“This civil war was not caused by a political vision or for religious reasons or for ethnic reasons. This was done for greed, for profit motives. This was to control a commodity, and that commodity was diamonds.” (David Craine, Chief Prosecutor, Special Court, PBS interview, 10 January 2003, PBS.org).

“To put it very simply, there are many sides to the cause of this conflict is diamonds. Fundamentally the cause of this war was to control a commodity and that was diamonds.” (David Craine, Chief Prosecutor, Special Court, PBS Conference, Freetown, 18 March 2003).

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**Africans Do Not Live By Bread Alone: Against Greed, Not Greavene**

Ibrahim Abdullah

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**Phase One: Conventional Warfare, 1991-1993**

**Phase Two: Guerrilla Warfare, 1993-1997**

**Phase Three: Reign of Terror and Criminality, 1997-2000**

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The underlying assumption in all of Collie’s work can be summarized as simply one of economic analysis: the greed of the rebels, motivated by the desire to profit from chaos; such calculations are supposedly propelled by the degree to which such a criminal enterprise can become a viable economic project. How to raise revenue to support such a project might begin to explain why rebels without a cause have a better chance of succeeding in the third world than in the first world. Viability is therefore key to the understanding the dynamics of rebel movements. The rebel movement needs source of support; finance to be precise, for the project to stay alive. “It is this, rather than any objective grounds for grievance which determine whether a country will experience civil disturbance, predatory behavior, and other anti-social acts may not be the objective of the rebel organization, but it is the means of financing the conflict.” Rebellion becomes therefore economic policy by all means necessary!

Extreme dependence on primary commodity exports, low average income and broad-based popular agitation is one way of depriving rebels of funds and resources. By reducing the world market price of any primary commodity, the rebels are deprived of the funds which they need to make war. Devoid of historical context, explanations such as these remain captivating but unhelpful.

I want to suggest that the greed problem arises from the fact that we, partly because it limits our understanding of rebellion as a political project and partly because it fails to explain rebellion in non-resource areas. By reducing everything to greed, by labeling rebellion as a criminal enterprise, the greed problematic jettisons legitimate struggles that are rooted in the desire to right the wrongs of events in the past or for yester years. My argument is that ethnic struggles, youth agitation for inclusion, the marginalisation of women, and separatists demand for regional autonomy constitute an integral part of the broad struggle for citizenship in post-colonial Africa.

The challenge, in my view, is to understand how the citizenship question poses itself as an existential challenge to the modern state in the erstwhile colonial territories.

In what follows, I first present a case for the specificity of the Sierra Leone conflict and then turn to the functions of greed in its understanding. How it illuminates the Sierra Leone case. I offer an outline for an alternative interpretation centered on greed and the intra-continental discourse anchored on pan-Africanism. I conclude by invoking citizenship as a way of understanding contemporary conflicts in Africa.

**The Specificity of the Sierra Leone Conflict: A Conceptual Statement**

My first point is conceptual: How do we explain the differences between the wars of the 1990s - Rwanda, Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, Cote d’Ivoire - and the wars of liberation against settler minority regimes in Southern Africa? How do we explain the differences between the wars of liberation in Eritrea and Sudan and that of the sans culottes in the 1990s? Are there any similarities between what unfolded in Chad in the 1970s - the first casualty to rebel movements - and what unfolded in Sierra Leone and the Diaspora lent any covert or overt support to the movement in furtherance of its political/economic objectives.

After six years of war something unprecedented happened: 95% of the Sierra Leone military joined the rebellion.

The RUF was composed of young men in their 20s and 30s. Sam Bockarie the notorious field commander was twenty-eight when he became a combatant; Issa Sesay who succeeded him was a teen-ager; Charles Taylor in Liberia, Asuna Man in Guinea-Bissau and Alhasan Ouattara in Cote d’Ivoire. This is significant for it helps explain why the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was the way it was, why the movement was silent for the first four years of the war, and why it doggedly held on to its belief that power was only attainable through military means.

It is the first example of a marginalized minority, a group in the process of translating and appropriating the language of revolution from radical college students to contest political power.

Subaltern officers, young men in their 20s, seized power a year after war commenced and proclaimed a revolution.

Throughout the war no member of the rebel political class in Sierra Leone or the Diaspora lent any covert or overt support to the movement in furtherance of its political/economic objectives.

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The underlyi
These developments unfolded at a time when the rhetoric of liberation had ceased to have any meaning. Even so, the RUF still continued, in collaboration with the renegade Sierra Leone military, to push for political power. In this sense politics can be read as an extension of economics: political power will give them more security (legitimacy?) to continue their predatory regime.

Greed, predatory rebellion and its continued reproduction only became a marked feature of the Sierra Leone conflict in 1996/97. It cannot explain why war broke out in 1991 or why marginal youths were at the center of the drama and its continuation. To understand why war broke out in 1991 we have to go back and look at the grievances.

