

Global Incorporation and Local Conflict: Sierra Leonean Mining Regions

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Abstract: This paper draws upon a world-system core–periphery framework to examine the nature and causes of persistent low-level conflict in Sierra Leonean mining regions. Conflict is endemic because of asymmetrical power relations between global core-state corporations and peripheral weak-state Sierra Leone, which are mirrored locally within its mining regions. Structural constraints inherent in these relationships generate and sustain socioeconomic, cultural and environmental inequities. The paper reveals the complex web of micropolitics in the mining locale core-periphery microcosm involving a weak state, exploitative corporations and oppressive traditional social hierarchies. The findings are relevant to effective policy making and conflict resolution.

Keywords: mining conflict, Sierra Leone, land rights, environmental degradation, core–periphery inequities

Introduction

Recent analyses of conflict in the mining areas of Sierra Leone use a variety of theoretical frameworks (Hirsch 2001; Richards 2008; Wilson 2009) to focus on the relationship between diamonds and the warring factions of Sierra Leone's civil war, 1991–2001, and its aftermath. Less attention is paid, consequently, to the persistent, low-level conflict that is historically integral to the mineral extraction environment in the country (see, for example, Conteh 1979; Harbottle 1976; Labi 1972; Rosen 1973). The Center for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSRMI; see CSRMI 2009) recently acknowledged that conflict is an inherent part of mining communities worldwide. Indeed, Bridge (2004) and Bury (2008) note that mining area conflicts occur among a variety of factions and at several scales regarding a number of political, economic, socio-cultural, and environmental issues. Competition between extractive industries and rural communities over land resources and rights, for example, is a major problem (Bebbington et al 2008). The objectives of this paper, are to: use the global–national and internal core–periphery framework to examine the nature and causes of low-level persistent conflict in diamond and rutile (titanium oxide) mining regions of Sierra Leone shown in Figure 1; analyze the role that the mass in-migration or “stranger” problem and class dynamics play in the core–periphery inequities in the mining area conflicts of Sierra Leone; address briefly how such conflicts contributed to the formation of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Sierra Leone civil war; utilize the rutile mining area as case study to analyze

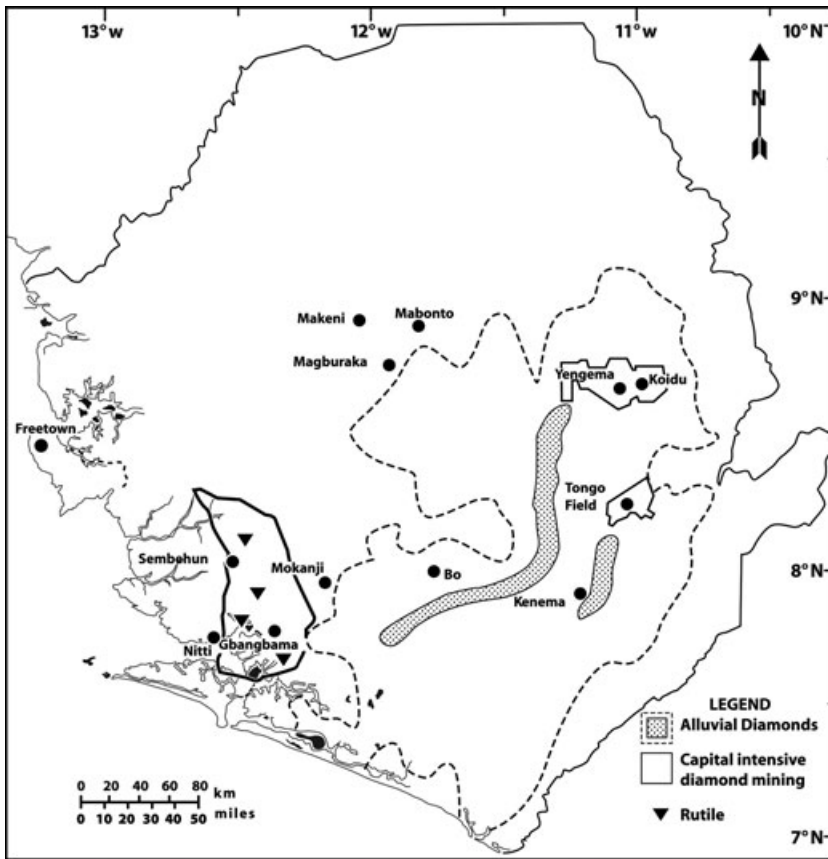


Figure 1: Diamond and rutile mining areas of Sierra Leone, adapted from Clarke (1972) p 93

the relationship between conflict and equity issues around historic land rights and environmental deterioration in mining locales.

I conceptualize mining locales as microcosms of the core–periphery world system, where socioeconomic, political, cultural, and environmental changes reflect unequal trading relationships and imbalances in power and resource distribution between the core and the periphery. I argue that the overarching driver of mining area conflicts is the asymmetry in power relations between global core-state corporations and weak peripheral nation-states like Sierra Leone.

