

Curse or blessing: Natural riches and civil war in post-independence West Africa

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Résumé: Le continent africain a toujours été le lieu des conflits ethniques et régionaux. Cela est certainement vrai, mais l'autre façade est que les richesses naturelles étaient aussi un facteur très important derrière ces conflits. Partout en Afrique les conflits et guerres civils sont originaires du désir de contrôle des richesses naturelles et par les africains ainsi que par des lobbies internationaux. Dans ce contexte, cette contribution a pour objectif de revoir le phénomène de la guerre civile en relation avec les richesses naturelles en Afrique de l'après Indépendance. Prenant le Nigéria et la Sierra Leone comme cas d'études, nous nous posons deux questions principales : est-il inévitable que les guerres civiles prennent place là où les richesses se situent ? Dans quel contexte peut-on comprendre les guerres civiles en relation avec les richesses naturelles ?

Abstract: It has been commonly stated that Africa's post-independence conflicts stem from ethnic and regional antagonisms. This is true to a certain extent but another dimension equally played a role in creating and extending life to serious conflicts leading eventually to civil wars: the natural riches such as diamonds and oil. In different places in Africa, conflict and civil wars stemmed from the desire to control riches as well by nationals as by foreigners. Taking as examples Nigeria and Sierra Leone the aim of the proposed discussion is to discern the grounds that made of riches a curse leading to civil wars rather than a blessing that could lead to rapid development in Africa. In both countries, civil war tattered the young nations along ethnic and regional lines, but the shadow of conflict over riches with local as well as external dimensions is strongly present in both cases. In Nigeria, civil war took place between the Igbo in the South East and the Muslims of the North, but at the heart of the matter situated the question of the rich oil fields in the Igbo regions. In Sierra Leone, civil war took place ostensibly for political reasons but diamonds were the real secret behind.

The history of postcolonial Africa is often synonymous to violence and civil war. Already by 2000, nearly 20 African countries i.e. about 40 percent of Africa south of the Sahara have gone at least through one period of civil war (Elbadawi and Sambanis, 2000: 1). Now recent

and ongoing events of violence in Africa - Sudan, Congo, Libya, Mali, ...- attest to the need to further understand the net of causes behind the issue of riches and violence. As TatahMentan states, "Africa's tragedy is not that its nations are poor. The tragedy is that it lacks ruling classes that are committed to overcoming the state of poverty" (TatahMentan, 2001: 26). In old as well as new cases of violence and civil war, large deposits of natural resources were not a blessing that led to social and economic development, but rather were associated to the curse of civil war. In different places in Africa, conflict and civil war stemmed from the desire to control riches by nationals as well as foreigners. Riches also fuelled and prolonged conflict as they provided financial backing to conflicting sides.

Nigeria and Sierra Leone are good examples to study because both looked promising cases as future successful independent nations. Nigeria at the time of independence was expected to be Africa's superpower because of the huge reservoir of human workforce, including large numbers of western educated members, and also because of its mineral riches, especially oil. Sierra Leone is a tiny country, but with a long history of attachment to Anglo-Saxon civilization and western education, and with important deposits of diamonds. Therefore, both countries were expected to erect stronger governments at the western model, and develop flourishing economies. However, both countries went through tough times of violence and bloodshed, and failed to reach economic progress in spite of the available natural riches.

Taking as examples Nigeria and Sierra Leone, the aim of the proposed discussion is to discern the grounds that made natural riches a curse leading to civil wars rather than a blessing that could lead to rapid development in Africa. The main questions that this paper seeks to answer: Is civil war a fatality whenever riches are found in Africa's ex-colonies? How does civil war occur in connection to riches?

