Greed vs. Grievance

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Greed vs. Grievance is an argument that seeks to understand the motivations of combatants in civil warfare. Those who support the greed model believe that combatants perform a cost benefit analysis and take up arms when fighting will better their situations, and those who support the grievance model say that combatants are motivated by religious, ethnic, identity, and social class grievances.

Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler spearhead the greed argument in their paper for the World Bank titled “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”. They concluded that the grievance-based explanations of civil war are wrong, and that combatants in civil wars fight for economic benefits such as loot (Berdal 1). Countries that rely heavily on primary commodity exports and have a young uneducated population are most likely to have greed based civil wars (Berdal 1).

As we have learned from the readings in part 2 of the course, conflicts often do not fall into either the greed or grievance arguments perfectly. In many cases, both economic and social grievances exist in a conflict. The civil war in Sierra Leone (1991-2001) is an example of a conflict that had motivations of both greed and grievance. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels had a political agenda, “their influence lives on in the movement’s revolutionary appellation and radical populist agenda (first laid down in a text known as the RUF Basic Document)” (Richards 2). The RUF also has legitimate grievances as well, “some of the fighters are chronically homeless, in the sense of being long detached from any rural community. Their sense of rootlessness helps account for some of the movement’s negative attitudes towards the rural poor, as well as its distrust of ethnic factionalism” (Richards 2).

In “To Fight or Farm? Agrarian Dimensions of the Mano River Conflicts (Liberia and Sierra Leone)” Paul Richards states "Institutional failure, and not criminal ‘greed’, should be regarded as the motor of the Mano River conflicts" (588). His argument counters Collier's and Hoeffler's greed based argument by stating that a failure to institute agrarian reforms and the legacy of slavery created grievances that led to insurgencies. Richards states that “Paul Collier rejects talking to combatants and finding out what makes them tick” (3). Instead, Collier uses econometrics to analyze combatants’ motives. Richards believes that in order “to grasp causes, we need to enter the worlds of organizations and belief” (4) instead of relying solely on graphs and hard data. He goes on further to argue that most of the combatants in the Mano River conflicts came from the countryside and not urban centers because of the grievances that exist in the rural areas. Young men in the countryside have no social mobility and are oppressed by tribal elders. They are scrutinized and heavily fined which keeps them in constant debt.

Robert Kaplan has a unique interpretation of the greed vs. grievance argument. He is trying to move away from greed and grievance all together, and place the environment as the central cause of conflicts. He states "for a while the media will continue to ascribe riots and other violent upheavals abroad mainly to ethnic and religious conflict. But it is time to understand The Environment for what it is: the national-security issue of the early twenty-first century” (7-6).

The United States government released its position on the greed vs. grievance argument in the Bush Administration's "National Security Strategy of the United States" in September of 2002. The government recognizes that conflicts involve both greed and grievance just as we saw in Sierra Leone; "Ultimately the path of political and economic freedom presents the surest routes to progress in sub-Saharan Africa, where most wars are conflicts over material resources and political access often tragically waged on the basis of ethnic and religious difference” (16).

References:
http://blackboard.tufts.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_id=_2_1&url=/webapps/blackboard/execute/launcher%3ftype%3dCourse%26id%3d_7169_1%26url%3d