Core-state multinational corporations (MNCs) are key players in global–local interactions systematically manipulating the global economic system and using economic leverage to guarantee compliance on the part of peripheral countries (Abouharb and Cingranelli 2006). This historic manipulation in the context of Africa causes inequalities, inequities, grievances, and conflicts (Obi 2009). While world-system analysis is fundamentally conceived at the macro-level, Chase-Dunn (1989:310) contends that “some world-system processes must be studied by examining smaller units of analysis such as nation states or transnational firms”. Within nation-states local cores may exploit local peripheries (Hall and Chase-Dunn 2006; Jordan 2007; Leitner 2004). Harvey (1987) supports this contention,

adding that internal class conflicts within regions are equally as important as conflict between geographical regions over monopolistic control of the market. With respect to Sierra Leone, Alexandridis (2010) concedes that conflict in that country is directly linked to class oppression. I concur with Leitner's (2004:398–399) summary that “studying the politics of core and periphery in these smaller units allows us to gain a finer-grained understanding of the politics of the world-economy by seeing how they play out on the ground”.

Most previous analyses have focused on conflict over political, economic, and socio-cultural change. These include studies of disenfranchised rural and urban youth, the so-called “lumpen”, and their role in the RUF/Sierra Leone war (Fanthorpe 2001; Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010; Jackson 2006; King 2007; Rashid 2004; Richards 2002, 2005). Conflict over land rights, environmental deterioration and associated loss of ecological resources and livelihoods from extraction processes is important. Tschakert (2009) highlights the fact that conflict over these issues of inequity is prevalent in all 25 African countries where artisanal gold mining takes place. Amin (2002:44) points out that the exploitative mode and intensity of Africa's integration into the global economy continues to focus on the extraction of natural resources. He explains that extractive processes do not ensure the “maintenance of the natural conditions of reproduction of wealth” but overexploit soils and forests with severe consequences for the sustainability of the environment and the livelihood of the local residents. Few analyses address mining and environmental conflict in Africa within the world-system's core–periphery framework (see eg Adeola 2009). The present paper adds to this salient research area by showing that core–periphery dynamics sustain economic and social inequities and cause the environmental degradation and loss of livelihoods that generate grievances and ultimately conflict. Such discord that starts out at low intensity can escalate into full-scale war with all of its horrors (Fithen and Richards 2005).

World-System Processes and Core–Periphery Dynamics

Extraction and production processes link labor in peripheral places with core regions in a process of unequal exchange. Such incorporation or integration of peoples and regions into the world system causes restructuring of rural societies to meet the labor demands of a global market and impacts households in the periphery (Wallerstein 1974). Though locals in the periphery initially resist these hegemonic forces, they eventually negotiate and make compromises. In fact, some of the locals become the agents who facilitate change and trade (Dunaway 1996). Once this arrangement materializes, resource extraction areas, like mining communities, eventually become a peripheral fringe of the world system while an urban elite sponsored by foreign capital (the core or center) exploits the rural area (periphery) for labor and raw materials (Amin 2002). The role of local agency is essential, and Flint and Shelley (1996:498) emphasize that “social interaction with large structures is mediated and facilitated by place-specific institutions and circumstances”. Massey (2004) likewise highlights the importance of interconnections and power dynamics locally and globally. While local places are not always victims of the global, incorporation typically has negative consequences for social relationships within the periphery.

Trade invariably devolves into an exploitation of one group by another, either within a country or between countries.

According to De Oliver (1995:567), the multinational corporation (MNC) is “the principal vector for carrying capital from the core to the periphery and, just as important, directing it within the periphery”. Indeed, the hierarchical organizational structure of the modern MNC worldwide is a coercive form of institutionalized power equal to or exceeding that of core states. MNC penetration of peripheral countries gives short-term gains but results in long-term stagnation and income inequality (Herkenrath and Bornschier 2003). Haselip and Hilson (2005) and Pegg (2003) emphasize that the World Bank is often a contributor to this calamitous situation because of its involvement in MNC transactions in the mining sector of developing countries. African governments work with the World Bank favoring large-scale ventures over the development aspirations of local people in mining areas (Hilson and Yakoleva 2007; Kitula 2006). Mineral concessions granted to MNCs give them tremendous power over the peripheral state. Dependent on royalties, taxation, and mineral extraction income, and having weak bargaining power, the peripheral state acts as facilitator for trans-territorial mineral exploitation. These financial relationships often include the state’s assertion of its authority and power to quell dissent by local people at the extraction sites. Here, complex and contradictory alliances and relationships develop among an assortment of local actors (Barron and Clark 2006; Obi 2008). Indeed, MacLean (2008:171) describes such locales of trans-territorial operations as exploitative “networks of plunder”.