Both countries were tattered along ethnic and regional lines, but with a shadow of conflict over riches by local as well as external elements. In Nigeria, civil war took place when the Igbos declared secession apparently to dominate the oil fields situated in their region. Nigeria was the first to experience civil war from 1967 to 1970. The

war cost was a great deal in terms of lives, money, and the country's image in the world: 100,000 military casualties and between 500,000 and two million civilians' deaths from starvation. After the hostilities, the Military grabbed on power up to 1999, with a great deal of corruption and mismanagement of oil revenues. Igbos and Easterners in general still have a feeling of injustice, with resentment against the Government that failed to properly use the oil revenues to develop their areas.

Sierra Leone in its turn, faced a terrific civil war from 1991 to 2002 between opposition *Temne* rebels, against a Creole-*Limba*, then a *Mende*, dominated Government. But diamonds were at the heart of conflict. 50,000 people out of 4 million were killed. Near two-thirds of the all the population was displaced (Gberie, 2005: 6). Both parties – the rebel RUF and the Sierra Leone government forces, conscripted vast numbers of Sierra Leone children into the conflict. It is estimated that 10,000 children were involved in the fighting forces. Besides rape, the single horrific feature of the war is hands amputation of thousands of individuals.

On the one hand, classical literature explains civil war in Africa being the result of ethnic diversity and the consequent ethnic politics that failed to redress grievances. On the other hand, some other literature assert that opportunities of economic profit (*greed*) are the principle motivation after civil wars. Collier (2000, pp.91 & 96) claims that 'conflicts are far more likely to be caused by economic opportunities than by grievance,' and 'grievance-based explanations of civil war are so seriously wrong', which is backed by the three major findings of his research: the exports of primary commodities, the number of young men and low education levels are positively correlated with the frequency of civil war outbreak. Collier (2000: 91) argues that grievance is not directly involved in the outbreak of civil wars. He explains that people may be reluctant to join the rebellion when expected benefits may take years to be realized. Differently from the two explanations, some argue that ethno-linguistic division does not cause conflict. He rather accuses high poverty and failed political institutions:

using recently developed models of the overall prevalence of civil wars in 161 countries between 1960-1999, we draw lessons with special reference to Africa, showing that the relatively higher prevalence of war in Africa is not due to the ethno-linguistic fragmentation of its countries, but rather to high levels of poverty, failed political institutions, and economic dependence on natural resources”(Elbadaoui and Sambanis 2000: 2).

The main point in this article is that prolonged civil wars are always associated to the availability and exploitation of valuable natural resources, but the availability of such resources does not automatically lead to civil war. Hence, ethnic/religious diversities, or natural riches are not a curse in themselves, and do not cause civil war. It is argued here that riches and ethnic diversities are only elements manipulated in a context that creates civil war. Therefore, the inherited curse of the nation-state, dragging the Army into the political arena, political incompetence and foreign manipulation transform ethnic/regional diversity, blended with the question of riches, into a potential power behind civil war.

1-Riches Discovered by the Colonizer:

The first curse is that Africa's riches (gold, diamonds, oil, copper, uranium, gems, etc.) were discovered during colonial times by Europeans, not Africans. Expatriate companies that gained monopolies from colonial governments ensured exploitation. Technically speaking, the Africans after independence were unable to exploit their own riches because of the lack of technical and material experience. Hence, ex-colonial interests would continue to play a role in the management of those resources, when daring acts of nationalization were made.

In Sierra Leone, diamonds had been discovered in the 1930's, and immediately exploitation was reserved to the Selection Trust Company that diverted them into foreign markets. By about the time of independence, alluvial digging was opened to Sierra Leoneans, but the Selection Trust retained important rights, while De Beers Company totally controlled purchase and sales in Western markets. Equally, Oil in Nigeria was discovered by Shell Oil Company in 1956,

and The British colonial government gave it monopoly of exploitation. Shell built the first oil refinery in Nigeria at Alesa Eleme near Port Harcourt in late 1965. Operations began with a capacity of 38,000 barrels per day (Fearon, 2005: 7) and the company from then is active in the country.

