revolutionary political movement led by 'excluded intellectuals' drew a number of criticisms from Sierra Leonean academics. Abdullah (e.g. 1998), Rashid (2004; 1997), Bangura (1997) and Gberie (2005) agree that the origin of the RUF can be traced to a student radical movement, but argued that, fundamentally, 'Richards' belief in an excluded intellectual group in the RUF is unfounded' (Abdullah, 1998, p. 217). This is because the student radicals had abandoned the 'revolution' before the RUF came to be formed. Abdullah (1998) also rejects Richards' explanation for the violence against citizens as a rational act and explains that it was actually

conducted because the RUF (as well as other fighting factions) came to be involved with or rather base itself on the 'lumpen youth' who, as I have described above, had long been immersed in violence and crime, and who considered violence as a kind of labour (i.e. Hoffman, 2011).

On the other hand, Richards' analysis that the roots of the war largely lay within the Sierra Leonean state and in 'a crisis of youth' is considered to be accurate and expanded by other works (such as Keen, 2005; SLTRC, 2004b; Abdullah, 1998; 2002; Peters, 2011; Bangura, 1997; 2004; Rashid, 1997; 2004). The weakness of the Sierra Leonean state in relation to a violent conflict is pointed out by many (e.g. Keen, 2005; SLTRC, 2004a). As Keen (2005) put it, 'Whilst at one level the rebel incursion threatened to bring down the government, at another level government in Sierra Leone was already collapsing' (p. 34). SLTRC (2004a) similarly concludes that conditions in Sierra Leone by 1991 made a conflict 'inevitable.'

Richards' (1996) notion of a 'crisis' of youth resonates with a common contention that the majority of the combatants in all the fighting factions were marginalised young males. They are classified commonly into three categories: urban 'lumpens' (who used to be 'thugs' for politicians); the young band of illicit miners called 'sansan boys'; and rural 'youth' who were oppressed by chiefs and elders in the community (see Keen, 2005; SLTRC, 2004b; Abdullah, 1998; Bangura, 1997). Similarly, Humphreys and Weinstein (2004; 2006; 2008), based on a survey of 1,043 ex-combatants, find a 'striking consistency' in the demographic profiles of combatants across the factions. That is, they were 'young' males (average age being 28) who were poor and little educated, with partial schooling at primary or secondary level (or not at all), and students or farmers by occupation. The similarities in background are also argued to explain why the combatants on supposedly two different sides colluded. That is, they were increasingly drawn from the same but fluid group of marginalised youth, who switched sides at their convenience (see Keen, 2005).

What motivated these young people to join the fighting factions and what the RUF as an organisation wanted are other areas of contention, however. The discussions on this revolve around the role of 'greed' (or economic incentives) and 'grievances.' While Richards' (1996) analysis of the Sierra Leonean civil war can be seen to have followed a conventional explanation of war, seeing political (and educational) 'grievances' as the only cause of the conflict, Collier and Hoeffler (2004; 2000) dismiss this and offer 'greed' as the key cause. They cite the case of Sierra Leone as an ultimate illustration of a rebel movement motivated by economic incentives, particularly for diamonds; the RUF was involved in the diamond business and Foday Sankoh demanded to be the minister in charge of mining (Collier and Hoeffler, 2000).

Recent studies indicate, however, that it is not a question of 'either–or' but that in fact both economic incentives and grievances are pertinent in understanding the war. Keen (2005) not only recognises the roles of both but shows the relationships between the two. Keen considers that what explains the kind of atrocious violence committed against civilians – in addition to taking away their properties – is the accumulated grievances from pre-war Sierra Leonean society. Because they were angry and filled with hate, they did not balk at using violence to get what they wanted. Humphreys and Weinstein (2004; 2006) also found both political and material incentives behind the mobilisation of the combatants but they further clarify the kinds of the incentives. They state that, rather than control of the lucrative natural resources, what were relevant were the political and economic incentives directly relevant to the lives of the combatants, such as jobs, money, food, offers of protection, and education. Indeed, in terms of the conditions in the Lome Peace Accord, too, the majority of the fighters were only concerned with those that would affect them directly, such as the ceasefire, provision of jobs, and the amnesty for fighters (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004).