Beyond income inequality, the activities of extractive industries run by core-state corporations cause degradation to the natural environment in the periphery (Burns et al 2003; Hornborg et al 2007; Roberts and Grimes 2002). Such environmental degradation causes population pressure on the land which, in turn, leads to conflict over scarce natural resources (Hall and Chase-Dunn 2006). For example, issues of environmental justice in oil-extraction areas of Nigeria over loss of livelihoods promote violence and the formation of militias to defend the Ogoni homeland (Adeola 2009). The fine-grained analysis of internal core–periphery dynamics addressed in this paper is important because it sheds light on the complexities and motivations within conflicts, the several levels at which conflict operates, and how low-intensity conflicts link to larger events such as the war in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone in the World System through Mining

The Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1929 was the impetus for establishing a mineral industry in Sierra Leone, and this Act is the instrument or mechanism that initially incorporated mining areas of the country into the world system. The Act’s intention was to supply raw materials to British manufacturers, create local jobs in the UK, and boost the then flagging British economy (Segkoma 1986). Diamonds and iron ore were the first minerals exploited, specifically for the British armament industry in the early 1930s (Saylor 1967). Currently, mining accounts for about 20% of Sierra Leone’s GDP and is the country’s primary foreign exchange

generator (Government of Sierra Leone 2004). Legal and illegal small-scale and artisanal mining of diamonds and gold accompany large-scale ventures. Such artisanal mining takes place in all lease areas, which cover 97% of the country (Le Billion and Levin 2009). The Sierra Leone Ministry of Mineral Resources estimated that in 2004 artisanal miners numbered up to 300,000 (Government of Sierra Leone 2004). The World Bank (2008) documented that more than 100,000 individuals had legitimate diamond mining licenses with an even greater number mining illegally. Large-scale capital-intensive mining by foreign companies for rutile, an ore of the metal titanium, began in 1967. This strategic metal is used in the US aerospace industry (US Government 1985).

The Sierra Leone Selection Trust (SLST) initiated diamond mining in 1932 in the Kono District of eastern Sierra Leone under an exclusive prospecting license covering the entire country for a period of 99 years. At the height of its operations in the 1950s through the 1960s, the mining industry contributed approximately 65% of national revenue (Rosen 1973). Renegotiation of the 99-year lease led to the formation of the National Diamond Mining Company (DIMINCO) in 1971, with the Sierra Leone government holding 51% of the shares in the company (Zack-Williams 1995). Currently, Koidu Holdings, a multinational company, undertakes underground mining of kimberlite, a diamond-bearing rock. In 1967, Sherbro Minerals, a British company, began large-scale, capital-intensive mining of alluvial rutile and ilmenite (ores of titanium) by dredging in artificial reservoirs (dredge ponds) in the Moyamba and Bonthe Districts in the southwest. Titanium Resources Group/Sierra Holdings Ltd currently works the deposits. Sierra Leone minerals receive low prices on the world market. Figures 2 and 3 show the districts and chiefdoms affected by diamond and rutile mining. Sierra Leone as a peripheral state has weak bargaining power in the world mineral markets, a situation about which the next section elaborates.

The Peripheral State and Government Mining Policy

The historical roots of Sierra Leone's unequal trading arrangements in the world market lie in the colonial exploitation of cheap African resources and labor. The monopoly of political and economic power held by the colonial state was made possible through legislation and the use of armed force to crush opposition (Rodney 1981). For example, the Minerals (Amendment) Ordinance 1932 (No. 17 of 1932) of colonial Sierra Leone declared: "that the entire property in all minerals and of all rivers and watercourses resides in the Crown". Under this ordinance, the Governor could also sanction special agreements for individual companies (Government of Sierra Leone 1934:12). In practice, such companies largely dictated their own terms and conditions (Segkoma 1986). The vesting of power in the colonial state persists in postcolonial Sierra Leone. The language in the 2009 Mines and Minerals Act now governing mining in the country parallels the 1932 ordinance:

All rights or ownership in, of searching for, mining and disposing of minerals in, under or upon any land in Sierra Leone and its continental shelf are vested in the Republic of Sierra Leone. The provision of subsection (1) shall have effect notwithstanding any right of ownership or otherwise that any person may possess in and to the soil on or under which minerals are found or situated (Government of Sierra Leone 2009).



Figure 2: Administrative areas with diamond and rutile mining activities, showing provincial and district boundaries, adapted from Clarke (1972) pp 29, 33

Not surprisingly, disagreements over exploitative legislation are common. Some African members of the colonial Legislative Council, for example, described the 1954 diamond mining ordinance as “inimical to the best interest of the people” and as “an iniquitous law that was rushed through council in a most unconstitutional manner” (*The African Standard* 1954). Opposition members of parliament took a similar stand in 2008, staging a walk-out over the proposed substance of the Mines and Mineral Act of 2009 and its subsequent passage (Miningmx 2010). Further, the absolute language of the clause regarding the government’s total right to ownership in the Mines and Mineral Act contradicts other legislation vesting lands in the Tribal Authorities for managing subsistence livelihoods (Govt. of Sierra Leone 2008a).