2- The Curse of the Inherited Political Systems and Ethnic/ Regional Politics:

Colonial rule had always maintained and reinforced antagonism for its own stability, while colonial education created unbridgeable gaps. The new independent nations inherited political systems that largely fostered ethnic diversities into conflict over natural resources. In particular, partisan politics, that is not African tradition, divided rather than united the new nations, as political parties were organized not around ideologies but around ethnic and regional sentiments. Political parties were real enemies within the nation state arena, and often turned to violence or secession.

To begin with, African colonies inherited political systems unfit to the realities inside the colonies. It favoured partisan politics, which divided rather than united the new nations, since political parties were organized not around ideologies but around ethnic and regional sentiments. Colonial rule had already maintained and reinforced antagonism within the colonies for its own stability. After, independence, ethnic rivalries got the upper word over ideology or programs of development. Hence, political parties were real enemies within the nation state arena. Elections instead of being an expression of freedom and democracy turned to fierce battles, in which ethnic, religious or regional loyalties were employed. Ethnic or regional parties leant more towards violence or secession in order to take part in grabbing on riches.

In Nigeria, the British adopted a colonial policy that made the country ethnically so diverse that its own nationalists doubted the success of an independent Nigeria (Siollun, 2009: 12). The British had maintained and reinforced the division between the North, predominantly Muslim, the West, Predominantly Yoruba, and the South-East, dominated by the Igbos. Southerners in general continued

to see Muslims in the North as backward and uneducated (Siollun 2009: 14). So did the Muslims who disliked the interference of Christians in their own traditions and customs. In the South, Yorubas and Igbos, though Christians, suffered from division along ethnic lines.

Even before independence, nationalist parties reflected these ethnic/regional divisions. The Northern People's Party was overtly regional. The other two were equally regional though their names were not as explicit (The Action Group-Yorubas, and the National Congress of Nigeria and the Citizens-Igbos). All three regions had at one time expressed secession tendencies. The Northerners threatened to secede blocked the southerners' action to move to independence immediately because the south had more educated people who would overrun the government at the expense of the northerners. (Only 50 out of 1000 students in Ibadan were northerners, schools were 20 in the south for every one school in the north). Then a proposal of a federal state was proposed with a share of power between the three regions. However, the Yoruba, seeing Lagos as their own land, insisted on the right of secession to be constitutional, which the North and the East refused. After the discovery of oil in 1956, secessionist tendencies became characteristic of the East.

The Igbos (15% of the population) took advantage of colonial education and commerce to get a privileged position. They quickly moved to administrative posts left by the British, and established strong business network outside their areas, especially in the North. The Igbos regarded themselves as good Christians socially superior than the hordes of the North. It was a deeply rooted culture, expressed even by symbols of Nigerian nationalism at the size of Nnamdi Azikiwe who had stated in 1949: "the God of Africa had specially created the Igbo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of ages" (Quote in Siollun, 2009: 17). The Northerners who lagged far behind in terms of education resented the Igbos who grabbed on professions, seeing them as "the Jews of Africa" (Siollun, 2009: 16).¹

¹Ahmadou Bello, the powerful northern leader prevented educated Igbos to fill jobs in the north and preferred expatriates.

The 1965 elections clearly reflected ethnic/regional partisan politics. This was preceded by a quarrel over the voters in each region. A 1963 population census in which the south and north exchanged accusations of maximizing the population figures in their region, led to a fatal rift in the coalition between NPC and NCNC. The elections went to crisis on overtly ethnic and regional bases, accompanied by large-scale acts of corruption. Already in 1964, an American report anticipated violence and secession: “the Northern Premier is at odds with the Eastern Premier in whose region large oil deposits have been discovered. In the heat of the election campaign, there have been threat of session by the East; threats “that would make Congo look like child’s play” from the North. (Siollun, 2009: 18)