Bringing Back Grievance

How do we explain the preponderance of marginal and alienated youths as combatants/leaders in the nasty war that ravaged Sierra Leone for a decade? Why did young military officers in their 20s seize political power a year after the war started? What young military officers in their 20s seized political power a year after the war started? What did young military officers in their 20s seize political power a year after the war started? What military officers in their 20s seize political power a year after the war started? What military officers in their 20s seize political power a year after the war started? What military officers in their 20s seize political power a year after the war started?

I mean the often popular but initially propelled by political considerations, history, character and dynamics of armed conflicts. But they should have gone further to elaborate on the subjective factor à la Lenin and Che Guevara. By this I refer to the willingness and the “revolutionary” commitment of a select group of people to start the “revolution”. This is a critical factor in insurgency. It was college students who inaugurated the insurgency discourse and spearheaded the call to arms in Sierra Leone. They recruited marginal youths, including the future leader of the RUF, for military training in Tajura, Libya, from 1987 to 1989. The issue of resources was never discussed in student circles nor was the issue of finance or sustenance regarded as a key element in the proposed project. The main emphasis was on commitment and willingness to acquire military training to start a guerrilla war. What propelled college students to assume the role of vanguard à la Lenin has more to do with the extreme centralization of resources and the creation of an alternative network; the large-scale political corruption and mismanagement.

Paul Collier et al invoke Marx and Lenin, the tongue in cheek, to substantiate their point about the primacy of the economic in explaining armed conflicts. But they should have gone further to elaborate on the subjective factor à la Lenin and Che Guevara. By this I refer to the willingness and the “revolutionary” commitment of a select group of people to start the “revolution”. This is a critical factor in insurgency. It was college students who inaugurated the insurgency discourse and spearheaded the call to arms in Sierra Leone. They recruited marginal youths, including the future leader of the RUF, for military training in Tajura, Libya, from 1987 to 1989. The issue of resources was never discussed in student circles nor was the issue of finance or sustenance regarded as a key element in the proposed project. The main emphasis was on commitment and willingness to acquire military training to start a guerrilla war. What propelled college students to assume the role of vanguard à la Lenin has more to do with the extreme centralization of resources and the creation of an alternative network; the large-scale political corruption and mismanagement.

I would like to suggest that ethnicity and the struggle for inclusivity by marginalized social/cultural groups is the form in which the citizenship question poses itself in Africa. The wrangling over political rights and the talk about economic and political marginality in the Sudan, Cote d’Ivoire and the Great Lakes are really about citizenship. The Anyanya rebellion in the 1950s, the conflagration in the Congo in the 1960s, the Nigerian civil war, the Chadian musical chairs in the 1970s were all about citizenship: the right of groups to actively participate in the nation-state project without discrimination. We need to recall that the pogroms directed against the Igbo in Kano City in 1966 were the immediate catalyst for the declaration of the independent state of Biafra. The Igbo were simply told to leave Kano City, where they had lived all their lives, and to return to their “native soil”. Their sojourner in Kano in the Sabon Gari quarters was a painful reminder that they were indeed non-indigene and could be asked to leave at any time. Twenty-some odd years later, Tutsis who had fought with Museveni in the NRM were asked to leave Uganda, where most of them were born or which they knew as home, for a place called Rwanda that only existed in their imagination. It was a painful reminder of their alien “otherness”. Even though continuous residency had granted them some respite during the period of struggle, the new post-1986 parliament would turn down their request for Ugandan citizenship. It is to the struggle for inclusion, for citizenship broadly defined, that we must turn if we want to understand conflict in contemporary Africa and elsewhere.

Notes
1 A French expression, literally meaning those without pants, loosely referring to the appearance of poor people. It captures the tag, character and bizarre outfit of the armed movements and militiam all over the continent.
2 Paul Collier et al have made no attempt to examine the dynamics and composition of any rebel movement anywhere in the world.
3 This is probably true of the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda and possibly of the fighters in Western Sudan.
4 Paul Collier and his collaborators in the World Bank-sponsored research project are notorious for repeating the same argument in different publications with absolutely no new information. Neither Collier nor any of his associates have studied or tried to understand any rebel movement anywhere in the world. See, for instance, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”. World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper 2355 (2001), 32pp.
5 In Collier’s “Economic causes of civil conflict and their implications for policy”, we learn that “the rebel leader was offered and accepted the vice-presidency of the country….He had one further demand, which once conceded, produced (temporary) settlement. His demand was to be the Minister of Mining.” Sankoh was never offered the vice-presidency or the ministry of mines. He was made Chairman of the Mineral Resources Commission with the protocol status of Vice-President!
7 Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone, From Cpl. Foday S. Sankoh, Leader, RUF/SL, Abidjan, La Cote d’Ivoire to Brother Mohamed Talibi, Peoples Bureau of Libyan Arab Peoples Jamahiriyi, Accra, Ghana, 4 December, 1996.