Government officials acknowledge the absence of sound mining policies and laws, the government’s weak negotiating power, and the need to create a more equitable playing field for Sierra Leone (Seibure and Hill 2008). As a result, the Sierra Leone government revisited mining policy and laws with help from a variety of international organizations, including the World Bank (CEMMATS 2007; Diamond Development Initiative (DDI) 2008; World Bank 2008). The World Bank as a key player in mining policy and legislative reform with its known collusion with MNCs is indicative of the problematic nature of core–periphery dynamics. The relationship begs the question: how can reform measures prescribed by such international agents genuinely protect local interests? Sierra Leone is also a signatory to the Kimberley Process a global effort to prevent trade in conflict diamonds initiated in 2003. However, diamond smuggling remains a major concern, and as illustrated in Ghana

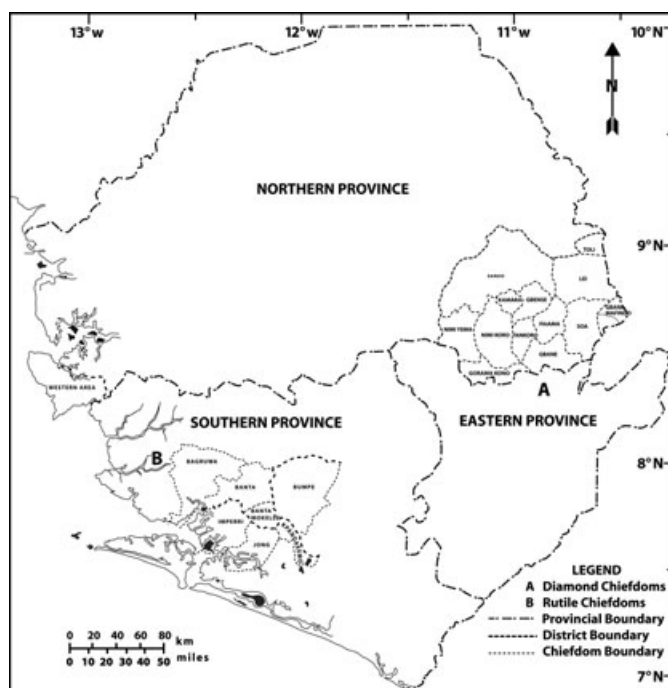


Figure 3: Administrative areas with diamond and rutile mining activities showing chiefdoms, adapted from Clarke (1972) pp 29, 33

poor implementation of the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) can perpetuate global-local inequities and exacerbate loss of livelihoods and poverty in mining area communities (Hilson and Clifford 2010). Maconachie and Binn (2007) highlight the importance of basing future sustainable development policy in Sierra Leone on a comprehensive understanding of the linkages between diamond mining and rural development at local, national and regional levels.

Additional issues the government is addressing include transparency and corruption, manpower capacity in the mineral sector, environmental monitoring and enforcement of laws and efficient implementation of community relocation for mining and environmental impact assessment findings (NACE 2009). However, gaps, inconsistencies, and ambiguities remain in mining regulations, and customized mining agreements for individual companies give them huge concessions for taxes and royalties. A revised 2003 agreement with the rutile mining company, for example, included selling rutile at prices below the world market value, a 10-year tax holiday on fuel imports, and a decrease in royalties paid to the Sierra Leone government from the standard 3% of turnover to a paltry 0.5% (Knight and Manson 2007). This lower pricing system for rutile has antecedents. In 1980, for example, Sierra Leone rutile sold at US\$250.3 per ton compared with the world market price of US\$885.6. Ten years later in 1991, Sierra Leone and world prices were US\$489.4 and US\$545 respectively (Cleeve 1997; Kamara 1997). These inequities through decades underscore Abouharb and Cingranelli's (2006) contention that systematic manipulation and economic leverage guarantee compliance on the part

of peripheral countries. Terms of trade are central to the global hegemonic structure and, in unequal exchange between core and periphery, the buyer determines the price.

In response to the issue of unequal trading arrangements, the Ministry of Mines claims that its role is to protect the people of Sierra Leone, especially host mining communities, from exploitation by corporations, and alleviate conflict (Fofana 2008). Politicians also periodically express their commitment to resolve the hegemonic nature of mining within local communities (Government of Sierra Leone 2003). In reality, no genuine commitment exists to change the status quo for fear of antagonizing mining investors. Despite proclamations to the contrary, the status quo persists with deleterious consequences for local mining communities.

The Mining Locale as Core–Periphery Microcosm

Mining companies in Sierra Leone operate as self-contained foreign entity and interact minimally with local people and their traditional socioeconomic structures. Mining MNCs rely on external supplies, markets, and managers and use foreign capital. Revenue from company operations reaches the mining area communities, primarily as a portion of national government development expenditure. Mining companies finance and operate ventures and also dictate how long extraction will continue in the context of world market conditions (Cleeve 1997).

Companies have tried, periodically, to generate goodwill in local communities with ventures such as the Protectorate Mining Benefits Trust Fund and the Diamond Area Community Development Fund established in 1932 and 2003 respectively (Government of Sierra Leone 1934; Ojukutu-Macauley and Keili 2008). Mining operations, nevertheless, represent core establishments situated in the midst of rural communities, local peripheries, and are still viewed as such, regardless of these apparent goodwill gestures. In a 1957 petition to the Colonial Office in London concerning political and socioeconomic inequities in the diamond areas, Kono chiefs described the Sierra Leone Selection Trust “as the government in Kono because [it is] in control of almost everything” (*The London Times* 1957:3). More than a half a century later, Sierra Leone’s Minister of Finance and Economic Development concurred that companies, not the government, own and control infrastructure in mining areas (Sierra Leone Diaspora Network 2008). These examples align with De Oliver’s (1995) view that the multinational corporation is such a powerful entity that it can override state power. On this fundamental question of ownership and control of minerals in Sierra Leone, a government commission, which investigated a grievance-related uprising in Kono in December 2007 about Koidu Holding’s destructive and polluting kimberlite blasting operations, concluded that:

it is fundamental to note that even though Sierra Leone has been in the mining business for some 75 odd years, there has never been any document, legislative or otherwise, that states or reflects that the minerals belong to the people of Sierra Leone and not to those who have to mine (Government of Sierra Leone 2008b).