A similar situation in Sierra Leone existed. The country inherited at independence a shaky political system that ruled over three major antagonistic groups: the *Mendes* of the South, the *Temnes* of the North and the Creoles of the Coastal areas. Colonial governments in Sierra Leone always reinforced difference. Well-educated Creoles who lived in coastal Freetown were British subjects until 1956. Seeing themselves more advanced and civilized, they wanted a separate state, and refused to live with the interior, especially with *Mende* people, accusing them as the “Murderers of our ancestors”. As the British nearly agreed on independence focusing mainly on the Mende elements, Northerners explicitly manifested opposition based on regional sentiments especially that the North lagged behind in terms of economic and social development. With diamonds situated in the south, Northerners’ protest seemed well grounded. The Creoles of Sierra Leone were a minority, but had an advantage and could dominate the administration.

3- Dragging the Army into Ethnic/Regional Politics:

The unsuitable system left the departing colonizer was worsened by the dragging of the army into the arena of politics. Armies in areas of conflict had carefully developed under the supervision of the colonizer, and lacked strong ideology or field experience. Politicians after independence interfered in the army’s affairs, especially in determining policy towards army officers. Then, instead of contributing to national unity, it reflected the politicians’ ethnic and regional divisions and contributed in the riches-related violence.

The army in Nigeria appeared a strong institution. However, its was affected by ethnic/political rivalries as it was forcibly drawn to politics. At first, the senior army officers were Yuroba or Kanuri Muslims, while the Igbos made 60% of the army's officer corps (Siollun 2009: 27). The Igbos were at first not well placed as they occupied the middle-grade rank positions. However, within years, they succeeded to advance to replace the retiring old officers (Siollun, 2009: 22).

Following the 1965 elections, there was bitter conflict between the President of Nigeria Azikiwe, an Igbo, and Prime Minister Belewa, a Northerner, over whom the Army should listen to. In 1966, a series of coups, that overtly expressed ethnic conflict, led to a civil war and a long era of military rule. The army, under Igbo commandment, and later under Northern Commandment, ruled from 1966 to 1999, and was widely accused of corruption and mismanagement of oil revenues. The military Junta after the end of the civil war would not give up power, as they had promised because oil revenues were booming and corruption primed.

Sierra Leone witnessed a series of military coups within the span of two years, with a significant ethnic/regional taste. Following the 1967 election crisis Southerners (mostly Mendes) and Northerners (Mostly *Temnes*) fought over to win the army's command. After the victory of the Northerners' party, the APC, Brigadier Lansana, a Mende, seized the State House and declared Martial Law. He accused the Governor-General of violating the constitution and placed him and Siaka Stevens, leader of the APC under house arrest. However, Stevens and some of his followers were allowed to leave the country into exile in neighbouring Guinea.

Just three days later, a group of officers led by Lieutenant-Colonel Juxon-Smith, a Temne northerner, turned against their military commander in a second coup. Both Albert Margai, the leaving prime minister and the Army leader were arrested. Juxon-Smith was appointed as chairman of the National Reformation Council, and a commission of inquiry into the previous elections was announced. General Bangura, a powerful Temne military officer staged another coup in 1968 military,

and brought Stevens back from exile to premiership. Then, a civil war only was avoided by good luck.

The new northern commandment conducted a purge of the army from a number of *Mende* officers, who were seen as potentially supporting the Mende-dominated SLPP. They were replaced by *Temnes* or *Limbas*, the latter being Stevens's own ethnic group. In two years, the Mendes' share in the army fell from 80% to 30%.⁵⁸ Stevens established a Republic and declared himself president, and offered a number of benefits to the army officers, in particular to senior commanders, to buy off their loyalties (Keen, 2003: 73). But he did not finance the army for improving its fighting capacity. Stevens eliminated all potential military leaders who could pose him a threat. When in 1971 two assassination attempts on him took place on one day in March that year, he was quick to get rid of the one who brought him from exile.² On 29 March 1970, Stevens had Bangura hanged after he was mercilessly beaten and had concentrated acid poured on him. Stevens then weakened the army and rivalled it with a secret police force. After that he established a one party state and himself acting as a supreme military officer. Later during the Civil war itself, two other coups took place: one by Valentine Strasser in 1992, and another by his close friend Julius MaadaWonie Bio in 1996.