As the complex account of the war so far makes it clear, diamonds were only one element that fed into the war (e.g. Keen, 2005; SLTRC, 2004b; Hirsch, 2001). Unlike the popular perception, diamonds only came into the dynamics of the war after 1994, and there were other ways of making money. Furthermore, the benefits from the diamond trade were concealed from the majority of fighters and thus brought no benefit to them directly (Keen, 2005; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004).

Thus, various explanations were offered in explaining the Sierra Leonean civil war, ranging from, among others, Kaplan (1994) who saw it as chaos and anarchy in the developing world not understandable by Western rationality, Richards (1996) who attempted to explain it adhering to the conventional model, and to Collier (2000) who offered an alternative economic explanation, coining it the 'greed' model.

Education as part of the root causes of conflict

Although seen as a prototype of the 'new' wars by Collier or Kaplan, a unique aspect of the Sierra Leonean war is that the role of education is much debated as part of the explanations. Although the role of education in the war is contested in a few ways, it is agreed that young people who were highly educated (the radical students) and who were little educated (lumpen youth) joined together in the 'revolution.' The section further shows how education came to contribute to a situation where young people could be easily mobilised. It will explore the elitist and unequal nature of the educational system itself, the elitist and unequal nature of education as a form of symbolic capital, and the failure of education to meet the expectations of young people as a form of symbolic capital.

As revealed above, education is a factor that comes up in many of the explanations of the Sierra Leonean civil war (i.e. Richards, 1996; Abdullah, 1998; Bangura, 1997; 2004; Rashid, 1997; 2004; Gberie, 2005; Keen, 2005; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004; 2008). Yet exactly how education played a role in the war is a contested area. The contention is on two fronts. One is on the extent to which grievances about education were the reason for young people joining the rebel movement, and the other is on whether the radical student group which formed the RUF continued to be part of it or not. On both fronts, Richards most strongly argues for the role of education in the war. That is, as shown above, he argues that the RUF was led by dissident highly educated people who had been part of the radical student group and that, for both the excluded intellectuals and for the young people in rural areas who had partial education, the grievances about education were key in taking up arms against the state. Peters and Richards (1998) similarly conclude, presenting findings from interviews with young combatants, that 'loss of educational opportunity is seen as a major factor in the decision to fight' (p. 187). Keen (2005) is more moderate but he too highlights education as a powerful source of grievances for young people who joined the war. The reasons he raises are similar to Richards (1996), in that it was not only the decline of services per se since the 1980s but the decline of education which frustrated a group of young people who dropped out from the system. In contrast, several Sierra Leonean academics (Abdullah, 1998; Bangura, 1997; 2004; Rashid, 1997; 2004; Gberie, 2005) dismiss the role of education on both fronts: the highly educated dissidents were not part of the RUF as the radical student group had left the 'revolution' before the RUF came to be formed; and the grievances of young people were not with education per se but were more generally held against the state and the society that marginalised them.

Regardless of the different views on the two fronts, the link of education to the war is agreed in two points. One is that, whether the radical student group became part of it or not, the origins of the RUF can be traced to the radical student group at FBC (Richards, 1996;

Abdullah, 1998; Bangura, 1997; 2004; Rashid, 1997; 2004; Gberie, 2005). Secondly, it is agreed that the majority of young people who joined the fighting forces had little education, in that they were students at primary or secondary level, 'dropouts' from the school system, and some who have not been to school at all (Keen, 2005; Wright, 1997; Richards, 1996; Peters and Richards, 1998; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004). 'Dropouts' here refers to those who dropped out from schooling, especially at the secondary level, or those who completed schooling but failed to achieve qualifications. The two points of commonality in the link of education to the war are that, in short, the two groups of young people differentiated by their level of education came to be mobilised into 'revolution.'

Why did these two different groups of young people come to be involved in 'revolution', either with the RUF or in the movement before its formation? Rashid (2004; 1997) argues that it is again education that linked them. When the student radicals started the 'revolutionary' movement in the 1970s, they went into the city to sensitise the young people there, i.e. the 'lumpen youth, to their political ideology. Rashid (2004; 1997) argues that the lumpen population had changed significantly since the 1970s due to the expansion of schooling in the country after independence. The youth had schooling at primary or secondary level and were politically aware. Therefore, it is this new generation of 'lumpen' youth who mingled with student radicals and became the core group in the early RUF.