In support of Obi’s (2008) premise that a weak state plays the role of mediator in global–local relations on the ground and is in collusion with MNCs, the Sierra Leone

government subsequently cleared the diamond company of any wrong doing in the 2007 uprising. In fact, it reaffirmed its commitment to support investors such as Koidu Holdings, even though its security forces killed two protestors and injured many others. This verdict profoundly dismayed local, social, and environmental activists (Fofana 2008).

The weak position of the state is further exemplified by its endorsement of legislation permitting MNCs to use private security forces and mercenary services to protect installations and stem violence caused by the mining activities (Government of Sierra Leone 2002; Francis 1999). This policy supported by law has been in place since the SLST first mined diamonds. The Kono District had its own security, licensing, and pass system to control movement in and out of diamond-rich areas because national government forces were deemed incapable of protecting the SLST's economic interests (Ferme 2004; Hirsch 2001).

The core-periphery divide manifests itself in a tangible, visual way as well. Upscale, walled living communities, known locally as reservations, have core-country living conditions and house expatriate and senior Sierra Leonean mine employees. These accommodations stand in stark contrast to the traditional villages with few basic amenities that house rural residents who form the majority of wage-earning mine employees. Labi (1972:48) calls attention to the realities of core-periphery relationships when she notes that relationships between residents in Mogbwemo, and senior mine employees living in the reservation, "revolve around superior-subordinate relations". Yet, Sierra Leone mines present the illusion of being pockets of economic growth and prosperity and have a strong economic pull factor in otherwise poorly developed areas. This economic pull factor leads to mass immigration of Sierra Leoneans and foreign nationals and gives rise to the "stranger" problem.

In the traditional African context, strangers are in-migrants to an area who have no kinship land rights but need land for cultivation. Strangers can access land for subsistence agriculture under historically established hierarchical community rules and landlord-stranger obligations (Unruh and Turay 2005). However, mineral exploitation as a new land use practice has broadened the category of the stranger.

Mining and the New Stranger Identity

Occupations of strangers in mining areas include mining company professionals (expatriate and Sierra Leonean), mine wage labors, diamond dealers, financiers, illegal miners, retailers, and service providers (Cleeve 1997). Large numbers of strangers flock to mining regions in search of economic opportunities. Aside from people being strangers, mining companies take the form of powerful "strangers" because, invariably, land leases granted to mining companies often grant them privileges and rights that supersede customary land rights (Government of Sierra Leone 2009). The changing relationship between landlord and stranger was made clear in the Protectorate Land Ordinance of 1927 that exempted anyone who "is employed by a person engaged in any industrial undertaking" from traditional stranger obligations to chiefs (Government of Sierra Leone 1960:1271). Strangers typically outnumber indigenes in the mining regions. For example, the population

density per square mile in Mogbwemo before rutile mining was 31–60 per square mile in 1966. By 1968, the population density was 900 people per square mile. Of the 1968 population, 91.6% was “stranger”, and only 8.4% was indigenous. Strangers were from six ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, and foreigners were from other West African countries such as Guinea, Liberia, and Dahomey (Labi 1972). The problem with this imbalance is that the restructured political and socio-cultural environment created by mines diminishes the importance of the traditional system of landownership for subsistence livelihoods as a basis for social status. Individuals with resources created by means other than farming take an individualistic approach to wealth accumulation and disregard customary kinship ethic and protocol of land use and wealth sharing, generating grievances (Richards 2002).

Strangers have historically posed a significant problem as illegal diamond miners (IDMs). In 1956, for example, in response to encroachment by IDMs on the SLST lease, the national government forced a mass deportation of an estimated 45,000 illegal strangers, including foreign nationals, from the diamond region (Laan 1965). The government periodically addresses the stranger problem and, as recently as 2003, President Ahmad Kabbah took a strong position on reinstating landlord–stranger obligations in mining areas (Government of Sierra Leone 2003). Yet, politicians exploit the stranger issue as a contrivance in power struggles and rivalries at several levels of governance. At the national level, the government employs different strategies to control diamonds. These methods range from giving Kono chiefs incentives to oust strangers to the preferential issue of mining licenses to strangers as a means of containing and co-opting those Kono leaders who are vocal against injustices in their chiefdoms (Zack-Williams 1995).