4- Weak Economies and CorruptionInstigating Conflict:

Colonies inherited from colonialism weak economies, that made enrichment possible only from securing positions in the Government rather than from economic activity. With the nation-state acting as an arena for ethnic and regional conflict, with the army drawn to ethnic/regional politics, and with riches at stake, politics became widely corrupt and conflict was inevitable. Actually, the military often justified its intervention in politics on the basis of politicians' corruption and mismanagement of resources, but the army itself became a corrupt machinery, or used by corrupt leaders.

²He was accused of standing behind a plot to overthrow Stevens.

To the Igbo Majors leading the coup in Nigeria in 1965, politicians were running Nigeria aground with their corrupt ways. They accused Ministers of living flamboyant lifestyles and looting public funds at the expense of ordinary citizens. For this reason, the Prime Minister and the minister of Finance were immediately shot. After independence, the East leaders increasingly accused politicians in Lagos of corruption and mismanagement of oil revenues. Igbos saw the coming oil boom as the perfect answer to the East's relative backwardness. The constitution stated that mineral revenues should be run mostly by the Federal government.

In Sierra Leone, Stevens' presidential/one party system (1971-1984) overtly diverted the diamond resources for the benefit of the strongest men of the regime. Stevens also behaved as 'the ultimate leader of the Sierra Leone patrimonial system' (Richards, 1996, p. 34). Western Diplomat observed: "He [Stevens] often confuses the national bank account with his own." The ownership of diamond mines and mining licenses had been mostly given to the ruling families and loyal supporters of the ruling men. Analysts speak about the shadow state of "illicit mining" i.e. 'the construction by rulers of a parallel political authority to manage the diamond sector in the wake of the near total decay of formal state institutions' (Young Jang, 2012). Thus, this economic inequality led to growing frustration among the population who were excluded from the benefits, including Mendes and Temnes. As a consequence, the young population both in cities and rural areas became even more marginalised from their society, without access to proper education and employment. This fuelled political and economic grievances against the government and ruling classes.

Saidu Momoh declared a state of economic emergency early in his rule (1984-1992), granting himself greater control over Sierra Leone's economy. He is viewed as far too weak and inattentive to the affairs of state, which allowed his notoriously corrupt advisors to manipulate matters behind the scenes. Sierra Leone's economy gradually disintegrated under Momoh's rule, and the country's currency decreased in value. Momoh's regime made the already weak state system completely collapse.

In such a chaotic situation, dissident culture was very favourable to the recruiting of rebels. The main victims of the patrimonial system collapse were, in fact, young people who were not able to be educated and employed in this deteriorating situation.³ This led to the creation of underground lumpen culture by ‘largely 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 underground economy’. The lumpen proletariat expanded as more numbers of secondary school dropouts and university graduates failed to find jobs and became marginalised from the privileged class (Young Jang, 2012).

It was this situation that the Revolutionary United Front exploited, so presenting itself as defender of the young and poor against the corruption of the regime. The resentment of young people against the whole society and what they really wanted was expressed later by one of the rebels:

“They [the RUF] told us that they are fighting to overthrow the APC government because they exploited the people and were taking all the money to Europe to build mighty houses or buy luxurious cars and forgetting about the youth. We, the young people, do suffer a lot in this country. Greed and selfishness was another factor which made the rebel war come to Sierra Leone. (Petersin Young Jang, 2012).

The Rebel leaders exploited every single mistake to strengthen their cause. When President Momoh delivered a speech in the eastern district of Kailahun saying that education was not a right but a privilege, the RUF punctually used his speech as ‘one of its justification to go to war.