A more fundamental question, however, is whether education as a system came to fuel the root causes of the war or not and, if so, how it did. There are a few studies that discuss it, including my own work elsewhere (Wright, 1997; Skelt, 1997; Krech and Maclure, 2003; Paulson, 2006; Matsumoto, 2011). These works argue that the relationship built around what 'education' had come to represent in Sierra Leonean society facilitated state fragility. In other words, education contributed to a situation where young people could be easily mobilised when there was a trigger in the form of rebellion against the state. Wright (1997) states that, 'in quite unintended ways, education in Sierra Leone has been an accomplice in creating the climate of rebellion which culminated in civil war' (p. 20).

Krech and Maclure (2003) in particular emphasise an approach in which education is seen not as a discrete phenomenon but in the context of political, economic and ideological forces, for it was not education per se but rather the relationship between the educational system and the context that came to fuel the root causes of the conflict. Following Krech and Maclure's (2003) approach, I have argued in Matsumoto (2011) that education seems to have played into the political, economic and social marginalisation of children and young people in three ways. First is the nature of the educational system itself, which was elitist and unequally accessible. As I have described earlier, the educational system developed in Sierra Leone was British centred and 'bookish', being therefore of little relevance to rural children in Sierra Leone. Moreover, access to education was unequally distributed between Freetown and the hinterland, urban and rural, and the south and the north. The governance of education came to be overly-centralised in Freetown, too. This mirrored the disparities in development on the whole, between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' in Sierra Leone, rather than countering them. Furthermore, the elitist and irrelevant system, focusing on passing academic examinations, is considered to have produced 'clever conformists' (Wright, 1997, p. 22) to the 'British manners and taste' (Krech and Maclure, 2003, p. 147). The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SLTRC) also identified education, being elitist and unequal historically, as one of the key 'historical antecedents to conflict' (SLTRC, 2004b).

The second link of education to the underlying state weakness that ultimately enabled the outbreak of the war is the elitism and exclusion that arises from the representation of education as a form of symbolic capital. In the history of education in Sierra Leone, education came to be highly valued as a form of symbolic capital (see above). What is of relevance to

the root causes of the war is that the established credentialism was of an exclusive standard. Only when one was successful in graduating from college was one considered to be fully 'educated' (Interview, SLTU President, 25 October 2009).[2] Therefore, not only was the system itself elitist, but the value of 'being educated' became an exclusive form of symbolic capital only available to a few university graduates. As a result, the majority of the young people who were only partially schooled were 'modernised but frustrated', as described above by Richards; they could not further their education or find employment (other than farming) or achieve the social status they wanted but, at the same time, because they were not fully educated, they were only perceived as 'dropouts' in the society.

The third link of education to the root causes of the conflict is that the expectations placed on the power of education – as symbolic capital – were no longer being realised for the majority of young people by the 1990s. Young people had expected that, as earlier generations had seen, the government would provide a public-sector job upon their completion of tertiary education. However, due to the economic crisis and exacerbated patrimonial politics, they came to realise that what they considered to be a *promise* of the government would not be met (see above). Krech and Maclure (2003) argue that it was this 'failed *promise* of education' (p. 149, emphasis in original) that became the source of young people's disillusion and anger. The collaboration between radical student group members at FBC and the 'lumpen youth' can arguably be attributed to their realisation, and attendant frustration, that regardless of education levels, employment was no longer available to them without strong political connections (Matsumoto, 2011).

Concluding thoughts

The article looked at the Sierra Leonean conflict from its historical context, features and root causes. It is clear that young people were largely involved in the war. What is behind this is the marginalisation of young people in Sierra Leonean society, and education came to play a role in this in the course of its long and 'eminent' history there.

The exploration of the case has demonstrated that the 'new' civil wars that have been emerging increasingly in the low-income and weak states have some features that could not be explained by the conventional model of warfare. It has also demonstrated the potentially negative contribution of education in the fragile states. That is, schooling can be entangled in the political economy of a country that allows or promotes the emergence of violent conflict. Then, examining schooling as a social institution in the context of the political economy of such fragile states is essential in understanding the nature of the role of education there: to what extent it may be playing the role as a tool for peace-building and development as the international community expects, and to what extent it may be entangled in (re)producing a cycle of conflict.

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[2] The interview was conducted as part of the author's doctorate study. The details of the methodology can be found in Matsumoto (2012).

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