At the chiefdom level, chiefs sometimes relinquish their obligations and responsibilities to Kono indigenes and support strangers by giving them permission to mine legally or illegally. The rationale for this behavior is that chiefs believe they have better control over strangers through landlord–stranger obligations or patron–client relationships (Levin 2006). However, sometimes powerful strangers become embroiled in local politics such as in the prolonged conflict over chieftaincy rights between factions of the Matturi-Bono clan to control the diamond-rich Nimi Koro chiefdom (Rosen 1973). At other times, when strangers become uncontrollable, chiefs have sought redress from the national government or insisted on greater rights for the Kono, particularly for priority in hiring with the mining companies in strategic positions such as security guards (Harbottle 1976). Local Konos respond to such inequality and favoritism towards outsiders by mining without official licenses, underscoring their entitlement to resources on what they believe is ancestral lands (Conteh 1979; Wilson 2009). Kono leaders depriving their subjects of land for mining harks back to the historical problem of class and age distinctions in land allocation for farming (Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010).

Class Struggles, Mineral Extraction and Conflict

Class is traditionally an issue in rural Sierra Leone. Land-holding families descended from warriors or hunter-founders customarily have first rights and control over land distribution for farming, superseding the rights of strangers and other dependents

(Richards 2005). Chiefs, custodians of the land in rural areas, allocate farmland based on age and pedigree and curtail efforts by young people to find alternative livelihoods. Chiefs deploy, allocate, and control unpaid social labor through kinship obligations and fines (sometimes unwarranted but used to guarantee dependency). Young men escaping this time-honored oppression become part of a pool of potential legal and illegal diamond miners, indigene and stranger alike (Fanthorpe 2001; Fithen and Richards 2005). These miners escaping exploitation in their own chiefdoms are, however, equally subject to the same oppressive treatment by chiefs in the villages in diamond-rich areas where they reside. Miners, therefore, sometimes prefer to live independently in isolated mine camps rather than affiliate themselves with local communities where they are subject to traditional norms and the gerontocracy (Maconachie 2008). Miners are again exploited in the diamond business by their financiers (locally called “supporters”) as they do not own the means to purchase licenses and equipment and have little sense of diamond valuation. Miners must sell all diamonds they recover to the supporters who pay below market prices. These transactions leave miners in a perpetual state of indebtedness (Gberie 2004).

Such injustice and inequality lead to grievances and illustrate Hall and Chase-Dunn’s (2006) assertion that powerful actors in local cores also exploit the marginalized in the local peripheries as well as express Alexandridis’ (2010) stance on oppression based on class differences. Consequently, miners join other itinerant youth, indigenes, and strangers to protest a range of perceived exploiters, including chiefs, mining supporters and diamond exporters, the national government, and the mining companies (Kamara 2006; Ojukutu-Macauley and Keili 2008). Indeed, Richards (2002) claims that “soldiers of the illicit mining armies” were natural candidates for the RUF because the exploitative and violent world of diamond mining had prepared them well for the violence of war and desensitized them to the exploitation of others. Ten forest-based camps from which rebels carried out operations in the RUF/Sierra Leone war, for instance, were historic havens for miners (Squire 2001). Access to a lootable resource such as diamonds resulted in more high-intensity conflict and indiscriminate violence against civilians (Lujala 2008). Many scholars and others have analyzed the relationship between disgruntled youth in mining areas and conflict, particularly their role in the RUF/Sierra Leone war (eg Abdullah 2004). While this “blood diamond” conflict is not the focus of this paper, some aspects of these “illicit miner armies” that predated the war are salient in emphasizing the connection between youth grievance and social and political conflict.

Illegal miners are a nuisance to diamond-mining companies in Sierra Leone. When the diamond rush was at its peak in the 1950s, well-organized armies of illegal diamond miners (IDMs), numbering in the thousands, frequently attacked perimeter security posts and invaded the SLST lease area. The IDMs operated in a single location, digging en masse at night, which undermined the viability of the SLST. Government and SLST security forces were unable to deal with the problem effectively. In fact, many security officers were killed or seriously wounded during these miner orchestrated raids. The miners constituted a formidable force for both

the SLST and mobile security patrol units in the late 1960s, as miners continued to ambush company vehicles and personnel (Harbottle 1976; Hayward 1972).

Over 50 years later, in December 2007, 1000 illegal miners were at the center of violence that exploded on the sites of Koidu Holdings mining operations. Efforts to expel them roused aggrieved residents, who were angry over the blasting of diamond-bearing kimberlite rock and poorly planned village relocations. Local communities had written several complaint letters to the national government and Koidu Holdings authorities, but their grievances had not been addressed. This arrogant inaction prompted the violence, reminiscent of earlier disturbances, and attacks that involved some 3400 youths armed with sticks, knives, rocks, and spades who looted and damaged company property (Heilmann 2007). The issue of a weak state and powerful MNCs resurfaced when a leading Sierra Leone human rights activist lamented: “[T]he authorities unfortunately ... used their heavy hands to clamp down on local communities on behalf of the mining company” (Mines and Communities Website 2007). These conglomerations of disaffected local people and miners thus concretely articulated their frustrations at the economic and social disparities in the Koidu mining area. The combination of traditional land disbursement practices, an ineffective national government, and an exploitative mining company make for a complex and volatile situation that, in the end, maintains a core-periphery stranglehold.