With their furious attacks on the corruption of the government, the RUF veiled a possible lust to grab on those resources. It is stated that the huge diamond reserve in Sierra Leone was the initial driver of the rebellion. This explains why their first offensive was made in the Kanu region, rich of diamonds. It is quite clear that diamonds offered

³ Students registered in secondary schools increased from 16,414 in 1969 to 96,709 in 1990. However, only about 60,000 were in paid employment by 1985.’ (Peters 2011, p. 46).

the RUF an invaluable funding source to sustain its warfare. With the growing interests of both parties – the RUF and government soldiers – in illegal diamond-mining, battles often occurred over diamond-abundant areas (Keen, 2003: 73). The RUF is estimated to have made an approximate profit of 200 million dollars a year between 1991 and 1999 through the illicit diamond trade. The RUF's war aims was to secure diamond mines for gaining a huge commercial profit beyond the necessity of equipping themselves with weapons.

5- Riches and Ethnic Conflict within the Frame:

Ethnic diversity is not necessarily a curse; it is so only when manipulated. Diversity also did not prevent antagonistic ethnic groups from alliance one against another. Often Africans in power or in opposition make use of ethnic loyalties and alliances to grab on power and the privileges associated to it. When Opposition leaders fail to reach power through election means, because of inability or because of authoritarian policy, they turn to manipulate the masses by inciting them towards violence as the only means of change. This is often motivated by lust for power, wealth or personal ambition. In both countries, ethnic groups made alliances and changed positions according to context.

Civil war in Nigeria is a manipulation of ethnic difference story. Up to the mid-1960s, Igbos had been in alliance with the North against Yurobas, who had much in common with them. But when they clearly sought to dominate the whole of Nigeria and its resources, particularly oil, the North violently reacted. When they failed, they decided that an independent state would be able to use its own oil for the sole benefit of their region. Oil provided a strong motivation secession (Fearon, 2005: 7).

The Igbo leadership secretly plotted for a coup in 1965 that was largely interpreted as an Igbo attempt to dominate the state. On 15 January 1966 a coup led by Igbo Major Chukwuma "Kaduna" Nzeogwu and 3 other Igbo senior officers led to the execution of many northern and Yoruba politicians including Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa and the *Sarduana* of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, but no

Eastern Igbos were killed.⁴ Seen as a theatrical act, the acting president, NwaforOrizu, an Igbo, invited the army leader, Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, also an Igbo, to rule the country which was of course accepted two days after the coup led by four Igbo officers. Aguiyi-Ironsi suspended the constitution and abolished the federal structure and introduced a **unitary system of government** in Nigeria.⁵ Now that Igbos ruled the country, the decree was meant to win over the non-Igbo eastern minorities who sat on the oil reserves that the Biafran state expected to exploit (Fearon, 2005: 6).

The army was purged from many Northern as well Western top officers. This triggered the accusation that the coup was not political but rather ethnic and that the Igbos of the east planned for **ethnic domination** over the country. It was very good news for Igbos when, the Northern soldiers utterly disobeyed orders from Igbo officers and wanted secession (Fearon, 2005: 6). Ojokwu on phone with one of the majors of the coup when told the North wanted secession clearly made it: "if that is what they want I agree. Let them go".

This explicit move on the part of the Igbos to dominate the country and its riches led northerners to enact their "revenge coup" on 29 July 1966, **led by Gowon, and which** resulted in the assassination of Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi. This was followed by a massacre against the well-established Igbo immigrants who had been making fun of northerners on the killing of their leaders after the first coup. Gowon deliberately refused to rescue the slaughtered Igbos in the North. Thousands of Igbos returned home and ethnic nationalism intensified and made secession very favourable.

It is clear that secession was not necessary if the Igbos were allowed supremacy over Nigeria; they had determinately refused the

⁴ A Nigerian commentator observed "Kaduna Nzeogwu's Igbo squad killed the premier of the Northern and Western regions but of course left the Igbo Eastern premiere alive. He killed the Finance minister, who was Nigeria's #3 man, but left the number #2 man"

⁵ Decree Number 34 of 1966 created a unitary system of government, thereby ending the federal arrangement". James D. Fearon David D. Laitin. Stanford University. P. 6.

Western Region's right of secession before 1956. Lt. Col. Odumegwu-Ojukwu had been clever enough to understand that Igbo domination of central government was only plan A, and that secession is plan B. He had managed to get the General Aguiyi-Ironsi appoint him Military Governor of the Eastern Region, in full control over Eastern armoured forces, and thus the ability to control an independent army. With the oil resources in the East, Ojukwu was enough seduced to rebel (Fearon, 2005: 7). Now the Igbo leaders decided to keep oil revenues for themselves and declared independence.⁶

After failed efforts to negotiate peace, on **30 May 1967** Lt. Col. **Ojukwu** unilaterally declared independence from Nigeria, and named the new country Biafra. General Ojukwu declared independence in spite of the expected great sacrifices. In the words of a Nigerian politician "adamant and obstinate... If he could not achieve his long cherished ambition of ruling an independent Nigeria, he could break it up and rule an independent and sovereign 'Biafra.' Nothing could stop him." Surprisingly, the Western region's leader "Awolowo", in his turn, had promised Ojukwu to follow in secession after the East's move, but radically changed position and sided with the North.

The reaction of the Northern officers, who were in command of the country, was violent because a Nigeria without oil would be a jump in the unknown. The Federalists did not fight for unity only because of principle; they would not have fought so fiercely if the Eastern province had no oil reserves; the North itself wanted secession earlier when oil was not yet discovered. Northerner General Gowon became effective ruler of Nigeria and proclaimed a division that would carve the eastern region in three states - South Eastern, Rivers, and East Central. He aimed to slip oil out of Igbo control; Igbo who were concentrated mostly in the East Central while oil in the other two states.

In Sierra Leone, although some scholars believe that Sierra Leone civil war was not rooted in ethnic rivalry (Young Jang, 2012),

⁶ General Kaduna Nzeogwu, who had attempted a coup against Aguiyi-Ironsi, now supported Ojukwu, who had supported the latter.

ethnic rivalry actually did play a role in that. After independence, the Creoles and the Northern politicians agreed to oppose the *Mende* dominated government. However, this alliance between the Creoles and the North was not concluded with the largest group, the *Temnes*, but instead with the *Limba* minority (8.5 percent of the population). The *Limba* rapidly progressed socially and economically thanks to their frequent contacts with the Creoles of Freetown. Like Igbos, they appeared more energetic in education and commerce. After a series of coups and the accession of *Limba* Siaka Stevens to power, he turned against *Temnes* and backed himself with the powerful Creole group throughout his presidency up to 1984. Now both *Mendes* and *Temnes* were antagonized into opposition, though Stevens could absorb some *Temne* anger by nominating a *Temne* vice-president. The *Temnes* had then developed more hatred against the dominance of the Creoles and the *Limbas*, seeing them as betrayers. Stevens was then succeeded by another *Limba*.

Contrary to Nigeria, secession in Sierra Leone was not the point. Diamonds situated in a region outside the homelands of the main conflicting ethnic groups: the region of Kano homeland to a small minority that fell a prey in between the Rebels and Government forces. Fighting was most intense in the southeast and northeast because it was the area of diamonds, and also because of being adjacent to Liberia, the rebels' main back bases.⁷

The founders of the rebel RUF (Foday Sankoh⁸, Abu Kanu and Rashid Mansaray) were Northern *Temnes* who stood against the dominance of both Creoles and *Limbas*. Most reports indicated that troops were also mainly *Temnes*. After Strasser's coup in 1992, the rebels claimed to be fighting against *Mende* dominance. Strasser was a Creole but during his time, the *Mendes* dominated the Government, as he favoured them over other ethnic groups in both his government and the military. The *Mende* therefore founded the KAMAJOR militias to

⁷ Throughout the war, the worst affected districts have been Moyamba, Bo, Kenema, Kailahun, Tonkolili, Kono and Pujehun.