Land Rights and Environmental Degradation from Rutile Mining

In addition to the political and social consequences of core-periphery dynamics, local peripheries also suffer from the environmental impacts of mining. In the rutile mining area, leases cover parts of eight chiefdoms (Banta—divided into Upper Banta and Lower Banta, Banta Mokelle, Bagruwa, Bumpe, Imperi, Jong, Kpanda Kemo, Mokelle). The Sierra Rutile Agreement gives the company, Sierra Rutile Ltd, the right to dam and divert water courses as needed and to dispose of waste in stream channels. Rutile dredge-mining dramatically alters landscapes in concentrated areas. The current landscape in an area of approximately 246 km² comprises reservoirs, tailings areas, cleared lands, and vegetation interspersed with communities. Reservoirs flood productive agricultural lands and sacred sites, damage cash crop plantations and rice farms, disrupt water-based livelihoods such as women’s scoop-net fishing, and cut off communication routes (Akiwumi and Butler 2008). Mining necessitated the relocation of 14 villages (Knight Piesold and Co 2001). These impacts breed a great deal of resentment and anger.

Periodic efforts by Sierra Rutile Ltd to address the environmental problems caused by its mining operations have not resolved conflict. Under the Environmental and Community Development Program (ECDP) in the early 1990s, for example, CARE Sierra Leone, a component of the international aid organization, had a contract to construct hand-dug wells in villages. Communities are skeptical of much of these efforts and, therefore, show a general lack of cooperation. In protest over involuntary relocation, villagers often boycott newly constructed facilities, such as community centers at new village sites (Kamara 1997) or file false compensation claims for houses, crops, and sacred bush sites (Akiwumi 2006). Communities,

consequently, have a degree of agency and mobilization and are not merely passive subjects of the agendas of the MNCs and national government. Further, communities look to advocacy groups to address their plight. Several groups are active in the rutile area, including the Organization for Research and Extension of Intermediate Technology (ORIENT), the Land Owners Federation, Community Advocacy and Development Project (CADEP), and the Network Movement for Justice and Development (Ojukutu-Macauley and Keili 2008). Similar to Obi's (2008) Nigerian oil extraction region case study, these local activist groups oftentimes collaborate with international partners for greater visibility. For example, ORIENT, whose goal is "to support poor and marginalized rural communities" (Kamara 1997:1) partnered with Friends of the Earth, UK to publicize the environmental and social conditions in the mining area. The blurring of core-periphery linkages and scales becomes apparent; in this case, environmental and social groups based in core countries work for environmental and social justice in a local periphery of Sierra Leone.

As in diamond areas, the conflict situation in the rutile mining areas reveals the ambiguous relationship between varied groups such as traditional rulers, local indigenes, strangers, and advocacy groups. Environmental and social problems often expose internal social and political fissures such as within the Land Owners Federation of Chiefdoms established in 1987. The federation comprised some members of land-owning lineages and some longtime strangers seeking to address concerns regarding substantial changes in the traditional culture and the degradation of the environment. The federation's membership included such professionals as teachers, college professors, civil servants, and clergymen. The organization purportedly had the support of the seven land-holding families and approval from the national government. More than once paramount chiefs led delegations of federation members with petitions to the Sierra Leonean head of state and the minister of mines about the environmental consequences of dredge-mining on their lands. Even during the period of mine closure from 1995 to 2003 due to the RUF/Sierra Leone war, political wrangling was ongoing within the organization over land rights for surface rent payments and environmental deterioration concerns. In the late 1990s, the federation filed a lawsuit in the High Court of Sierra Leone against the paramount chiefs and District Officers in Bonthe and Moyamba District. This legal matter concerned the unfair distribution of surface rent allocations (Sierra Rutile Ltd 2003a). The internal strife led a former federation member and a long-term Mogbwemo resident-stranger to establish a breakaway organization in 2003. The new organization, Community Advocacy and Development Project (CADEP), is a watch group against exploitation by traditional rulers who are seen as mining company and government collaborators. In response to the internal federation conflict, two chiefs in separate letters to the president of the federation and the mining company (copied to all the paramount chiefs in the mine lease area, national government officials and the area police chief) denied any knowledge of the existence of the federation. They dissociated themselves from the federation and took a strong pro-government and company stance (Sierra Rutile Ltd 2003b). The Chief of Lower Banta in his letter stressed that: "Paramount Chiefs are the custodians of all lands, life and properties of their chiefdoms . . . on behalf of

my Chiefdom Council we remain loyal and respectful to Government policies and all interested investors that are respectful to government.” In a letter of response dated 13 September 2003, the president of the Land Owner’s Federation expressed willingness to work with chiefdom authorities but emphasized it would not be controlled by the pro-government chiefs (Sierra Rutile Ltd 2003a).