⁸ Foday Sankoh joined the army in 1956, and then was jailed from 1971 to 1978 after having been convicted of failing to report the plot of John Bangura to overthrow the government. (Gberie 2005).

fight against the RUF. Strasser himself was ousted by his *Mende* friend Julius MaadaWonie Bio. Early in 1996, Ahmed TidjanKabbah, a *Mende*, was elected leader of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and was then elected President of Sierra Leone in the 1996 election with 59% of the vote.

The KAMAJOR militias, supported by President Kabbah, used similar horror tactics used by the Rebels to recapture the diamond fields. The term "Blood diamonds" is related to the rebels as well as to the KAMAJOR. The RUF then complained that the predominantly-*Mende* Sierra Leone People's Party had been marginalizing non-*Mende* and using ethnic criterion in appointing ministers. In 1997, a northerner led a coup, and collaborated with the RUF who opened Freetown for widespread terror and looting.

6- ExpatriatesInterests:

Civil war in Africa in connection to riches has never been a local matter only; it was an international question as well. After independence, the expatriate companies continued to dominate exploitation and sales in international markets. The markets that deal in Africa's riches are dominated by mighty international companies, capable of political, diplomatic and military manoeuvring inside the African countries in order to protect their huge interests. Expatriate interests often caused and created conflict through a manipulation of grievance and local diversities, with the help of local agents, who consciously or unconsciously trust them.

Shell Company in Nigeria was hesitant to whom to offer support. But after some time, it realized that the federal government was likely to win the war and hence actively backed it against secessionists. France, anxious for energy security after the loss of the Algeria Sahara, had already secretly encouraged the Igbo leadership to declare independence in return for oil exploitation benefits. They supplied weapons and defended the Biafra case internationally. But France was hesitant to recognize the intended state officially.

In the Sierra Leone case, the powerful De Beers Company totally dominated trade in Africa's diamonds. Civil war helped the

smuggling of illicit diamonds that were purchased in Liberia for the account of the De Beers network, in spite of a world campaign under the label “Blood Diamond”. The rebel RUF founders also had received military training in Libya in 1987-88.⁹ Militarily, the RUF was assisted by Charles Taylor, while being president of Liberia. Although the latter never set foot on Sierra Leonean soil during the 1991-2002 civil war, it is widely believed that he was one of the main orchestrators of the war, providing the rebels with essential aid, in return for diamonds sold to De Beers collector agents. These illicit diamonds were falsely identified as Liberian and hence legitimately exported abroad (Young Jang, 2012).

Conclusion:

If Africa went through conflict and instability, this is not because of ethnic diversity in the first place. Africa’s problems are due to a historical context in which a number of factors interrelated to transform its natural riches from a blessing to a curse. As shown through the two cases of Nigeria and Sierra Leone, the ethnic factor was only manipulated in the context of conflict over natural riches, while conflict over riches was not an African matter only. Africa’s fate with the expatriates did not end with independence. Mighty companies during colonial rule had discovered these riches and were not ready to let them go out of their hands. Conflict, instead of strong governments, was the best guarantee for these companies to continue their manipulation. African politicians were unable to create stronger governments because of the deficiencies of the inherited political systems that encouraged partisan politics that in its turn favoured ethnic loyalties. Lack of political experience allowed a number of African politicians to consciously or unconsciously serve expatriate interests.

⁹Rashid was ‘an activist from Freetown east end, who had left the country in 1986 to join the MPLA in the fight against UNITA in Angola’.

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