Conflict over land rights and environmental degradation continued even with the reopening of the rutile mine in 2006. Landowners accustomed to receiving surface rent payments put up roadblocks to halt mining operations, protesting the company’s delay in implementing revised payment rates (Winnebah 2006). Sierra Rutile Ltd compounded the problem when in November 2006, it returned 26,625 acres of land once leased to the Tribal Authority. The action freed the company executives of the obligation to pay rent for those lands in its effort to streamline operations after the huge losses incurred during the RUF/Sierra Leone war. While the company had this option under the Sierra Rutile Agreement, the move angered people accustomed to this revenue stream (Mansaray 2006). In 2008, the chief of Mogbwemo, the main mining town, expressed continuing concerns about the flooding of community lands, pollution of water sources, lack of infrastructure, and marginalization of local people in the hiring of mine workers. He complained that the company does not live up to its social responsibilities and describes the mine as a mixed blessing: “We are happy the mine is here, but we don’t feel a part of the mine.” Such views prevail despite the company’s financing of community development projects through the Sierra Rutile Foundation. Land rights and environmental degradation and restoration remain unresolved issues persistent and contentious (Seibure and Hill 2008).

A recent effort to address these concerns about mining took place in December 2009 at the rutile mine site. The Children’s Welfare and Community Development Programme (CWADEP), a civil society group, organized a public workshop funded by the UK Department of International Development’s program on Enhancing the Interaction and Interface between Civil Society and the State (DfID-ENCISS) and CARE Sierra Leone, which was involved locally in village well projects in the late 1980s to 1990s. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss corporate social responsibility, the roles of the government, chiefs, local councils, and civil society, and provisions of the Sierra Rutile Agreement and Mines and Mineral Act of 2009. A local activist complained: “We are living as strangers in our own land, without the right to be involved in negotiations before our fertile agricultural lands are leased out to the company.” In support of Alexandridis’ (2010) claim about class oppression, others, including the Director of CWADEP, highlighted explicitly the class disparity between the company employees and indigenes in surrounding communities. One participant likened life at the rutile mines to “the animal farm situation wherein the class distinction is so glaring that one begins to wonder whether the indigenes whose land is being exploited matter at all” (Gbenda 2009). Antagonism by disgruntled youth reared its head again when a local youth leader warned of the potential for violence by young people if unacceptable conditions did not change and the loss of agricultural lands and traditional heritage sites continued.

In response to these positions, a company representative at the workshop declared that the mining corporation was not a humanitarian organization but a legitimate

business venture complying with the nation's laws. Though the mine was physically located in the middle of communities, it should not assume the responsibilities of the national government vis-à-vis development and environmental management (Gbenda 2009). The deliberations at this workshop reveal, most importantly, that local people do not fully grasp the extent of the "right" to land conferred on the company. A gap clearly exists between perceptions of roles and expectations of local people and the company. The rejoinder by the rutile company representative is significant in that it echoes sentiments expressed in 1966 by the SLST in Kono. The SLST believed it honored its obligations by paying high taxes to the national government and had no economic or social obligations to the local areas. As the company manager based in Freetown explicitly affirmed: "We have no conscience about it" (Hayward 1972:6). These perceptions highlight the need for astute and responsible political leadership at the national level that demands and ensures corporate social responsibility and fulfils its own obligations to the people. Only then can the internal Sierra Leonean core-periphery stranglehold be broken and future conflict alleviated.

Conclusions

Sierra Leone's incorporation into the world system through mining began in the 1930s and continues to the present time. The Sierra Leone government's weak bargaining power and poor negotiating skills with MNCs causes undervaluation of minerals, and the nation receives little for its resources. National government mining legislation and sanctioned corporate mercenarism has become a means of encouraging foreign investment and facilitating mining operations even in the midst of unrest. Such unequal exchange translates to the mineral extraction sites. Mining locales of Sierra Leone are core-periphery "microcosms" of the world system where socioeconomic, political, cultural, and environmental changes are manifestations of unequal trading relationships and imbalances in the distribution of power and resources. The presence of mines and associated stranger influx affects all aspects of local life.

The world-system core-periphery model provides a tool that allows for a fine-grained analysis and understanding of the various conflict mechanisms operating in this microcosm. Using empirical data in historical and contemporary contexts, this study reveals the complex nature of the conflict relationships in these micro-level reproductions of exploitative global-local relations. The hegemony of the "stranger" mining establishment supported by a weak state and historical class oppression by traditional governance generate grievances because of socioeconomic, political, cultural, and environmental injustices and highlight the pivotal role of traditional social hierarchical systems in Sierra Leone especially regarding the ambiguous relationships with indigene subjects, the state, and strangers. Strangers, in particular, may be allies, pawns, or enemies as conditions prescribe. These dynamics exemplify Hall and Chase-Dunn's (2006) assertion that powerful greedy actors in local cores exploit the marginalized in the local peripheries along class lines causing deep-seated grievances. Conflict, therefore, becomes a fundamental part of mineral exploitation, operates at several levels and among various groups that continue to

protest against economic disparities and inequities characteristic of core–periphery dynamics.

The decade (1991–2001) of civil turmoil in Sierra Leone was emblematic of the convoluted relationships developed over the years among the indigenous people, their leaders, and strangers, including the mining establishment, emanating from discontent over economic inequality and social change tied to the global economy—a case that supports the premises of the core–periphery model. The findings provide pertinent information for policy makers in the mining sector at both the national and international level with regard to formulating equitable policies and alleviating and resolving conflict.

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